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Armed with a ballot: The rise of La Raza Unida Party in Texas

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ARMED WITH A BALLOT:
THE RISE OF LA RAZA UNIDA PARTY IN TEXAS

by

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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PREFACE

The mid-1960s and most of the 1970s were years of social unrest in many of the Mexican American neighborhoods of the Southwest. This turmoil came to be known as the Chicano Movement, a political and social catharsis that led to the founding of numerous self-help and militant organizations that sought to better the conditions of the Mexican American population. During this intense period, a third political party was founded by Chicanos and Chicanas who saw the Republican and Democratic parties as the "same monster with two heads." The party was known as El Partido de la Raza Unida.*

The Raza Unida Party (RUP) was different from other Mexican American organizations in that it attempted to solve the problems facing the barrios through the ballot. Previously, most Mexican American organizations had used protest and litigation as a way to change the bleak educational, economic, and social status of their community. Since Mexican Americans voted in such small numbers, and few were ever elected, it seemed ludicrous to base social change on the power of the ballot. Raza Unida Party founders, however, believed that Mexican Americans would participate in large numbers. And they set out to prove their point.

This thesis attempts to shed light on two important aspects in the development of El Partido de La Raza Unida. First, it reviews the events leading up to the founding of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), which was the precursor of the party. The bleak economic and social conditions that existed in that period and the activities of numerous organizations to change them led to an environment that bred La Raza Unida. Possibly no other time did conditions exist in the Mexican American barrios as in the 1960s, when a third political party could have been established.

Second, this work focuses on the strategies used by the MAYO activists to organized Mexican Americans into a voting bloc. That voting bloc gave the RUP political control of two counties in South Texas, and numerous elected positions throughout the

"The Party of the United People."
state. The strategies in simplified form were: develop ethnic pride in the Mexican American community; polarize the organizing area into Anglo vs. Chicano; and establish grassroots entities that would bring large groups of voters together for indoctrination, and guarantee that they would make it to the polls.

As would be expected from a political party founded by young people amid the social rebellion of the war in Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty, La Raza Unida was more than an electoral organization. Party leaders saw themselves as a militant vanguard that would influence every aspect of Southwest Chicano society. Consequently, Raza Unida organizers did not limit themselves to registering voters and getting them out to vote. They established local unions, liberation committees, they boycotted schools and they established links with foreign governments, particularly Mexico and Cuba. At times they acted as government officials in exile. At other times they seemed willing to strike deals with either of the two established parties. Their ideology was based as much on what they did not want as it was on what they sought to accomplish. Ideology, in fact, became a major point of contention both between the party and other Mexican American leaders as well as within the party's hierarchy.

While the party grew to become a national organization, with chapters in eighteen states and the District of Columbia, this thesis will only deal with the Texas chapter of the party, which proved to be the most active and the one with the most success in the electoral phase. This work will also not look at the period of the party's decline, instead it ends with the party at the height of its power. This is done to maintain the focus on the development of the electoral process as an alternative for Mexican Americans in their quest for civil rights.

I would like to acknowledge the help and support given me by the three members of my committee, Dr. Michael Schaller, Dr. Juan R. García, and Dr. Oscar Martínez. Dr. Schaller's lectures helped me understand the precursor years, while Dr. Martínez's comments allowed me to place a proper perspective on La Raza Unida's role within the
larger Chicano Movement. Dr. García has been a true mentor and to him I owe the most for having finished this thesis.
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ABSTRACT

In 1970 a group of Mexican Americans in Crystal City, Texas came together to form El Partido de La Raza Unida (The Raza Unida Party) and challenged the Anglos that had governed there for years. From that beginning came a state-wide party that ran a candidate for governor in 1972 and in a short period took political control of two counties and numerous other elected positions throughout the state. This thesis looks at two aspects in the development of the Raza Unida Party. It reviews the years leading up to the founding of the Mexican American Youth organization, which was the precursor of the party, and it focuses on the strategies used by this group to organize Mexican Americans into a voting bloc.

It is the premise of this thesis that La Raza Unida Party, more than any other Mexican American organization before it, was responsible for Mexican Americans becoming participants in the electoral process in larger numbers than ever before.
CHAPTER ONE

THE PRELUDE

Southwestern society in the mid-1960s was marked by an obvious disparity between the dominant Anglo population and the mostly lower-class Mexican Americans. Two different worlds coexisted, and their inhabitants intermingled only when the job required it or circumstances briefly brought them together. In many small towns the railroad tracks separated the two; in others prejudice and discrimination, both de facto and de jure, indicated the dividing line and made sure everyone knew his or her place. Cultural, linguistic, and economic barriers separated Anglos from Mexican Americans, and in most places there also existed a distrust of motives. The Southwest was an Anglo world, and even in small rural communities like Pearsall, Texas; Greeley, Colorado; Las Vegas, New Mexico; Morenci, Arizona, and others where Mexican Americans were a significant part of the population, Anglo economic and political power stood firm and was used to its full extent to keep the races segregated. Occasionally challenged by Mexican Americans wanting change, Anglo dominance rarely gave way.

So entrenched was the culture of segregation that laws or court decisions outlawing it were ferociously opposed by many Anglo citizens. When the Supreme Court ruled against the concept of "separate but equal," a furious Texas citizenry presented the governor with 165,000 signatures opposing federal intrusion into this segregated environment. In 1956, referenda promoting segregated schools, prohibiting interracial marriages, and supporting local control over federal intervention were placed on the Texas ballot and passed overwhelmingly.

Understanding their subordinate status, Mexican Americans avoided conflict with the patrón, sherife, la corte, and other symbols of Anglo power by keeping their contacts with them on a formal basis. They worked hard, stayed away from the affluent sections
of town, and avoided the police at all costs. When they failed to do this, or when they were perceived to have failed, conflicts erupted, and it was usually the Mexican Americans who lost. They lost their jobs, were brutalized by law enforcement agents, and were made to feel like victims without recourse. And they had no recourse from local and state courts. In its report to President Richard Nixon, the United States Commission on Civil Rights declared:

Our investigations reveal that Mexican American citizens are subject to unduly harsh treatment by law enforcement officers, that they are often arrested on insufficient grounds, receive physical and verbal abuse, and penalties which are disproportionally severe. We have found them to be deprived of proper use of bail and of adequate representation by counsel. They were substantially underrepresented on grand and petit juries and excluded from full participation in law enforcement agencies, especially in supervisory positions.

Discrimination was not limited to those in rural areas or to workers on the lowest rung of society, but was a pervasive characteristic of southwestern society which suffocated the aspirations of many of those who sought to improve their bleak social standing.

Nowhere did discrimination seem more pronounced than in the region's public schools, which were segregated at a time when they should not have been. The 1950s had been a decade of litigation over desegregation, when Mexican Americans led by such organizations as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the American G.I. Forum had continually challenged the school systems in the courts. Between 1950 and 1957, fifteen suits charging discrimination were filed in Texas courts alone. In an effort predating the black civil rights movement, Mexican American lawyers had won important victories. Unfortunately, the school system's biases proved resilient, and board members and administrators found loopholes in the decisions or simply took advantage of a lack of enforcement of the law.

Where it was not possible to segregate the brown children, they were often treated as second-class students by teachers, administrators, and school committees that decided
on everything from homecoming queen to class valedictorian. In integrated schools a minuscule number of Anglo students occupied most of the positions of power and prestige. The method of electing class officers, cheerleaders, homecoming queens, most-likely-to-succeed, and so on changed as the population majorities in the schools went from Anglo to Mexican American. Anglo students had been allowed to choose their-peer group leaders, but Mexican American students lost that right to school committees.

The educational system responded to Mexican American students in two ways. The more "sensitive" approach called for Americanizing the culturally different children with the foreign tongue. Executed with a missionary zeal, this approach had the purpose of making children different from parents, and instilling in them middle class values and a patriotic fervor for the United States. Teachers were quick with the paddles and the tongue-lashings in the hope that with firmness they could discourage the children from being what they were.

The well-entrenched culture and language the students brought from home, educators still believed in the 1960s, kept them from trying harder. It was widely accepted as fact that passive, "mañana-oriented" attitudes were the reasons for Mexican Americans' slow learning and that their inability to defer gratification caused them to drop out of school. As far as the teachers and administrators were concerned, Mexican American parents were not interested in their children's education. One clear indication, they pointed out, was the parents' unwillingness to teach their children English. Anyone speaking Spanish during school hours received a swift retribution. Spanking, a trip to the principal's office, and suspension were all remedies for those who used Spanish. Administrators in some schools even assigned Spanish "monitors," students who mingled discreetly among their peers during recess to find out who was speaking Spanish in order to report them to the school authorities.

The second approach to the Mexican American educational problem bordered on benign and, at times, deliberate neglect. Some school districts had large numbers of
uncertified instructors, unmotivated teachers, and educators waiting to retire. The quality of their teaching was poor, and their popularity among the students was nonexistent. Unwilling to take the time to teach students with so many disadvantages, they simply herded them into remedial courses or vocational education shops where they could "use their hands" and stay away from trouble. A small number of Mexican American students were selected every year to be encouraged to go on to college, but few could afford the tuition and even fewer had received the proper counseling. By 1960 only 13 percent of Mexican Americans had four years of high school and less than 6 percent had some years of college education.

Stephen Castro, a graduate of Sidney Lanier High School in San Antonio in 1969, complained that "counselors only bring ex-convicts to our school to scare us away from jail. Those are not role models." Other students protested that there were few preparatory courses for college, and that more time was spent advising them against smoking, premarital sex, and violence than encouraging them to seek a profession. The school policy seemed one of containment and avoidance of problems rather than one of educating. Urban schools, in particular, had problems with youth group violence, though rarely was it directed at the teachers or administrators.

Although some educators cared, many became discouraged in a few years because of the school system's attitude toward its students and the seeming lack of support from the parents. A few of them understood that the schools were programmed to fail because they did little to overcome the disadvantages the students brought with them. The majority of teachers, though, simply blamed the circumstances on the children and rarely tried to change their approach to teaching or the schools' policies toward educating.

The tragedy of years of poor schooling showed in the economic state of the Mexican American population of the 1960s. Only 19 percent of Mexican Americans were employed in white-collar occupations, and 57 percent worked in low-skill manual jobs in which they earned, per capita, only forty-seven cents for every dollar of Anglo income.
This rate of pay fell below that of other nonwhites and kept nearly 35 percent of all Mexican Americans in the Southwest below the poverty line of three-thousand dollars in annual income.\textsuperscript{10} The unemployment rate for Mexican Americans was twice as high as that for Anglo workers and only slightly less than that for other nonwhites. In 1964 Gunter Myrdal said of America’s poor:

Something like a caste line is drawn between the people in the urban and rural slums and the majority of Americans who live in a virtual full employment economy. . . . There is an underclass of people in the poverty pockets who live an ever more precarious life and are increasingly excluded from any job worth having, or who do not find any jobs at all.\textsuperscript{11}

Sixteen percent of the Mexican American population worked in the fields, following the migrant streams north to Idaho, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Michigan, west to California, and Washington, and south to Florida to pick the crops. Theirs was a life of constant travel, harsh living conditions, and back-breaking work for six to eight months, and stringent budget-watching for the last four to six. The migrant workers’ difficult existence seem destined to be perpetuated through their children, who rarely completed school and thus were unable to gain the skills necessary to leave the fields. They represented a living tragedy for which there existed no formal policy of assistance. James Sundquist explained the mood of government about this issue: “When it comes to the solution of the poverty problem, a good many of the urban poverty thinkers have written off the rural areas and have concluded that the only way to deal with rural poverty is to let the people move and then handle them in the cities.”\textsuperscript{12} Migrant workers who moved to the cities often found that they still had to follow the crops because their lack of skills kept them underemployed.

Many Mexican Americans had left the fields for the cities in the preceding decades, but their poverty had followed them. Lewis Nordyke, in his book \textit{The Truth About Texas}, described the condition of the urban Mexican American: "Many Latin families live in jaca\'les or huts and shanties that have no plumbing; some of them have no
water, and the people carry in buckets from wherever they can get it; they burn candles or kerosene lamps because there is no electricity."

Every southwestern town and some major cities, such as San Antonio, Albuquerque, Los Angeles, Denver, and Phoenix, had Mexican sides: the barrios, poor neighborhoods where people lived in substandard housing and where there were few street lights, many unkempt streets, and often no drainage for rainwater. Although in the 1960s poverty had been rediscovered and federal monies were available for poor communities to start revamping themselves, many Anglo-run town governments did not seek these funds and chose instead to remain "independent" of the federal government and to keep taxes low. In the cities, where federal funds were requested, the planning for such programs as Model Cities and Urban Renewal was sometimes so carelessly done that the resulting development created inconvenience and forced people to leave their communities, causing a financial burden and social displacement.

The powerlessness of the Mexican American population made it easier for government to be insensitive. In town after town in the Southwest, predominantly Mexican American communities were governed by Anglo officeholders who had been elected and reelected by a small minority of voters. In Tucson the Mexican American population lost its majority in the early 1900s and with it went its political power. Only a few elite families participated in coalitions with Anglos, mostly at a subservient level. In California a wholesale gerrymandering of legislative and county districts diluted Mexican Americans' voting strength. Another problem resulted from the fact that a large portion of the Spanish surname population did not have citizenship status. Colorado had an active community, but its numbers were too small to have much impact. As for New Mexico, Mexican Americans were an important minority—almost 40 percent—and they did have political power, but the governing policy was a blend of Anglo conservatism and Mexican elitism. The state's limited tax base and lack of significant industry coupled with the political orientation left many Mexican Americans without a voice.
Texas undoubtedly was the most repressive of the states. Two kinds of Anglo politicians governed the Lone Star State, and both kept the power away from the barrios. The old guard of the Texas Democratic Party had built its power in the late 1800s through the accumulation of land, usually at the expense of its former Mexican owners. These Anglos had taken over the land but did not completely discard the ways of the rich Mexican landowner. Evan Andres, in his book *Boss Rule in South Texas*, described the patrón relationship between the landowner and most of his laborers. As patrón, the rancher exercised almost complete social and economic control over his peones. The submissive workers could not quit their jobs or own property, and they needed their master’s permission to marry, to leave the ranch, or to summon a doctor or some other outsider. The patrón also served as the local judge, who settled disputes among his peones, maintained order and discipline, and even assessed punishment. On election day he herded them to the voting booth, citizens or noncitizens, and had them vote for him or for those in association with him. Since Mexican Americans were the overwhelming majority in areas such as South Texas, these politicians were guaranteed their stay in office. Occasionally, the political bosses would include a Mexican American or two on their slates, particularly if the rest of the Anglo ranchers were not happy over the power sharing. The trade-off was a number of votes for a benevolent feudalism.

As repulsive as this corrupt system seemed to reformers and present-day activists, it was no worse than the system that replaced it in many parts of rural and urban Texas in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The new politics were couched under the guise of Progressivism. The Progressive Era reformers were interested in transferring the power of the old bosses to new capitalist elites who claimed an interest in cleaning up the political spoils system and reducing government costs and waste. More often than not, though, they sought to curb the voting power of the lower, immigrant-ethnic classes who had formed the base of the political machines they were seeking to replace. In the decade-long struggle between the "Progressives" and the "bosses," Mexican Americans lost almost
all the controlled but valuable electoral strength that had given them some limited benefits.  

The new reformers, having eliminated many of the bosses—not all of them, in the case of South Texas—did little to change the social or economic status of the Mexican American workers and families in their communities. They developed voter eligibility requirements, disallowed the use of Spanish in the voting place, and intimidated the few individuals who overcame the first two obstacles. These new power brokers and their constituencies were the ones responsible for the enactment of segregating laws and the ones to perceive that there was a "Mexican" problem. These men believed in less, not more, government and consequently did not see any role for government in helping the poor Mexican American. Remnants of both of these types of politics remained at the beginning of the 1960s in South and West Texas.

The few Mexican American officeholders at the beginning of the 1960s owed their positions to their allegiance to one or another Anglo coalition. These officeholders proved to be unwilling or unable to improve the economic, educational, or social status of their fellow ethnics. There were, however, several Mexican Americans officeholders left over from the time of boss rule, such as those of the Guerra family in Starr County. They controlled local politics through an extended family network of politicians, businessmen, and party officials. Unfortunately, these leaders did not see anything wrong with the way they governed or the way most Mexican Americans lived.

The only hope for what seemed a hopeless situation came from a small number of Mexican American politicians and intellectuals scattered across the United States. They were a more militant progeny of what historian Mario T. García described as the Mexican American Generation. They were products of the Second World War and participants or at least witnesses of the litigation battles waged by members of organizations such as LULAC, the G.I. Forum, and La Liga Pro-Defensa Escolar against segregated school systems nationally. Their parents had been influenced by the assimilationist tendencies of
the 1930s, when Mexican American intellectuals stopped looking at Mexico as the mother country or as the center of intellectual thought. Learning English and attaining citizenship was an obsession, and so was demanding the civil rights conferred by that citizenship.

In "The Mexican American Mind: A Product of the 1930s," Richard Garcia writes:

The Mexican American mind emerged in the 1930s as a product of social differentiation, the crisis of the Depression, the Americanization role of such institutions as the family, the Catholic Church and the educational system, the Mexican and American ethos of the city, the idea and ideology of the exiled Mexican "rico" and the rise of the LULAC as well as the relative absence of constant immigration.

J. Montiel Olvera, writing in 1939 in his Latin American Yearbook, admonished his readers: "The minds of the younger generation . . . must be trained to be subservient to no one; to feel and act 'equal' with others; to grow into manhood upright, with no complexes . . . with loyalty to the [American] flag . . . and an abundance of patriotism in their hearts." This generation felt that improvements had been made and could be enhanced if Mexican Americans tried harder to be more like the rest of the American population and less like the migrant generation that had preceded them.

Rodolfo Alvarez describes this juncture in the development of the Mexican American as a "period when the first relatively effective community protective organizations began to be formed. The organizing documents are so painfully patriotic as to demonstrate the conceptualized ambitions of the membership rather than their actual living experience." Alvarez also places a perspective on the advances this generation made by pointing out that the improvements in education, income, social acceptance, and so on were accomplishments only when compared to the lot of the migrant generation, which began with nothing. And in fact the Mexican American experienced only an "upward coasting with the general economy and was not directly influencing his own economic betterment."
The activists of the 1950s promoted the concept of integration rather than assimilation. They began to note that there were differences between them and the majority population, but they were nonetheless Americans with full rights. Rarely successful in local politics, they were attracted to national elections and the major liberal politicians of the time. They also moved toward involvement in electoral politics, unlike LULAC and the G.I. Forum. These Mexican American activists were optimistic, and they quickly joined John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign of hope. Viva Kennedy Clubs sprang up throughout the Southwest amid promises of Mexican American inclusion in the Kennedy administration.

This activism found a base in two new organizations. The Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) in California and the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASSO) in Texas, though they did not field candidates, did endorse them and provided money and volunteers to those they felt would work for the benefit of the community. This was the first time an organization had used the term "Mexican American" in its title or made politics a prominent feature of its agenda. Both groups were headed by feisty militants. Bert Corona, Jr., long-time unionist, was the president of MAPA, and Albert Peña, Jr., civil rights lawyer, occupied the presidency of PASSO. Both men represented the link to a yet-to-come activism of the Chicano Movement, while their constituency remained a composition of moderate New Dealers at best. These organizations had ties to labor and attempted to include the skilled working class and the war veterans. At the halfway point of the 1960s the leadership felt that there prevailed a "friendly atmosphere for change." President Lyndon B. Johnson had followed Kennedy's progressive rhetoric with a full agenda of social programs to combat poverty and illiteracy, and these programs created a small but aggressive and adequately financed group of educators, social workers, and community organizers.

Ironically, when the social activism of the 1960s began accelerating, both MAPA and PASSO lost momentum and were not able to capture the leadership of a movement
they had helped initiate. There were several reasons for their decline. The first was that the membership was composed predominantly of professionals who were either established in their careers or at least were sampling the benefits of a growing economy. They were, in terms of economic stability and educational achievement, unrepresentative of the population at large, and though supportive of liberal remedies for the poor, they were nevertheless class conscious and moved away from the barrio and into integrated neighborhoods as soon as they could.7 Their children were the first generation of Mexican Americans to have trouble speaking Spanish and relating to Mexican culture. A second reason was that, as MAPA and PASSO members worked in coalitions with Anglo liberals, they were forced to suppress their own nationalistic tendencies. Although they were supportive of their culture at the personal level, they did not consider it appropriate to flaunt it or to perpetuate its "public" existence. Third, they were extremely sensitive to the intense red baiting directed at the black civil rights movement. It was not uncommon for these activists to point out that they had refrain from rioting and protest marches and had chosen to suffer discrimination with dignity.8

The preoccupation with dignity and legitimacy often led to bitter infighting that weakened the organizations. The fatal blow for PASSO came after an impressive electoral victory in the small South Texas town of Crystal City. There PASSO united with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters to sponsor an all-Mexican American slate that swept the city council elections in 1963. The victory sent shock waves throughout the state, as it was the first time Mexican Americans had successfully challenged their subordinate status through the ballot box. Peña and Albert Fuentes, PASSO's executive secretary, took credit for the strategy and for a time vowed to repeat the process throughout Texas.9

Liberals statewide praised the Crystal City "miracle," but other PASSO members, led by Hector García, founder of the American G.I. Forum, were troubled by the association with the Teamsters and the negative publicity in the conservative Texas press.
William Bonilla, a Garcia lieutenant, expressed the feeling of a significant minority when he said, "Many of our professional and business people feel that PASSO has received unfavorable publicity because of the Crystal City elections, and they do not know if it's worthwhile for them to give of their time to work for the organization."

At the PASSO convention of 1964 some delegates also felt that the all-Mexican slate was open to charges of "discrimination in reverse." Crystal City mayor Juan Cornejo had to explain to the delegates that the teamsters-PASSO coalition had tried to balance the slate with Anglos but had been unsuccessful in attracting any of them. Just as reluctant had been the "educated Latins." "Instead, we poor Latin Americans with fifth grade education had to run," said Cornejo. For many middle-class Mexican Americans, the Crystal City officials, who were defeated in 1965 after a disastrous and divisive two years, were an embarrassment. The teamsters-PASSO association became a major issue at the convention and led to the walkout of Garcia when Peña was reelected. The organization never recovered from that schism.

By the late 1960s the PASSO-MAPA style of activism had come in for strong criticism from new activists involved in what came to be known as the Chicano Movement. This movement brought a new world view of the barrio and its relationship to Anglo society. The new activists had no interest in legitimacy in the eyes of the Anglos, they were avowed nationalists, they spoke as much Spanish as English even though they were young and educated, and they believed in the confrontation politics of the civil rights movement. They were deeply influenced by the rhetoric of black militants such as H. Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael, and Malcolm X and were discovering a new cultural identity in the symbolism of the United Farm Workers' movement. Their heroes were César Chávez of the UFW; Reies López Tijerina, leader of a movement to win back land grants in New Mexico; and Rodolfo Gonzales, a charismatic, urban politico from Denver, Colorado, who sought to organize Cholos and street-gang members into a revolutionary vanguard.
By the latter part of the 1960s the movement had spread nationally, and initially it
gave rise to a consensus of the needs of the Mexican American community, something
that the regionalism of the prior organizations had made impossible. This movement not
only awoke the political sensibilities of the southwestern barrios, but it also encouraged a
renaissance of Chicano art, literature, and culture. It became a breeding ground for young
intellectuals who had their own ideas on how to change the condition of the Mexican
American. They were impatient with the slow-moving changes. Many had been sheltered
from the few changes that had taken place, and for a time they believed that their own
parents and grandparents had been passive and accommodating to discrimination and
exploitation. These militants were the first generation to see its economic and social status
within the context of a bountiful America. An educated group, it believed many benefits
were unattainable because of Anglo society’s preoccupation with color, accent, and
national origins. To them, America’s moral legitimacy had been lost, and what began as
an opposition to specific issues became a repudiation of the whole American system and
its moral foundations.33

Armando B. Rendón, in his Chicano Manifesto, expressed the feeling of many
activists when he said:

The North American culture is not worth copying; it is destructive of
personal dignity; it is callous, vindictive, arrogant, militaristic, self-
deceiving, and greedy; it is a gold-plated ball-point pen; it is James
Eastland and Richard Nixon; it is Strom Thurmond and Lyndon
Johnson; it is a Mustang and old-folk’s homes; it is medicine and OEA; it
is an $80 billion defense budget and $75 a month welfare; it is a
cultural cesspool and a social and spiritual vacuum for the Chicano.34

By 1967 the mood was calling for a new kind of approach to organizing mass
resistance to Anglo society. Militant Chicanos no longer just wanted to eliminate the
disparities between the two worlds, they wanted to destroy the structures that had made
those differences possible. "Chicano Power!" became the new slogan and "Viva La Raza!"
the call to arms.
CHAPTER TWO

A NEW KIND OF ACTIVIST

The barrios in the city of San Antonio were seething during the summer of 1967. The three hundred fifty thousand or so citizens of Mexican ancestry there had watched half a decade of civil rights conflict and legislation after legislation of New Frontier and Great Society programs unfold before them. Yet they remained powerless, unable to elect any significant numbers of Mexican Americans to office or to break down the barriers to economic upward mobility even as their sons went to war in large numbers. Although political and social activism had been prevalent in San Antonio, most outsiders would have categorized Mexican Americans there as a flock without a shepherd, lost within the confines of their own barrios.

Against this backdrop five young men came together at the Fountain Room, a local bar several blocks from St. Mary's University, a small, Catholic, liberal-arts college. They came to discuss politics, the Chicano student movement in California, and the conditions of Mexican Americans in general, and they came to drink beer. Serving as the catalyst for the group was a political science graduate student named José Angel Gutiérrez, who had recently dropped out of the University of Houston's law school. Gutiérrez came to the meeting already a veteran of numerous political battles, including the 1963 Crystal City election, in which as a junior-college student he had registered voters and written propaganda flyers. Also, as an undergraduate at Texas A&I University he had forced PASSO to lower its age requirement from twenty-one to eighteen.

At St. Mary's, Gutiérrez renewed his acquaintance with Charles Cotrell, a political science professor he had met at Texas A&I. Cotrell introduced Gutiérrez to other young men on campus who were involved in social activism. In the early spring of 1967 he...
met two young men and became reacquainted with another who shared his ideas about the conditions of the Mexican American population. The three were Juan Patlán, a friend from high school and junior college; Willie Velásquez, a student and community activist who worked for the Catholic Bishop’s Committee on the Spanish-Speaking; and Ignacio "Nacho" Pérez, a nonstudent who was active in raising money for the Texas chapter of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. The four talked for hours one spring evening. Their topics ranged from the Black Movement to the current crop of 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 late twenties who had grown up in the tough barrios of San Antonio’s west side and was then a freshman political science student. They met at a picnic sponsored by the department. After teaming up to win several games of horseshoes—a game neither had played before, but did so to beat a few "gringos"—they discussed Gutiérrez’s political views. Compean recalled the meeting years later:

We talked a lot about what was going on with the Black Movement... the farm workers' movement... César Chávez in California, and other events. We discussed leaders like [Stokely] 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 and the American G.I. Forum.

In Compean, Gutiérrez found a disciple. Compean had attended school at Edgewood High School in San Antonio, which had a predominantly Mexican American student population. By his own admission, there he had learned to distrust Anglos and to develop nationalistic ideas. After talking to Gutiérrez, Compean agreed to meet with the other young men. Three weeks later Gutiérrez, Compean, and the other three met at the Fountain Bar and then began to meet regularly afterward. This time the meetings were not merely rap sessions, but study sessions.

The five began to read books on political theory and works by black nationalists such as Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, and Malcolm X. The group also followed the
newspaper accounts of what was happening with the Alianza de Pueblos Libres of Reies López Tijerina in New Mexico and the Crusade for Justice of Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales in Colorado. Tijerina led a movement to reclaim thousands of acres of federal land for the descendants of the original owners, who had received land grants from the Spanish Crown. The Alianza had had by then several violent confrontations with state and federal authorities. Tijerina had also been the target of the largest federal manhunt in the country. Gonzales had a regional reputation for his fiery nationalistic speeches that smacked of separatism and for the Chicano liberation gatherings he sponsored. The five also looked up old organizers like Eluterio Escobar and María Hernández, who began their activism in the 1930s and 1940s.

In their discussion sessions the five reaffirmed their dislike for the políticos of the barrio. They felt that these political leaders' approach to the problems of the Mexican American community did not yield meaningful results. They viewed these leaders as accommodationists who were only too willing to work within the system and who agitated in favor of their community only as long as it did not adversely affect their economic or political standing or as long as it gave them credibility without consequences. The five also concluded that they were not interested in forming another mass membership organization, of which there were many in the Mexican American barrios, but rather were attracted to organizations such as the Students for a Democratic Society, a white anti-war group, and the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a black activist movement, as possible models for Mexican Americans.

They traveled—sometimes together, sometimes alone—into the South to talk with Carmichael and Martin Luther King's people, and they headed west to Albuquerque to interview Tijerina. They listened attentively, took notes, and came back and reported to those left behind.

Through these travels and study sessions, they concluded that they should establish an entity of organizers, young activists who would subsist on a minimum of resources.
They were to get involved in issues of discrimination, police brutality, labor organizing, and especially education and the treatment of Mexican American students in the schools. Beyond that, they were to foster a new pride in being Chicano. The new organization, they decided, would consist of natural leaders who could be developed without too much training. By the late summer of 1967 the five had recruited a second layer of young men, mostly high-school dropouts. These new recruits came from the ranks of Compean's acquaintances, although Gutiérrez did most of the recruiting. 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 joined the growing group of activists-to-be. They were teenagers in school, mostly from the poorest districts deep in the west side of San Antonio.

At the same time, the five began to contact other young men around the state. Most of these recruits were involved in the farm workers' unionizing efforts or in self-help programs in the poor barrios. These men, too, came in for extensive study sessions.

Guadalupe Youngblood, a prominent young activist from Robstown, Texas, recalled "long study and discussion sessions in which we talked about what we wanted and how we were going to do it. It was a philosophy based on cultural nationalism." This philosophy embodied cultural components such as family, Mexican history, music, and the use of the Spanish language as part of the group's political views. It was also based on a new political rhetoric whose confrontational nature sought to arouse the attention of the Anglos, who would be shocked by it, and to capture the imagination of young Mexican Americans, who would applaud its audacity and valor. "We set out to come up with a lexicon of . . . terms," said Compean, "terms like 'La Raza,' 'Chicano liberation,' . . . and the word 'Chicano.' We began personifying the system through the use of the word 'gringo.'"

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." These were the methods of organizations like LULAC and the G.I. Forum, which relied on litigation and support from sympathetic Anglos to achieve their goals. Compean recalled:

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 [Mexican American Youth Organization] was going to be using. Use confrontational politics based on information . . . well researched, but also foregoing the use of nice language.

Gutiérrez, Pérez, and Compean tried out this approach in the summer of 1967 when they set up an informational picket line outside the Alamo, where a July 4th commemoration was being held. While the band played and patriotic speeches were still ringing in the air, the three chanted and carried signs taunting the crowd. Expressions such as "What about La Raza?" "What about independence for La Raza?" and "When is that coming?" were painted on large signs where the celebrants could see them. There were always substantial numbers of Mexican Americans at these functions, and the three wanted to inaugurate 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. Nevertheless, for the three the protest was a success. They had introduced their style of activism to other Chicanos and to the media.

The five also followed Pérez's lead in getting involved in a farm workers' strike in the Rio Grande Valley where Chávez's people were trying to organize. They went down to the fields and placed themselves between the Texas Rangers and the farm workers in the picket lines. They also worked with Ernie Cortez, the sixth significant recruit, in organizing food banks in Austin for the farm workers. At the time, the UFW's campaign to unionize field workers symbolized the momentous struggle. Chicano activists saw themselves waging a war against an unfair system. Despite its pacifist leader, the UFW presented a rather radical image to many. Its motifs were nationalistic and its working-
class roots were devoid of Angloism, making it an attractive symbol of La Causa.

Velásquez, more the urban activist, involved the group in calling Raza Unida (People United) unity conference, throughout Texas. These gatherings were to play an important role in the development of the Chicano Movement in Texas. Prominent Mexican American scholars and activists came from around the country to speak to the students and community people and to motivate them to get involved in the social revolution raging in some parts of the Southwest. Being on the same stage with these figures helped legitimize the six in the eyes of Mexican Americans. It also allowed them to make contact with some militant elements of the political middle class.

The first Raza Unida Conference took place in El Paso in October 1967 to counter President Johnson's cabinet hearings on Mexican American affairs. The hearings had been called to placate protesting Mexican American leaders who felt left out of the Democratic administration and who envied what they perceived to be Johnson's partiality toward blacks. When the list of invitees became public, it revealed that the administration sought to deal only with moderates who had an extensive history of loyalty to the Democratic Party. Though some of the invitees could claim to be legitimate spokesmen for the Mexican American community, a good number of them decided not to attend.

One week before the hearings, Tijerina's Alianza held its annual meeting in Albuquerque. Several Chicano activist organizations met there and discussed the matter. A week before that conference, the five met and decided to push the idea of calling a counter-meeting in El Paso. Compean later explained their participation: "We talked about what was needed to be done . . . It took us three sleepless nights to get a commitment from the people there . . . to go to El Paso. They had previously wanted to boycott the conference." At El Paso Velásquez, suggested "La Raza Unida" when the conference participants were looking for a name. Ernesto Galarza, prominent scholar and union organizer, became the conference's first chairman.
A follow-up conference was held in San Antonio in January 1968, and several well-known Mexican Americans, including Galarza, attended and spoke to the participants about getting active in the movement that was sweeping the barrios. Two months later, another conference convened in Laredo.  

 Shortly after coming together, the five concentrated on finding a name and a symbol and developing an organizational structure. They decided on the name Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) because it sounded "boy scoutish." According to Gutiérrez, the other names considered included Liga de Estudiantes y Obreros Nacionalistas (LEON), Partido Unificador Mexico Americano, (PUMA), and even, 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 take some of the heat off when they became militant and abrasive. The symbol that became synonymous with MAYO—the Aztec warrior inside a circle—was copied from Aeronaves de Mexico, the Mexican national airline.

 On paper a board of directors, made up of one representative from each chapter, directed the organization's activities. The board met on the last Saturday of January and the last Saturday of June. The first meeting was devoted to planning strategies and programs and the second to evaluating the programs and electing officers. The elected positions were those of chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, and treasurer. 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 did not want MAYO to become dependent on one person who could be targeted for pressure by political opponents. Nonetheless, the organization was far from being democratic. Gutiérrez later said:

[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] Luera 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.55

MAYO was incorporated and by-laws were established. The membership requirements, though, were of a different nature than those of the usual nonprofit entity. They were meant to attract idealistic youth and to alienate moderates. They read like the creed of an ethnic, political movement, which is what MAYO intended to be. Members were expected to "put La Raza first and foremost"; to be alert but with a closed mouth; to have a desire to study, learn, and articulate, yet be ready "to attack"; and to support fellow MAYO members in time of crisis.26 These rather simplistic requirements had the aim of developing a cadre of fiercely loyal members with a basic knowledge of the Chicano student movement and an obsession with cultural pride. They were to be militant in their fight against the gringo and respectful toward La Raza, thus making them modern-day political Robin Hoods. The preamble of the MAYO constitution read: "The purpose of the Mexican American Youth Organization is to establish a coordinated effort in the organization of groups interested in solving problems of the Chicano community and to develop leaders from within the communities."

To maintain a political movement, the MAYO leaders knew economics would be an important consideration. Velásquez, better versed in fundraising than the rest, became the prime fundraiser, getting money from local chapters of LULAC and the G.I. Forum. He acquired MAYO's first headquarters rent-free, atop a westside drugstore.26 In its initial stage MAYO's aggressive style was admired even by established Mexican American political leaders and some barrio businessmen, who made small contributions and invited the young "militants" to lunch.

MAYO'S chance for a larger financial base came through the efforts of two acquaintances of Gutiérrez and Compean, Gonzalo Barrientos and José Urriegas, who helped them become involved in the founding of the VISTA (Volunteers in Service to
Minority Mobilization Project in Austin. This self-help organization was funded to recruit and train two hundred young volunteers to work in four depressed areas of South Texas and in El Paso. Through his contacts with Urriegas and Gil Murillo, the project director and a sympathizer, 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 said later.

With the assistance of this patronage, MAYO grew from one chapter in San Antonio to more than thirty—of a few members each—in South Texas in one year. Compean later boasted: "MAYO had two hundred people loose. We had a budget. We had salaries for people. We had transportation. We had telephones. We had travel monies. So consequently that really allowed MAYO to expand."

MAYO leaders, however, envisioned more than getting jobs for their members. They were interested in developing a financial base for their activities while creating an economic stimulus for the Mexican American community in San Antonio and, later, South Texas. That led to the founding of the Mexican American Unity Council (MAUC), an economic development corporation funded by a grant from the Southwest Council of La Raza, another Mexican American agency, which received money from the Ford Foundation. MAUC was the brainchild of Gutiérrez and Velásquez, who knew Julian Samora and Galarza, two prominent scholars with close ties to several funding agencies. Velásquez wrote the proposal and became MAYO's first employee earning five dollars a week.

First Velásquez and then Patlán took the reigns of the development agency and made it a successful entity that served, into the 1980s, as a model for other Chicano economic development efforts. Initially, the Unity Council funded neighborhood associations and similar groups that worked with young drug addicts, advocated for better police protection in the barrio, and provided outreach services to the poor. From there, the council 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, to infuse them with money, and to provide managerial help to get them on their feet again. Within four years of its existence, the agency’s budget totaled millions of dollars and became the largest and most successful economic development agency in the city and the state. Eventually, it became involved in buying franchised firms.\textsuperscript{33}

Notwithstanding its business orientation, the council continued to be involved with issues of health, particularly mental health. It received funds to train health para-professionals and other professionals oriented toward social work. MAUC became a successful source of employment, but more importantly, it served as a conduit for a one-time Ford Foundation grant of $8,500 in 1968 to MAYO, which allowed it to hire one staff member.\textsuperscript{34}

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 directed 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 behind the agency was original, and it brought praise from federal officials, who later attempted to duplicate the program nationally.\textsuperscript{35} Like MAUC in its first years, TIED was used to employ MAYO members as well as to organize, around health and economic issues, the communities they served. The long range-effects on their localities nonetheless transcended and outlived their political purposes.

While MAYO was able to use federal and private dollars to sustain itself and its foot soldiers, it also provided services to Mexican American communities, at the same time claiming that it did not receive or accept direct money from the federal government. Yet for all their economic successes, MAYO leaders knew that their good fortunes were only a one-time deal. They had been able to surprise the Anglo power establishment the first time, but eventually the funds would dry up.
In the meantime, as VISTA volunteers the MAYO activists engaged in polarizing 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 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. 36

MAYO organizers tried to get involved with neighborhood groups and agencies that worked with low-income people and disadvantaged children. Through these students and agencies they attempted to reach parents and other adults. This strategy did not prove successful at first. Most parents did not relate well 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, a mistake that later haunted MAYO.

Since many of the youths were best attracted through fiery speeches and confrontational politics, special effort was made to taunt the Anglo structures that had long governed without opposition in these communities. MAYO's strategy sought to exasperate Anglos into overreacting or showing their "true colors." 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. MAYO's 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 damages our human dignity, but also makes 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... Whenever MAYO members could confront an Anglo politician, a law enforcement agency, or any other representative of authority, they reveled in it. They wanted opportunities to prove to the Mexican American community that Anglo racists were vulnerable and could be confronted and beaten down.

Newspapers became an effective medium for introducing MAYO's philosophy to the people in the barrios. The first MAYO newspaper was El Deguello in San Antonio. Three others in circulation by 1969 were Hoy in the Rio Grande Valley, El Azteca in Kingsville, and La Revolución in Uvalde. In naming the newspapers, the activists exhibited their ardent nationalism, which was vividly captured in an editorial explaining why MAYO had chosen the name El Deguello, which, signified, in the old Mexican Army, that no quarter was to be given.

Just as that bugle rang out that quiet morning, so, too, must it ring in every Chicoano's ears. As Chicanos we have given the gringo please, requests, and even demands. The gringo refuses to hear our voices just like Travis did. Obviously, gringos didn't learn much in 120 years. So, El Deguello must again shout out its war cry to tell all Chicanos that we must rise up against the gringo again. He has had his last chance.

Extemporaneous events proved to be beneficial to MAYO. Police harassment, indiscriminate firings of Mexican Americans, controversial school suspensions, electoral intimidations, and similar events brought immediate response from the MAYO activists, either through their own initiative or by invitation from community groups. Each incident brought organizing opportunities that often led to the formation of more MAYO chapters.
One major media event occurred when the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights decided to hold hearings in San Antonio from December 9 to the 14, 1968. One of those subpoenaed was Captain Alfred Y. Allee, a thirty-six-year veteran of the Texas Rangers, the state’s most famous law enforcement agency. No Commission hearing on the Mexican American community could end without looking into the area of police brutality, and 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 ruthlessly suppressed a strike in the Rio Grande Valley by arresting hundreds of farm workers, with no pretext other than the fact that the farm workers were being unionized by Chávez’s United Farm Workers. The Rangers’ reputation for intimidation, harassment, and violence, however, had not been acquired in contemporary times, but rather had been developing since the mid-1800s.

When first summoned, Allee refused to attend. He claimed 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 and other Chicanos who were not afraid of him. Allee replied that if they had any guts, "they would face me in my own home." Gutiérrez rebutted that MAYO would meet him "anywhere and on any terms" and then he called him an animal. An infuriated Allee shot back that he would be there but with an escort of Texas Rangers. When Allee arrived in San Antonio, he was met by hundreds of young MAYO-led Chicanos from across the state who had surrounded the auditorium where the commission was meeting. The Texas Rangers and their leader 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. MAYO came out of the confrontation looking like an organization of valiant youths willing to face danger for their Raza. The event signaled, they maintained 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 in describing MAYO members: "[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." Texas Governor Preston Smith did more than talk. He ordered VISTA volunteers to leave Val Verde County after county commissioners there accused MAYO 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." MAYO responded to this action by staging a large demonstration in the town and unfolding what they called the "Del Rio Manifesto" to the courthouse door.

U.S. Congressman O. C. Fisher of San Antonio continued the attack. He urged the House Committee on Internal Security to undertake an investigation of MAYO. Fisher accused Gutiérrez of being "deeply involved" in the grape strike at Delano, California, and "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."

All these criticisms, 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 and barely missed getting his party's nomination, 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 something 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 . . . makes his followers revolutionaries . . . One cannot fan the flames of bigotry one moment and expect them to disappear the next.48

For three days he blasted MAYO on the floor of the House of Representatives. He 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, nor did the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) or the Southwest Council of La Raza, which were friendly to MAYO. González blamed the Ford Foundation for wasting taxpayers’ money in order to support "brown thugs" who were bent on using racist tactics to divide Anglos and Mexican Americans.49

González was especially 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 psychologically 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 that he operates from, be it economic, political, or social. That is what we intend to do" (author’s italics).50

Although the threats and subsequent explanations were enough to incense most Anglos, the way the newspapers played the story created a furor. 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." González labeled MAYO leaders "Brown Bilbos"—a reference to Theodore Bilbo, segregationist senator from Mississippi—who were practicing a new racism.51 His was a vicious attack, and it opened the flood-gates for more scathing criticisms of MAYO from both Mexican Americans and Anglos. It also
guaranteed that a segment of Mexican American liberals would not only resist MAYO overtures, but work to destroy the organization. A weak congressman in Washington, D.C., González nevertheless wielded enormous power in the twentieth Congressional District, which included much of the west side of San Antonio. His speech became a albatross around the neck of Gutiérrez and the organization.

The immediate impact of the assault on MAYO was the eroding of the organization's economic base. Governor Smith's charges forced the national VISTA organization to clamp down on MAYO's activities, and many of the organizers were soon purged from their jobs. Congressman González's denunciation ended the possibility of any more direct funds for MAYO. MAUC survived and prospered because Patlán moved the organization away from politics and eventually away from MAYO control, but TIED barely managed to hang on with small grants that were never large enough to hire much of a staff. Political consequences notwithstanding, MAYO had no intention of abrogating its agenda, and prominent among its objectives was educational reform. While media events and public debates increased MAYO's notoriety, another strategy became a trademark for which the organization would be known and feared: school boycotts. From day one the leadership gave education a high priority. In their constitution MAYO leaders unequivocally stated, "We seek to control local school districts or individual schools in order to make the institution adapt itself to the needs of the [Chicano] community rather than . . . making the . . . student adapt to the school." They sought to gain control over the curriculum, the hiring of administrators and teachers, the financing, and the schools' relationship to the community. MAYO leaders realized that even middle-class Mexican Americans had rallied to the issue of education in the past. It was also an area in which schools were vulnerable. Few Anglo educators could seriously defend the education system in the barrio. In San Antonio 98 percent of the teachers without degrees were concentrated in schools that served the barrio. And these poor schools, like many others in the Southwest which served Mexican Americans, received
much less money—three hundred dollars less in San Antonio—per pupil than the predominantly Anglo schools.^

When the MAYO leadership elected to challenge the educational system, it chose methods other than litigation or quiet diplomacy. Boycotts, they decided, would be 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. Through their networks, MAYO activists identified students who were natural leaders and who could rally others to their cause. They oriented these students to "boycott politics," assisted them in writing a list of demands and in setting up press conferences, and then let them take over the frontline leadership while the MAYO leaders from outside the locality remained in the background. In two years MAYO initiated numerous boycotts—the estimates run from eighteen to thirty-nine—from Lubbock in West Texas to the Rio Grande Valley and San Antonio in the south.^

Sidney Lanier High School, on San Antonio’s central west side, was MAYO’s first target. Velásquez led the effort to create a student coordinating committee which presented a number of grievances to the school administration. The demands centered on three major points: the instituting of college preparatory courses, the establishment of culturally-relevant courses, and the elimination of the "No Spanish" rule forbidding the use of Spanish on the school grounds. That rule was seen as particularly demeaning by some of the more nationalistic students. The more moderate students strongly advocated the college preparatory courses.

Lanier seemed the wrong place to start a student revolt because it had a Mexican American student population of nearly 97 percent, was located in a stable working-class neighborhood, had a large number of Mexican American teachers, and was recognized as academically the best high school in the barrios of San Antonio. Violence, vandalism, and absenteeism, so often associated with urban, inner-city schools, were not major problems at Lanier.
Judging from appearances, the school did not seem a good place to organize, but MAYO activists were looking beyond appearances. They saw that there were few college preparatory courses, a large dropout rate, and that students were being punished for speaking Spanish. Most of the graduates were getting low-paying jobs, while graduates of the city's Anglo high schools were going on to college. Possibly just as important, they saw that Sidney Lanier student leaders were well respected by the Mexican American community because they tended to be more articulate and came from more stable families than students in other west side high schools, which were worse off financially and located in less stable neighborhoods.

The protest movement within the school created a rift between the students and the Mexican American principal and many of the Mexican American teachers, who sided with the Anglos. Even the nearby neighborhoods were divided, with some parents charging that the student leaders were Communists and others defending the protesters' courage and willingness to stand up for their rights. The student leaders, some coached by MAYO organizers, others encouraged by more moderate activists, were able to gather support from a number of the Mexican American politicians in the city and this gave legitimacy to the protest. Support from several Catholic priests also helped to divert some of the criticism.

The climax of the student controversy came when school officials held a meeting with the parents and the student leaders in a Catholic parish hall adjacent to the school. More than five hundred people attended, including a group of Anglo sociology students who came to study the event. In a dramatic confrontation between students, led by José Vásquez and Homer C. García - both non-MAYO activists - and school officials, the parents and other interested persons were able to hear both sides and to meet the conflict's protagonists.

The student leaders came better prepared than the school officials, who underestimated the students' sophistication. School officials brought former students to
testify in favor of the school's rules, particularly the one dealing with no Spanish on the school grounds. When one former student told the audience, in heavily accented English that the "No Spanish" rule sought only to help students learn English, and that he was an example of one student who circumvented it to his detriment, a student leader quickly rebutted, telling the audience that speaking Spanish had hurt the student a lot less than the bad instruction he had received.58

Playing to the nationalist feelings of a large number in the crowd, the student leaders continually pointed out rules and practices they described as humiliating and degrading to the Mexican American community. In a tone and style that exuded pride in their ethnic heritage, they repeatedly demanded respect for the culture and traditions they brought from home. Slowly they won the favor of the audience. Ironically, they did it by being more articulate, in both Spanish and English, than the "successful" students who were persuaded to speak on behalf of the school. Years later one former student wrote:

The school was supposed to be the beacon of light that would lead us to a better life, but all that came from the school officials' defense was the offer of a stable life of hard work, limited mobility, and a traditionally well-played football schedule. It wasn't that the teachers did not teach about better things, it was just that no one in the school system did more than just teach . . . . In contrast, what I was hearing from the student protesters were new challenges, new horizons, all the things that my parents and an occasional good teacher had taught me to believe in.59

Completely embarrassed in the meeting, the school officials capitulated. In its May 1968 edition the Chicano newspaper Inferno reported: "Nine of the demands were granted as they were proposed. The one most popularly received was the one dealing with speaking Spanish at school."60

Shortly after the Lanier victory, students at Edgewood High School and Junior High School walked out of their classrooms, complaining that the state had abandoned them to classrooms without window screens, water fountains without water, teachers without certification, and a host of other problems. The Edgewood boycott proved successful when the media began to investigate the charges and found that most of them
were true. The Edgewood Independent School District ranked as one of the poorest in the nation and it became an example of the disregard that officials had for the Mexican American students.  

On November 14 another major walkout occurred in the Rio Grande Valley when one hundred forty students left the Edcouch-Elsa High School after two of their fellow students had been expelled for failure to cut their hair. MAYO organizers then helped other students write a list of demands for better facilities and the right to speak Spanish on the school grounds. This was a spontaneous boycott, but like others that followed, it had been prompted by the successes at Lanier and Edgewood. The school protest led to the striking down of the “No Spanish” rule as unconstitutional by a federal judge, and thus one of the most degrading school rules in Texas was eliminated.  

Numerous other boycotts followed the one in Edcouch-Elsa. The main demands in each case were the same: no punishment for speaking Spanish, establishment of a bilingual-bicultural program, the firing of racist teachers, the celebration of Mexican holidays, and availability of college preparatory courses for all students. The adoption of even half of these demands would have required major shifts in policies, so many administrators resisted, and thus many threatened boycotts turned into walkouts. Walkouts were not unique to Texas, for spontaneous walkouts occurred in California, Colorado, New Mexico, and other states. What was different was that these were being initiated, supported, or directed by a single organization.  

One of the major beneficiaries of the boycotts proved to be bilingual education, which had become federal law in late 1967. Funds were not appropriated until 1968, and the programs in Texas did not begin in full until 1969. When they did, they had a ground-well of support from many high school-students and their parents and from some school officials and teachers who needed the funds to implement such programs to placate the protesters. The boycotts also changed the relationship between parents and the school districts. In supporting their children’s confrontation with the school administrators and
school board members, more parents became involved in school issues and in attending school board meetings.

From these confrontations came many of the new leaders of MAYO. These leaders and their followers were not exclusively male, for women made up a significant part of the membership. They came from the larger pool of Mexican American women who were attending college, oftentimes away from their homes. The nature of the activities allowed women to become spokespersons and leaders, though never at the level of the men. MAYO’s recruiting success, however, remained limited to students and young people. Even when the parents came out in full force to support their sons and daughters, they limited their involvement to the school conflict. Gutiérrez later recalled: "We were never able to get parents to join us. It was not until thirty-eight walkouts later, that we finally learned enough techniques to organize parents, teachers and students." It was to be in Crystal City, Gutiérrez’s hometown, that MAYO claimed its first major organizing victory.
CHAPTER THREE

DESTINY CALLS AGAIN

Destiny, it seems, had tapped Crystal City for a major role in Texas political history, particularly that portion dealing with Mexican Americans. Already in 1963 the small, rural, agriculturally based town had been in many of the state's newspaper headlines, and for a short time it had become a symbol of simmering social unrest. Not since the late 1800s, when Mexican Americans were still a significant majority in some southwestern states, had they been successful in winning an electoral victory as they had in Crystal City. Another small Texas town, Mathis, had followed the Crystal City victory by winning control with a majority Chicano slate, but this group was more assimilationist and made no effort to be a rallying symbol. Few would ever point to Mathis and say that it was one of the precursors of the Chicano Movement, as they would say later of Crystal City.

The revolt of 1963 had a significant influence on Gutiérrez, who at the time was a student at a nearby community college in Uvalde. The electoral victory of "Los Cinco," as the candidates were called, was an example of repressed passions and fervent nationalism bursting into the open, and it impressed a young man who had grown bitter from his experiences at the hands of Anglos who controlled the political, economic, educational, and judicial institutions of Zavala County. He later described 1960s life in Crystal City as "suffocating" and "a tunnel without any light at the end."

His views were in part inherited from his Mexican father, who as a young medical school graduate had joined the army of Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution of 1910. He came to be one of Villa's medical officers and a member of the Mexican ambulatory corps. The elder Gutiérrez served as the military and then elected mayor of Torreón before he was exiled twice during political upheavals in Mexico. In 1929 he came to the Rio Grande Valley and moved to Crystal City. A fervent Mexican nationalist, he
never became a U.S. citizen and asked to be buried in Mexico when he died. The younger Gutiérrez later laid claim to that nationalist fervor. He also maintained that his speaking abilities came from his father.

Life for José Angel had not been difficult while his father lived. Though not rich, the family was one of the better off in the barrio. But when the father died at the age of seventy-four, the family found itself without any means of support and without the lines of credit they had enjoyed. Twelve-year-old José Angel saw his life change drastically. He became just another of the poor Mexican boys in Crystal City and his mother another of the poor women who had to perform menial jobs to feed her family. Gutiérrez later recalled this new life as a harsh one and said it was only then that he began to notice the disparities between the two communities that lived in Crystal City and to question why his people lived in such destitute conditions.

Crystal City was one of many rural slums in Texas where most of the Mexican population either worked for extremely low wages in the nearby cannery and the surrounding ranches or waited for the harvest season to travel up north. Nearly one thousand of the town's families earned less than three thousand dollars a year, which was below the poverty level for a family of four. More than half the homes had no toilets and one-third had no plumbing. One section of town did not even receive water. A reporter for the Washington Post wrote of the town, "The Chicano neighborhoods are a collection of wooden shacks and unpaved muddy streets." In contrast, "the Anglo neighborhoods [have] concrete sidewalks and roadways [that] weave past modest middle class homes and high-priced ranch style structures."

This kind of past had rallies hundreds of Mexican Americans in 1963 to register to vote and to cast their ballots for a slate of five uneducated, working-class Mexican Americans who ran for the city council. When the vote total was released, the reaction was euphoric: people hugged each other, some cried, some got drunk, and others honked their car horns for hours until the Texas Rangers cracked down on them. The rallies, the
pamphleteering, the voter-registration drives, and the political fundraising were activities new to most Mexican Americans in Crystal City. For many, it had been the first time they had united for a cause at the risk of losing jobs or getting physically abused. The period leading up to the election had been one of orgullo, pride of being mexicano.

Six years had passed, and Gutiérrez knew that not much had changed in Crystal City and the neighboring communities. The dream of a Mexican social revolution had died two years later.

When Gutiérrez arrived in Crystal City in June 1969 with his wife Luz and their first child, he came for two reasons, one economic and the other political. Only three months before, he had been released from the army reserves after six months of active duty. There he had had time to write down some of his political ideas and to affirm in his mind that partisan politics were essential for Chicano empowerment.

On his return to San Antonio, he tried to regain his job as a field researcher for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) but was refused. It seems that the pressure Congressman Henry B. González had put on the Ford Foundation had reached MALDEF. Gutiérrez threatened to sue, and the legal agency paid off his contract rather than rehire him. Without a job and with few possible prospects in San Antonio because of his reputation, he decided to visit Reies López Tijerina in New Mexico and Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales in Colorado, and then return home to Crystal City to live rent-free with relatives.

Before he left, though, he attended MAYO's semiannual state meeting in San Antonio, where Compean won the election for chairman and where new, more specific organizing goals were agreed upon. Gutiérrez presented his concept of a third political party. This had been one of MAYO's original goals, but little had been done to carry through with the idea. When Gutiérrez first mentioned it in 1967, the other activists had told him to "write up" the idea and send it out for reaction. He studied the state's laws dealing with political parties, wrote a proposal, and sent it out to farm-worker groups and
to activists in El Paso, Crystal City, and other places, but he received no response and the idea was shelved.10

The MAYO meeting of 1969 seemed the right time to resurrect the third-party concept because the organization had just completed its first electoral activity, a race for the San Antonio city council. Compean and two other candidates had run under the banner of the Committee for Barrio Betterment and challenged the powerful Good Government League, which had dominated San Antonio politics for more than two decades.11 Although the committee did not run strictly as a MAYO front, Compean nonetheless expounded the concept of La Raza Unida and even placed that slogan in all his campaign literature. 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.12 He limited his campaigning to the west-side barrios but still came within a few hundred votes of getting into a runoff with the incumbent mayor. He captured a number of the Mexican American precincts and became convinced that the idea of a third party would attract support in the barrios.13

Unfortunately for Gutiérrez, he could not find many other enthusiastic supporters besides Compean. Luz later recalled that most of the MAYO activists did not consider the program feasible and some of them thought it ludicrous. Instead, they were more inclined to support a program designed to win control of a particular area in rural Texas.14 They were interested in taking over existing institutions rather than continuing to use confrontations and protests as strategies for change. Through they were in essence talking politics, the nonpartisan nature of local elections in Texas allowed them to have electoral designs without considering the need for a new party.

The MAYO delegates discussed four possible target areas with large concentrations of Mexican Americans. The areas were chosen because they were poor, they were controlled politically by Anglos who could easily be accused of being racist, there had been MAYO activities in them before, and the chances of success were considered good.
The four targets contemplated were the Winter Garden Area, a seven-county stretch in South Texas that included Crystal City (Zavala County); the Plainview and Lubbock area in West Texas, which had a significant number of former migrant workers and field hands; the Kingsville area, where Texas A&I University was located; and the Rio Grande Valley, an area close to the Mexican border which had the largest concentration of migrant workers in the state and which ranked as one of the poorest parts of the country.¹⁵

The MAYO delegates decided on the Winter Garden Area and agreed to focus on three of the seven counties: Zavala, Dimmit, and La Salle. Gutiérrez was born and still had family in the first county, Patlán was from the second, and MAYO had a strong chapter in the third. The main reason for choosing the Winter Garden Area, though, was that Gutiérrez had decided to go back home to organize. Compean consequently appointed him head of the Winter Garden Area Project.

By deciding to head the MAYO project in his hometown, Gutiérrez adhered to a rule of the organization which stated that each organizer had to return home and agitate in his own community. Gutiérrez wrote in his diary his strong feelings about that MAYO principle: "Our young Chicanos must learn and accept the fact that to not return [is] in effect saying, My people and my town are not worth going back to . . . I wonder how our young, educated and bright Chicanos can think of joining VISTA or the Peace Corps or the army and not see that the struggle is where they come from."¹⁶

When Gutiérrez made a preliminary trip to Crystal City, the Zavala County seat, he found a controversy already brewing among the high-school students. Chicano students were upset over the de facto quotas the high-school administration had when it came to extracurricular activities. In the spring of 1969 they became particularly angered over the selection of the baseball sweetheart and the cheerleading squad. In both instances, the Mexican American students felt that the small Anglo minority received a better deal.¹⁷ Chicano students, led by Libby Lara and Diana Palacios, presented the principal, John B. Lair, with a petition asking that the students be allowed to elect the
cheerleaders. Lair refused to accept it, so the students went to the school superintendent, John Billings. By then the petition had grown to seven demands and had three hundred fifty signatures. It insisted, among other things that teachers stop expounding their political beliefs to the students and that the school implement bilingual and bicultural education. Gutierrez could easily identify with the protesting students, as he had graduated from Crystal City High School in 1962 and had encountered the same kind of blatant discrimination.

He vividly remembered two incidents that were to influence the way he felt about Anglos for the rest of his life. The first occurred when as junior class president he conducted an election for twenty pairs of servers for the senior prom. The students elected thirty-four Mexican Americans and six Anglos. Gutierrez took the list to John B. Lair, who quickly dumped it in the trash can and proceeded to develop another list that had ten Mexican American couples and ten Anglo couples. He told Gutierrez, "This is who won," to which Gutierrez responded, "No sir...why are you changing the names?" Gutierrez would always remember the reply, "Because we live in this town and this town wouldn't put up with Mexican boys...with these White girls and we're not going to start no trouble, are we?"

The second instance came during the election of the most handsome boy and most beautiful girl. With the Anglo students bloc voting and the Mexican American students having a larger choice, six Anglo students and four Mexican American students became the nominees. Their pictures were taken and then sent to well known Hollywood movie stars Troy Donahue and Kim Novak.

Time passed and there was no answer. Gutierrez, along with several other anxious students, decided to break into the journalism office and check to see if any results had come back. In one of the files they found letters from the actors excusing themselves as judges and indicating that they felt the local community would best be the judge of who was beautiful. "We thought, 'No winners'," Gutierrez later commented.
"We asked the following day ...[and] they said they hadn't heard. Within ten days they announced they had received word. They had a letter from both people (Donahue and Novak) saying who won -- they were white [students]. We knew they had forged the letters. That was how far they went. I, for one, said, 'This people will never willingly change.'"

After the students presented Billings with the petition, he agreed to meet with some of them and several parents. In the meeting he promised the protesting students that there would be an explicit quota of three Anglos and three Mexican American students in the cheerleading squad. He also pledged to deal with the other issues with either more quotas or by finding out what other communities in the area were doing. The superintendent's solutions proved that the administration would be pushed no further than the policy of separate but equal.

Gutiérrez and Patlán, who was temporarily staying in nearby Carrizo Springs, advised the students to accept the arrangement because the school year was winding down and students would have little leverage in a walkout. The seniors were sure to be flunked, and the school board would have the summer to let things cool down. The students accepted, but they were not truly happy, and that left a smoldering nonconformity that Gutiérrez quickly sought to take advantage of. In June the school board added more fuel to the controversy when it decided that the superintendent's actions were "pandering to the hot-headed students" and overturned his decisions.

By midsummer Gutiérrez had initiated several discussion groups in which he brought together a group of men to drink beer and talk about the lot of Mexican Americans in Crystal City. There was no agenda, but the discussion always drifted to politics and the need to make changes. The 1963 electoral revolt was often rehashed, at times heatedly because there were still many bitter feelings about the experience. Some thought Mexican Americans would always be second-class citizens. The emotional scar of the Anglos' reaction to that election lingered in the minds of several of the men.
Gutiérrez found that some of the men had major inferiority complexes when it came to dealing with Anglos. He later noted: "The defeat of the 1963 effort in 1965 caused a cynicism and pessimism to develop. It was very vicious because people would say things to me like 'You are crazy trying to do it again. We already did it once and it didn't work. We are just incapable of self-government.'" Others did not totally trust Gutiérrez. They were not sure whether he had come to Crystal City to establish his own little political empire or whether he even had the capacity to be a leader. They questioned him on subjects dealing with history, science, and any other topic they could imagine to test his knowledge and his ability to think.

Victoriano "Nano" Serna, who owned a convenience store, became Gutiérrez's best ally. He provided the meeting place and most of the beer and snacks. Julián Salas, who had been elected justice of the peace in 1968, also became an early convert. Salas shared Gutiérrez's dislike of the Anglo. Even though he served as a county official, he did not have an office, a telephone, or supplies, and he did not receive any cases to try. The Anglos had isolated him and diminished any influence he could have had.

Both Serna and Salas became facilitators for Gutiérrez's message and provided legitimacy for his cause in the eyes of many Mexican Americans in Crystal City. Their network of family and friends offered a natural constituency to organize into a study group. With the help of these two, Gutiérrez spoke to many without having an obvious public image that would have attracted attention from the Anglos in town.

Besides a community network, Gutiérrez needed a staff and he recruited Bill Richey and Linda Harrison, who had been fellow students during his stay both at Texas A&I University and St. Mary's University. Through his connection in the VISTA program, he had Richey and Harrison hired and transferred to Cotulla in La Salle County. In the fall of 1969 he recruited María Ynosencia and two students, Severita Lara and Beatriz Mendoza. In Carrizo Springs, a neighboring community in Dimmitt County, he recruited David Ojeda and his wife Rosa.
In moving to organize in the Winter Garden Area, Gutiérrez decided to change some of MAYO's tactics. He realized that the rebellious, loud approach would do more to alienate the poor and tradition-bound Mexican American community than it would to unite it, especially since the community, having seen the chaotic manner of "Los Cinco," sought legitimate leaders who knew what they were doing and had the ability to succeed. Because of MAYO's insistence that no one could straddle the fence on the issue of Mexican American rights, and because it chose to confront rather than negotiate, polarization resulted from most of its activities. In time, MAYO made as many enemies as it did friends. Gutiérrez later recalled: "We failed in making friends. We were so bad... We would rather be hated than liked. Pretty soon there were more people hating us than liking us... Our image was terrible... Regrettably this was being seen by the Chicano community much more so than the gabacho." By 1969, an element within MAYO had made a move to change the organization's public image from that of a group of rebellious, sloppily dressed, often times foul-mouthed youth to that of an organization of articulate, undivisive activists with close ties to the community.

Compean and Gutiérrez led the fight for a new image, but they were outvoted by those who felt that their dress was irrelevant to their activities. The opponents won the debate by stressing discipline in lieu of a change in wardrobe. Interestingly enough, Compean and Gutiérrez remained the most militant of the group, Compean with his cultural nationalism and Gutiérrez with his verbal attacks on the gringo and his use of profanity. Although numerous MAYO activists saw a need for change, most who were recruited in the urban centers and expected to stay there did not alter their style much. A number of those in the rural communities realized that had no choice but to make some changes if they were to succeed in their organizing activities.

Gutiérrez presented an image of a young, educated Mexican American who had returned to live and work in his hometown. He avoided being seen as a leader in the traditional sense and sought instead to be a motivator and an adviser to the natural
leaders of the rural community. His organizing tactics were proving fruitful but slow when a major new conflict arose at the high school.

In October the Crystal City High School Ex-student Association decided to choose a queen and her court for the homecoming activities. To be eligible, the candidates had to have at least one parent who had graduated from the high school. Of the twenty-six applicants, only five were Mexican American and this brought an outcry from students who did not qualify. With an average median educational level of 2.3 years, the Mexican American community could not claim many graduates.

Severita Lara, now a recognized student leader because of her work with Gutiérrez, published a pamphlet criticizing the requirement. She was quickly suspended for three days, though she returned after the second day with the help of a MALDEF lawyer.

Gutiérrez and Luz moved quickly to organize support for the students and to expand the demands. In this effort they were assisted by Virginia Múñquiz, a long-time activist and friend of Gutiérrez, as well as other men and women who had captured the vision of a town in revolt. Some had been part of the 1963 campaign; others were new to this kind of activity. Most were women, and they proved to be tenacious and untiring in their efforts to gain support for the student walkout. The work was divided by gender, Gutiérrez and others working with the men and the students, and Luz, Múñquiz, and other women with the students’ mothers. They were able to convince more than one hundred parents and family members to attend the school board meeting on November 3, when the issue of choosing the homecoming queen was placed on the agenda.

The women and students were anxious to attend, but the men were either afraid or simply did not feel it was their role to argue before a school board. Gutiérrez well understood the men’s inhibitions and decided to wait until they had a few beers at the local bar before he went over and began to denounce the school board for discriminating against the students and then for threatening to throw out the women because there was
no room in the meeting hall for so many people. Some of the men, already partly intoxicated, cursed and made idle threats against the school board. After getting them riled, Gutiérrez led them to the board meeting.\(^3\)

At the meeting hall Luz had already carried out her part of the plan by getting the women and students to occupy the back, thus forcing the men to move up front. Since the board had refused to move the meeting to accommodate the large crowd or even to bring more chairs, the men stood around the board members’ table. The board found itself surrounded by rough-looking men with a strong smell of alcohol on their breath. When Gutiérrez and Jesse Gámez, a native of Crystal City with a law practice in San Antonio, brought up the issue of the coronation activities, the men became loud and boisterous.\(^2\)

The board, overwhelmed and intimidated by the large, angry crowd, turned down the Ex-student Association’s request to use the school grounds for its ceremony. They took the other grievances under advisement after a contentious, three-hour meeting.\(^3\) Rather than defusing the students’ momentum, the board’s action simply made it more determined. The students and the parents viewed the board’s capitulation as a sign of weakness and resolved to press for the other demands.

The protesting students and parents were not the only ones to view the board’s actions as buckling down under pressure, however. The Anglo community saw the school board as too cowardly to confront the "disturbed young men," and the more militant Anglos began harassing the school board members and other Anglos they considered too lenient in their view of the protest. One member of the Ex-student Association even expressed the feeling that it might be time to "change the crew" in the school’s administration.\(^4\)

The hostile attitude of the Anglo residents prevented any serious effort to compromise on the demands. The board members, assailed from both sides but conscious that the Anglo community had already once turned back a challenge from the barrios,
decided to reject all the demands. In an extremely short meeting on December 8, a board spokesperson announced that the grievances had been found to be unsubstantiated and that no more time would be spent on them.

The board’s action cemented the polarization between the two sides of town and dispelled any notion that the Anglos were now more willing to negotiate than they had been in 1963. The blatant insensitivity was particularly appalling to the small middle-class element that had expected some concessions from the Anglos in return for support against Los Cinco in 1965. They felt despised by the lower-class Mexican Americans and ignored by the Anglos. A good number of them became susceptible to Gutiérrez’s persuasions.

Gutiérrez had counted on the board’s rejecting the demands and creating more hostilities. He knew that anger was the one emotion that could break the fear the Mexican American community had of the Anglo. In anticipating the negative decision, he had prepared plans for a school walkout that would gradually grow stronger and would involve parents from day one.

As soon as the decision was announced, Gutiérrez, Luz, and several leaders went to work. All that night they went from house to house recruiting the first one hundred students to walk out the following day. They identified the students less likely to be intimidated and the ones whose parents were supportive.35

At this time Gutiérrez’s previous organizing work proved to be crucial. Parents who had met him through the discussion sessions sensed that he knew what he was doing and came out in support of their sons and daughters. By the second day two hundred fifty students failed to show up to class; by that afternoon the boycott had spread to the junior high school, and nearly five hundred fifty school-aged children had stayed home. On the third day four hundred sixteen of six hundred seventy-three high-school students failed to attend school.36

Sensing that the boycott would not blow over, the board asked an investigative team from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to mediate. The two-person team from
TEA stayed in Crystal City for two unsuccessful days and left with the recommendation that the school close early for the holidays in order to avoid violence. School officials rejected the advice and attempted to defuse the situation by agreeing to develop a course on Mexican American history. But they would not budge on the other requests, so the students refused to negotiate and simply vowed to outlast the school administrators.

After the first week the parents became involved at the decision-making level. Along with numerous other individuals who had participated in the discussion groups, they banded together to form Ciudadanos Unidos, a grassroots political organization that intended to stay together after the boycott issue was settled. The Ciudadanos Unidos and the student leaders sponsored a rally on Sunday of the first week, and it attracted more than one thousand people who came to hear Gutiérrez, the Rev. Henry Casso—head of an organization of Mexican American priests—and Albert Peña, Jr., an old friend of Gutiérrez's who had been a prime supporter of the 1963 revolt. The publicity of the rally and the boycott strengthened the students' hand. At the start of the second week student leaders Diana Serna, Severita Lara, and Mario Treviño were invited to Washington, D.C., to meet with Texas Senator Ralph Yardborough, who introduced them to Senators Edward Kennedy and George McGovern. They also spoke to officials of the Departments of Justice and Health, Education and Welfare (HEW).

Meanwhile, the board could feel the pressure mounting, so it again requested mediators from TEA. The board members stated that they were ready to negotiate but would do so only with the parents of the students. Gutiérrez quickly advised the students and parents against this type of meeting. He knew that the school officials would attempt to intimidate the parents, some of whom would be fearful of losing their jobs or would feel uncomfortable speaking English and thus be no match for the more assertive board members. When the TEA team arrived, they found that no meeting could be arranged. An interdenominational church committee also attempted to mediate, but it, too, failed when infighting broke out among its own members over which side was right
in the boycott issue.  

Near the Christmas holidays the school officials were handed a major blow when the Texans for the Educational Advancement of Mexican Americans (TEAM), a group headed by Josué González, announced that it would send teachers to instruct the students during the holidays so they would not fall behind in their studies. Some of those teachers were sympathetic to MAYO and, with the help of the organization, which had now gotten involved, began to establish "liberation" classrooms outside the school grounds to teach not only the regular curriculum but other lessons on Mexican American history. 

Just behind the TEAM members came a two-person mediating team from the Community Relations Service of the U.S. Department of Justice. Gutiérrez had left nothing to chance. He knew from experience that with pressure from Anglos the school board would not give in easily. He also felt that it would be willing to engage in questionable tactics in order to win the confrontation. He needed only to remember 1963 to know that intimidation and violence were weapons often used against Mexican Americans. His own experience at the hands of the Texas Rangers reminded him that if the confrontation was contained at the local level, local "remedies" would be applied very effectively. With the media and federal mediators present, the few hotheaded Anglos could be kept in check.

Gutiérrez defused the accusations of radicalism by toning down the public statements so common during his leadership of MAYO. To avoid the charges of "Communist" and "subversive," he organized pledge-of-allegiance and flag-raising ceremonies on the morning before the students took their places outside the school with their signs.

Gutiérrez had prepared well for the boycott and later proudly recalled:

The rallies of Christmas of 1969 provided the happiest times for La Raza. Since the boycott La Raza had maintained the upper hand in media, in tactics and in morale. The mood of imminent victory was exemplified by speaker after speaker during the rallies.

During this time the Mexicanos of Crystal City were one in thought, action and goal—they were La Raza Unida. No longer did the slogans for unity need shouting; nor did the songs of solidarity need heed—la Raza
had gotten it all together .... The farm workers opened their modest homes to the strangers from TEAM .... the members of TEAM came to teach the boycotting students; the truckers provided the bus service for liberation classes; and the parents joined their children at the daily marching around the school and through the city's white business sector.5

With nearly 65 percent of the student population boycotting classes and with pressure mounting from the Department of Justice, TEA, and HEW, the school board finally decided to negotiate a way out of the crisis. The school board, five students, five parents, and two mediators from the Community Relations Service met in three lengthy sessions and worked out a compromise that gave the students most of what they had asked. On Tuesday, January 6, 1970, the walkout ended, and the students returned to school the following week.

The board attempted to save face by stating that some changes were contingent on available funds, but neither side ever believed that the agreement was a true compromise. The students had won a dramatic victory, and the school officials and their strongest supporters had been humiliated. The victory had been made possible by the discipline the students exhibited and because they had waited for the right time to walk out. In neighboring Uvalde the following year, students did not heed Gutiérrez's advice and they left school near the end of the term. The school board and school officials ruthlessly crushed the protest by expelling most of the students involved. The selective service board, working in conjunction with the school officials, drafted the oldest students, some of whom ended up as casualties of the Vietnam War.4

The Mexican American community knew this triumph was well deserved, and it encouraged them in a way that the 1963 election had not. They realized that they had won because they had prepared and had remained united. They also recognized that in Gutiérrez they had a bona fide leader capable of anticipating the Anglos' moves and knowledgeable enough to bring the required help from the outside. Most of his supporters felt that this would be a lasting victory, though a few must have thought about what the Anglos would do to retaliate.
Gutiérrez had no intention of waiting for a backlash or of giving up the offensive. Even before the walkout ended, he initiated a selective boycott through Ciudadanos Unidos of stores owned by Anglos who had threatened retaliation against the students' parents. They also boycotted the store of one Mexican American school board member who had not been supportive of the school walkout. This action surprised and frightened some of the Anglo businessmen and added to the disarray of the Anglo community, which felt humiliated by the turn of events.

The celebration had not yet subsided when Gutiérrez moved toward organizing an electoral challenge to the Anglos in the upcoming city and school board elections. Ciudadanos Unidos had emerged from the conflict a strong organization. At first some of its members had been afraid, and so they met in parks, in cars at night, and in homes away from where they could be seen. But as the boycott became more intense and popular, they began to meet at the Campestre, a popular dance hall, and assumed a more public role. To this group Gutiérrez expounded the idea of a third-party political movement that would run candidates for the school board and the city council. By January Gutiérrez had received an endorsement from MAYO during its December national meeting to promote the building of a third political party that would carry out the organization's program of Chicano empowerment. By mid-January Crystal City's electoral passions had reignited, and they would not be contained at the county limits.
CHAPTER FOUR

LA RAZA UNIDA BECOMES A PARTY

It was a determined group of MAYO activists that came together at a Catholic seminary building in Mission, Texas, to discuss the future of the movement in the state. Everywhere else, it seemed, the movimiento clearly headed toward a more militant posture, and different groups were consolidating their constituencies and jockeying for control or at least leadership of the social upheaval. It was also clear that mainstream Mexican American politicians and activists had already gone or been pushed as far as they were going. In addition, MAYO leaders were being besieged with invitations to join the Democratic Party and change it from within.

The national meeting at Mission proved significant because there MAYO made the break with the traditional modes of nonpartisan civil rights agitation. It split with the more mainstream elements in the Mexican American community. As long as MAYO remained nonpartisan, its members could move in and out of Democratic Party circles. Interestingly, several months after the national meeting, Compean ran for district chairman of the Democratic Party in Bexar County and came in a surprisingly strong second. Compean and others also worked on the Albert Peña, Jr., campaign in San Antonio, and Gutiérrez worked on a Democrat's campaign for county commissioner in Uvalde, but those activities only bought time until the party could be established.¹

Once they opted for a partisan alternative, they went at it alone. This, it would seem, was something that involved a great deal of reflection and discussion, and there was some during the early years of MAYO, but by 1969, momentum and circumstances took over.

The organization made a definite resolution to stay outside the traditional channels of American activism. By this time, MAYO leaders had become "pragmatic radicals." They
placed importance on getting immediate results by being resilient, adaptable to shifting political winds, and sensitive to the process of action and reaction so as not to be placed in a position they could not control. They shunned the dogmatic approach of sectarian groups in order to avoid ideological limitations on their freedom of action and choice.

Their political philosophy was based on what they did not like as much as it was on what they sought to achieve. They attacked Anglo institutions as having been founded on institutional racism, propagated to keeping minorities on the outside. MAYO questioned the moral fiber of American society, accusing it of using democratic and religious demagoguery to keep whites in charge and minorities exploited. "We feel the system is neither ours nor for us," said Gutiérrez. "We are political prisoners neither allowed to participate nor able to participate." By using the seething rhetoric and trying to delegitimize the political system, MAYO activists were saying that they wanted no part of the system either then or in the "idealized" future of the Texas liberals, who were at the time also trying to gather momentum.

The Chicano power leaders wanted a new system based on a cultural nationalism that was not as yet defined in terms of political processes and economic institutions. They were in truth inching toward a segregated, if not separatist, political ideology. This move toward a more fervent nationalism was spurred by Gutiérrez's rhetoric and Compean's leadership in MAYO. Gutiérrez, by his own admission, was an integrationist. Those who heard him, though, thought of him as a separatist. Compean, on the other hand, though not an avowed separatist, did lean heavily toward that view. This duality of thought gave rise to a rhetoric of fervent nationalism among activists who were not necessarily seeking such drastic action. By this time, the concept of Aztlán was popular, especially among activists, from California. Aztlán, according to Mexican mythology, was where the Aztecs had originated before they came to conquer the central valley of Mexico. All that was known about Aztlán was that it was north of Mexico. Some Chicano nationalists began claiming that the American Southwest was Aztlán and that Chicanos were called by
destiny to recover the homeland. Although few Chicano scholars and intellectuals ever gave more than lip service to the concept, many political organizers used it as a recruiting aid. There were some in MAYO who accepted the concept of Aztlán as real and preached it to their followers.

Notwithstanding their strong militant tendencies, MAYO leaders avoided the stringent sectarian ideologies fashionable at the time. They lambasted capitalism, as most activists did in those days, but they never overtly advocated socialism, which at the time had gained popularity among other Chicano groups as well as in the white youth movement. In terms of homegrown Chicano ideologies, only Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales's Chicano liberation thesis was prevalent, and it avoided sectarian tendencies. MAYO leaders were not inclined to bring more attacks on themselves by advocating a socialist system that could be implemented only nationally and not regionally. Socialism versus capitalism was one battle they anxiously avoided, as they realized that there were no organizing advantages to it. When pressed on the matter of prevailing ideologies, though, most MAYO leaders echoed Alberto Luera, who espoused a combination of political democracy and economic socialism.\(^4\)

MAYO organizers learned the hard way that their ideology had to conform to their organizing practices, which in turn conformed to the issues current in the barrio. Gutiérrez lamented the early mistakes. "You don't come in with your own agenda; we tried that. We tried coming in and telling the people to fight against imperialism, colonialism and capitalism—that was like talking moon talk."\(^6\)

At the national convention two major resolutions were voted on and passed, channeling the organization's future efforts. One stated that MAYO would support and, whenever possible, promote alternative educational systems such as Colegio Jacinto Treviño, a university without walls and without certified instructors to be administered by Chicanos for Chicanos."\(^7\)
This issue became a point of contention, as several MAYO leaders felt that politics should be the top priority and not pseudo-educational enterprises, no matter how noble. Narciso Alemán, a MAYO organizer from the Rio Grande Valley, led the fight for the alternative education emphasis. He wanted to drop or minimize the boycotts, and he lobbied hard. With resources so limited, most delegates saw a need to galvanize them in one direction. But to avoid a split they supported two directions instead of one. Although they voted to support alternative educational systems, however, the organization never did become engrossed in them.

The other resolution called for the formation of a third political party, which involved a concerted redirection of effort. MAYO leaders and activists became concerned with registering voters, developing party platforms, and raising funds for electoral campaigns. Ironically, at the height of its activity, MAYO began to decline, giving way to the all-consuming process of partisan politics. MAYO would exist for a couple more years but without any of its major founders and with few of the trained cadre.

For those who were ready to make the transition—and not all were—they could look back satisfied at 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 one of an energetic, active community engaged in self-determination.

After the meeting in Mission, the activists left with unusual confidence and a high level of contentiousness. Before leaving the old seminary building, they committed what some Catholics considered a sacrilege. Angry over the Church's refusal to give them the building for their university without walls, they spray-painted brown a statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception that stood on the grounds. This action only enhanced the negative reputation MAYO had among some elements in the Mexican American community.

Shortly after the conference Compean was interviewed on Spanish television and he came out swinging, lambasting the two political parties, Anglo justice, and the Catholic
Church. The tongue-lashing was meant to serve notice that MAYO stood even more
determined to take on the Anglo institutions and that Chicanos on the sidelines were
going to have to choose whether to be part of the movement or part of the problem.

By late January 1970 the Ciudadanos Unidos were ready to form the basis for
Gutiérrez's political party. The Ciudadanos Unidos organization had opted for calling the
party El Partido de la Raza Unida, despite objections from Gutiérrez, who felt the much-
used slogan would alienate the middle class because it was closely tied to MAYO and
sounded radical. The name was later changed to Raza Unida Party (RUP) to
accommodate the word-limit requirements of the Texas Election Code. Luz was elected
county chairman, and on January 23 an application was filed for the formation of the Raza
Unida Party in Zavala County. Similar applications were submitted in Dimmit, La Salle,
and Hidalgo counties. Dimmit and La Salle were part of the Winter Garden Area, and
Hidalgo lay deep in the Rio Grande Valley.¹⁰

At the conclusion of the school walkout, Gutiérrez quickly moved to get the
parents and students ready for the elections to be held that spring. With educational
issues being such an integral part of MAYO's political activity, the school board elections
became the first battleground. Mere representation was not enough; Gutiérrez wanted
control of the institution. The school board already had some Mexican Americans, and
few changes had been made. It was MAYO's philosophy that reforms would come when
the Chicano community had not only the votes to implement changes but also the strength
to resist outside pressures to rescind them. Empowerment also called for a shake-up of
the organizational structure and a changing of the guard in the school's administration.

With the support of Ciudadanos Unidos, Gutiérrez recruited Mike Pérez, a dance-
hall operator, and Arturo Gonzales, a twenty-one-year-old gas-station attendant, to run
with him for the three positions on the school board that were up for election. Gutiérrez
had decided that he needed to take a more public role in order to build the party. For
the city elections scheduled one week later, Pablo Puente and Ventura Gonzales were
chosen to run for the two spots. Gonzales worked at the Del Monte packing and cannery plant outside the city, and Puente managed an auto-parts store. Gutiérrez was lucky to get two running mates, as most Mexican Americans were reluctant to run for fear of retaliation from their Anglo employers. Most Mexican Americans in Crystal City could not afford the luxury of radicalism or independent thinking, at least not in 1970, when political reprisals were common and usually unchallenged.

Almost immediately, the city attorney disqualified Puente because he did not own property, as the city charter required. It took strenuous efforts by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund to get him back on the ballot barely in time for the election and only after he agreed to forfeit the absentee ballots. Puente was willing to do this in order to stay on the ballot (the election process had already begun) and because few Mexican Americans voted absentee, so the votes lost would have little effect on the outcome.

The courts were only one of several ways Anglos in Crystal City tried to head off a Gutiérrez victory. First, the Anglo organization Citizens Association Serving All Americans (CASAA), which had helped defeat the first revolt in 1963, chose Mexican American candidates, mostly middle-class citizens they considered "safe." This strategy had worked before, and Anglos knew it might be the only thing to work again. The candidates got financial support and volunteers to man the telephones and pass out literature. At first, CASAA’s Anglo members worked discreetly, but by the end of the campaign they were the most visible of the supporters.

A second strategy to head off defeat was an attempt by the Anglo board members to make changes that were inevitable in the school system. Their efforts were given a boost when John Billings resigned as superintendent, effective that summer. The board quickly moved to hire John Briggs, a former school superintendent who had adopted two Mexican American children. He took over as assistant superintendent until the end of Billings’ term. The board also refused to renew the contract of the besieged high-school
principal, and the junior-high principal resigned to go back to teaching. By election time the main targets of the students' wrath were gone. Unfortunately for the school board, Chicanos in Crystal City recognized that the moves were political decoys. They knew that the board's action had come only after months of negotiation and a bitter walkout, and only after the Anglos realized they were in danger of losing control.¹⁴

As the elections neared, the political maneuvering and the rhetoric became intense. The Anglo-Mexican American coalition kept hammering away that the rural community needed "responsible men for responsible jobs." Poor migrant farm workers, dance-hall operators, gas-station attendants, and young radicals were not the right people to govern the city. One day before the school board election, the CASAA campaign workers dropped two thousand leaflets by plane over Crystal City. The leaflets contained the text of a militant speech Gutiérrez had given in Odessa, in which he attacked the Catholic Church, called himself an atheist, and blasphemed.¹⁵

In the leaflets were also warnings that a Chicano victory would cause economic stagnation and the loss of many jobs. No business would consider moving to Crystal City if it was governed by radicals and the schools were teaching Communist notions. It was a subtle message to the Mexican Americans dependent on Anglos for their livelihood that their votes would be closely watched.

In the end, the CASAA strategy served no purpose other than to heighten tensions and to cement the distrust that Mexican Americans had long felt toward the Anglos. Though not all Anglos were racist, nor did they all agree with the intimidation tactics, most went along with the CASAA strategy. They seemed to fear a backlash from the same people they had employed or associated with for many years. Their own actions reaffirmed that Mexican Americans and Anglos had lived side by side for years but had never learned to live together.

As it turned out, all the political strategies of Ciudadanos Unidos's opponents proved fruitless: the Gutiérrez-led ticket swept the three seats with 55 percent of the
vote. That victory was followed by an even more impressive win by Gonzales and Puente in the city council elections several days later. They received 60 percent of the vote. It was an important triumph for Chicanos in South Texas, and it gave them control of the city. This was accomplished when two Mexican American incumbents, one on the school board and the other in the city council, became sympathetic and shifted allegiance, a result of the strength Ciudadanos Unidos had gained in Crystal City. Their campaign had focused on discrediting any Mexican American in the Anglo camp, and their boycott of small businesses owned by Mexican Americans who did not support the student demands brought an economic hazard to those perceived to be on the wrong side of the fence.

Fewer than six years after the Anglos had recaptured Crystal City from Los Cinco, they were again out of power, but this time to a better organized and more astute opponent. Anglos realized soon after the election that the situation was different from the one in 1963. Although most of the voters were still illiterate and poor, they no longer seemed so afraid, and without doubt they were better led. The Chicano revolt of 1963 had been an uncontrolled flood of passions, but this one was a calculated barrage of blows from a wide-awake and power hungry-giant.

The victory in Crystal City reverberated throughout Aztlán, in communities similar in size, in urban centers, and in universities where Mexican Americans came together. The successful revolt symbolized what Chicanos everywhere could achieve with hard work and well-planned strategies. Within days of his election, Gutiérrez received several hundred calls from Chicano activists nationwide, congratulating him and asking him to come tell them how they could do the same in their localities. Crystal City became a sort of political mecca for Chicanos, a symbol of what brown power could do. Back home the electoral victory made converts of MAYO members who originally were lukewarm to the idea of a third party. "No one could argue with success," Gutiérrez later recalled.

One who could argue, and did, was an old nemesis, Henry B. González. In a meeting of the Southwest Political Science Association in Dallas, he criticized the third-party approach as a wedge between the population groups of Texas.
The unfortunate thing about MAYO's approach is that an appeal to race pride is a slender and volatile glue upon which to build a political power base. . . . The rhetoric for the MAYO tactic is inflammatory. There is a constant stress on the "gringo" as an enemy to be removed, one way or another. The hints of violence by MAYO speakers are unmistakable and constant. As real as the danger of violence may be, the more likely danger lies in the fact that the MAYO tactics are designed to polarize the community.19

González labeled the ethnically based organizing a "game that can be played by more than one party." He was referring to the American Party of George Wallace, which was organizing then for a second run at the presidency. He added that the "Wallaceites" had 70 percent or more of the state's population on which to build, while the La Raza Unida Party could count on only 15 percent of the state's people.20

A similar perception was shared by the most influential defector from MAYO, Willie Velásquez. As one of the founders of the organization, he had been the moving force behind the La Raza Unida conferences, one of the chief fund-raisers, and the leader of the Mexican American Unity Council in its first year. Along with Nacho Pérez, he involved the organization in the farm-worker movement. An individualist with a flair for the dramatic, Velásquez did not share Compean's and Gutiérrez's enthusiasm for the more ideological goals. While dedicated to working at the grassroots level, he believed in pluralistic participation rather than Chicano empowerment. An avid student of history, he concluded that ethnic movements and third parties were ill-fitted to survive in American politics. Velásquez later described himself as a Jeffersonian Democrat who believed in the system.21

To Compean, Velásquez was a "do-gooder" interested in providing helping hands to local organizations rather than developing political strategies to combat the system statewide. During the first year of MAUC, Compean, who served on the board of directors, made a motion to fire Velásquez, but Gutiérrez, a close friend of both, worked out a compromise that eventually led to a resignation.22 In Velásquez's version of the
story, he quit because of constant bickering in the board meetings. After a year he felt burned out and decided to take a job with the Southwest Council of La Raza in Phoenix, Arizona.23

Before leaving, he told Gutiérrez that the party was a mistake and that he did not want to spend his time trying to raise funds for something that was bound to fail. Velásquez felt that the MAYO leaders' ignorance caused them to make rash decisions. "We didn't read enough," he said later. He also believed that there were provocateurs, some probably on government payrolls, who pushed MAYO toward a more militant role, one that took it away from any possible compromise with middle-class Chicanos, who tended to be dyed-in-the-wool Democrats.24

It was the potential of success, however, rather than provocateurs or ignorance, that pushed the party idea to move at a faster rate than even Gutiérrez had envisioned. Crystal City had gotten the biggest headlines, but there were several other victories in the Winter Garden Area which contributed to a sense of groundswell in favor of MAYO and the La Raza Unida Party movement.

In Carrizo Springs two candidates backed by the party, Rufino Cabello and Jesús Rodríguez, became the first Mexican Americans to be elected to the city council. Both had started the campaign as Raza Unida candidates but changed to independents when the campaign became bitter and divisive. Since the elections were nonpartisan, they could do it without alienating their Raza Unida supporters.25

In nearby Cotulla the party-supported candidates did even better, winning two city council seats, two school board positions, and the mayorship. One Chicano candidate lost but by only forty-five votes. The efforts there were coordinated by Juan Ortiz, Arseno García, and Raul Martínez, the La Raza Unida Party chairman for La Salle County. The party had prepared well by registering nearly two thousand voters in the county during the month of January.26
Alfredo Zamora, Jr., a school-teacher, defeated incumbent mayor Paul Cotulla, a descendent of the town's founder, by a count of 587 to 554. Enrique Jiménez, Jr., received 636 votes against the incumbent's 493, and George Carpenter, Sr., another party candidate, got 667 votes against his opponent's 439. The only loser in the city council race was Alfredo Ramírez, who received 530 votes to the incumbent's 575 votes. In the school board race Reynaldo García won 667 to 537, and Rogelio Maldonado, 693 to 524.²⁷

Only in Robstown, where Guadalupe Youngblood had gone to organize, did the party fail to come up with a victory. The RUP candidate for the city council finished fourth in a field of five.

After the election the priority became the consolidation of control in Crystal City and the further development of the Ciudadanos Unidos organization. Shortly after the spring victories in the school board races, the school attorney, R. A. Taylor, was replaced with Jesse Gámez. Taylor's dismissal, though one of the first, was by no means the most important. A wholesale change of teaching faculty began with the simple process of changing the school environment. Anglo teachers felt uneasy serving under a "radical" school board that implemented such things as a free lunch program, courses in Mexican American history, and bilingual education. They were also upset by what they perceived to be hostility from their Mexican American students, many of whom were sympathetic to La Raza Unida Party. When the fall semester began in 1970, nearly 40 percent of the teachers were Mexican American, an increase of almost 100 percent. This new group of teachers proved to be more supportive of to the school's new direction. Even the new Anglo teachers tended to either be sympathetic or unequivocally neutral.²⁸

To counteract some of the economic retaliation from the infuriated Anglos, Gutiérrez and his majority began to use school-district jobs for patronage to the party faithful. The number of cafeteria jobs increased, and all of the new jobs went to Mexican Americans. The number of teacher aides before the new board took office had been twenty-four, with Anglos holding thirteen of those positions. By the start of the new
school year the number of positions had jumped to sixty-seven, and all but three went to Mexican Americans. In a matter of a few months Mexican Americans began receiving two-thirds of the total monthly salary of $40,000.29

The new administration's first priority was halting the alarming rate at which Chicano youth were dropping out of school. Teachers and counselors were encouraged to use innovative techniques and acquire contemporary materials to retain the students. The Mexican American became the focus of civics, history, journalism, drama, and literature classes. Even the agricultural classes changed direction, as students began discussing problems of migrant farm workers. The school library acquired more books on Chicanos and by Chicanos. The new school board was more willing to accept and to seek government funding than the previous one. In one year federal assistance to the school district increased from $417,000 (1969-70) to $720,000 (1970-71).30

In a short period of time the school became a breeding ground for "Chicanismo," where army recruiters were unwelcome, only UFW lettuce was eaten, and the band played "Jalisco" as its fight song and went on and off the football field with raised clenched fists. In less than a year the school, once a symbol of Anglo control, became the first exhibit of La Raza Unida Party's blueprint for the rest of South Texas.

The transformation of the city paralleled that of the schools. Once it took office, the new city council hired Bill Richey, one of Gutiérrez's first recruits to the Crystal City campaign. He proved to be an efficient administrator while carrying out the party's agenda for Crystal City. He quickly moved to fill city posts vacated by Anglos with qualified Raza Unida supporters. And he also set out to attract federal and state funds. In this effort he was as successful as his counterparts in the school district.

The victory celebrations were not yet over when the maneuvering began for the November elections. The party had filed to run candidates in Dimmit, La Salle, Zavala, and Hidalgo counties for positions that were selected through partisan elections. Raza Unida banners had been prevalent in the city and school contests, but the November
elections would be the first "real" races of El Partido de la Raza Unida.

The party filed for sixteen positions in the four counties, confident that it could win the majority of them since its candidates would be running mostly against Anglos in areas where Chicanos were the majority and where Anglos had already been beaten. Many of those who voted for the Raza Unida in the spring would be voting again and would be assisted by other Mexican Americans in the counties' outlying areas. Also, the party had organizations in the four counties which were registering new voters who were likely to support La Raza Unida. Party leaders believed that migrant workers could be trained to vote absentee while they were away. The party machinery prepared to use every tactic to get the voters to the polls, and once there, there seemed little doubt about their preference.

The Raza Unida leaders were not the only ones to think that way. Shortly after the school elections, board president E. F. Mayer had these words of warning: "The other communities better wake up or they'll be facing the same thing." Zavala County Judge Irl Taylor also cautioned that the Chicano party looked capable of sweeping all its candidates into office. But he added that the "better thinking Mexican Americans are not going to let" José Angel Gutiérrez make such a clean sweep. He also advised that Gutiérrez had to be met "head on" and predicted that the RUP leader's "line" would not sell. If it did, said the judge, the Democrats would go "down the drain."

Fortunately for the Democrats, they controlled the county government and quickly moved to keep La Raza Unida confused and, if possible, off the ballot. The judges in their counties told Richard Clarkson, the party's lawyer, that they did not know what to do with the petitions calling for ballot status for RUP and that they would decide in September or October, when it came time to print the ballots.

The judges, the chief administrators in the county, pointed to contradictory statements by the state attorney general, and the secretary of state to justify the confusion. The attorney general, Crawford Martin, reacting to an inquiry by Hidalgo County District
Attorney Oscar B. McInnis, stated that the Raza Unida would not be eligible to be on the ballot because it had filed its application on January 19, too early to be within the voting year, which began on March 1. This was a revised opinion from one he gave earlier. In the spring he ruled that the new party could nominate candidates even though it had no state organization and planned only to run candidates in Hidalgo County. The only requirement was that the party present signatures of at least 3 percent of the number of voters in the last election.

The secretary of state, Martin Dies, Jr., ruling on the same inquiry from Hidalgo County, disagreed with Martin and instructed county officials to accept the petition. County Judge Milton Richardson accepted Dies's ruling and placed the party on the ballot. The party leaders attempted to use Dies's ruling as a basis for obtaining ballot status, but the other county judges were just as adamant about using the contradictions to keep them off the ballot. The initial statement led to a series of court fights that went on almost until election day in November.

The party filed suit in the Fourth Court of Civil Appeals in San Antonio to force the county judges to place the RUP candidates on the ballot. In court the counties' lawyers challenged the party's nominating activities and its filing procedures. Attorneys for La Salle County argued that no precinct elections were ever held to elect delegates to the party's county nominating conventions, as required by the state's election code. Attorneys for Judge Harold Dean of Dimmit County claimed that there were not enough signatures on the party's petitions and that precinct conventions were held in only two of the seven election precincts. The Zavala County attorney pointed out that the petition, or application, for ballot status carried the year 1969 instead of 1970.

The Fourth Court of Civil Appeals denied the party's writ of mandamus. The panel of judges was unanimous in the case of Zavala and La Salle counties, but split in the case of Dimmit County. The judges ruled that there had not been substantial compliance with Provision 13.54 in holding precinct conventions. The article read:
Any political party without a state organization desiring to nominate candidates for county and precinct offices only may nominate such candidates . . . . by primary elections or by county conventions held on the legal primary election day which convention shall be composed of delegates from various precincts in said county, elected therein at primary conventions held in such precincts between 8:00 A.M.–10:00 P.M. on the dates set by law.⁴⁹

Associate Judge Carlos Cadena dissented on the specific case of Dimmit County, where the party had been disqualified because some of the petitioners had voted in the Democratic Party primary. He stated that the election code did not explicitly forbid a member of one party from signing the petition for ballot status of another party. "Language expressing such disqualification is absent" from the Texas Election Code, he added.⁴⁰

Alfredo Zamora, RUP mayor of Cotulla, was the first to react, calling the decisions a great disappointment. He added:

> The decision is a pity. We tried to do everything necessary to comply. We went to hearings, but no one—not judges, lawyers, not anyone—seemed to know what needs to be done to get a third party on the ballot. I think our party should have been allowed on the ballot—at least until someone comes up with some guidelines covering such a situation.⁴¹

After hearing the verdict, the RUP party's lawyer filed for a hearing with the Texas Supreme Court.

The first judicial setback came on September 28, and it was followed two days later by another legal defeat. On September 30 the Texas Supreme Court upheld the lower court's ruling. It took the high court only half an hour of deliberation to reject the party's arguments. But again it was a split decision, and the split was also over Dimmit County, with Associate Judge Jack Pope ruling that La Raza Unida had fulfilled the requirements for getting three candidates on the Dimmit ballot.⁴²

Chief Justice Robert W. Calvert reiterated the three shortcomings found by the Fourth Court. Petitions filed in Zavala County, ruled the court, carried the date January 1969 instead of January 1970. In La Salle County inadequate records failed to show that precinct conventions had been held at the time required. Finally, in Dimmit County,
petitions calling for placing candidates on the ballot fell five signatures short after ten signees were ruled ineligible for having voted in the Democratic primary. In responding, Clarkson stated that the "January 1969" date was a typographical error but that the voter registration numbers as set out on the petitions were current for 1970. He added that the precinct conventions in La Salle County were held just before the county nominating convention and all who attended were made delegates. Finally, Clarkson contended that the secretary of state had declared that Democratic voters were not disqualified.

Clarkson then declared that the party would be willing to forfeit the absentee ballots if it could be placed on the ballot by November 3. The court did not sway from its position, so Clarkson immediately moved to file in federal district court. This time, though, the suit entered the docket as a civil rights case. Clarkson told Chief Judge Adrian Spears of the Western District of Texas that the civil rights action distilled into "whether all Anglo candidates or all Mexican American candidates will be elected." Spears remarked, "That's a pretty sad choice for the court to invoke."

Forty-one people were subpoenaed to testify as the lawyers and the judge tried to get the case resolved before the absentee voting started on October 15. While waiting for the court action, the party asked the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans to force the counties to print the names of its candidates on the ballot before the conclusion of the trial. Clarkson stated that the move was made to keep the case from becoming moot. But the court denied the request. On that same day the Texas Supreme Court released its written denial of the party's request for a writ of mandamus.

Chief Judge Calvert noted that the party lawyer had admitted that the party's application in the three counties were signed and filed with county judges before its county conventions were ever held. Therefore, said Calvert, the petitions were obtained even before the candidates were known or certified by the county clerks. He added:

The statute does not expressly provide that the application . . . shall be signed and filed after the names of the nominees have been certified to the
county clerk, but that seems to us to be the only logical and reasonable interpretation. Otherwise party leaders could foist upon the signers totally unacceptable candidates and then defeat the purpose of the application. Our interpretation serves the further beneficial purpose of assuring that persons asked to sign an article 13.54 petition will have available to them the names of all other candidates for the same office, and will be in a better position to make an intelligent decision as to whether they should sign.

Two days later the party suffered yet another legal blow. Judge Spears, in a conference with lawyers from both sides, questioned whether the party had any case on the civil rights issue. Clarkson had no time to argue the point and so he requested time to file an amended pleading challenging the constitutionality of the Texas Election Code. This new tactic, however, required a three-member panel of federal judges and thus the hearing was delayed one more week while the judges were selected. Spears was designated head of the panel, which also included U.S. District Judge Jack Roberts of Austin and U.S. Circuit Judge Irving Goldberg of Dallas.

Their hopes already fading, the party leaders were finally dealt the death blow to their ballot chances. On Monday, October 12, the Odessa law firm of Warren Burnett, which had been providing the party legal services free, withdrew from the suit. Clarkson said he was forced to withdraw because Burnett, a prominent West Texas lawyer who headed the firm, had become ill and was hospitalized. The illness, coupled with the law firm's heavy workload and the lack of time before absentee balloting, left the firm no choice. "We fought the good fight," said Clarkson. "I sincerely believe this will be the established parties' last hurrah in these three counties." A quick flurry of activity to get another lawyer for the case ensued, but nothing came of it. No action was taken, and Judge Spears dismissed the case.

Gutiérrez and the candidates conferred and decided to run a write-in campaign rather than let their momentum die. With such a high illiteracy rate in Crystal City, the write-in campaign was a gamble, but failure to run would have diminished the people's enthusiasm for the party. Consequently, Ciudadanos Unidos, as well as volunteers from
as far away as California and Wisconsin, set out to teach the Mexican American voters of the three counties how to write a name on a ballot.

Ever the optimist, Gutiérrez soon came to believe that the party could win. "Have your headlines ready," he told newsmen. "We're going to win some." He stated that the best possibilities were in La Salle County, followed by Zavala and Dimmit. Hidalgo County was questionable, as the party had almost no organization there.51 A federal court had ruled that the illiteracy provisions of the Texas Election Code were unconstitutional but declined to order election officials to provide any help for illiterate voters, adding that it was up to the legislature to rectify the situation. Judge Taylor of Zavala County quickly announced that he would enforce the code as it stood, meaning that no help would be available to the uneducated Mexican American voter.52

On the Sunday before the election, hundreds of Mexican Americans in Crystal City rallied in La Placita, a small park in town, where the voting procedures were explained in detail in both languages. Posters had been hung all over town showing the names and the ballot lines of the write-in candidates to remind the citizens about the challenge that confronted them in trying to take power from the Anglos. Those who could not read were instructed to measure the distances in the ballot to know where a candidate's name was to be written. Then they were drilled to memorize the writing of the name.53

Without the benefit of the absentee ballots, the party was confronted with a major obstacle. It had planned to provide absentee ballots to the migrant farm workers who left town to follow the harvests. Without its name on the ballot, the party had to send out a call to the migrant workers to come back home to vote. Some came, but others could not afford the trip and the lost work time. Nonetheless, the high level of campaigning and the rhetoric made for an environment that seemed to indicate that a victory was attainable. It is quite possible that if the write-in campaign had started earlier, there might have been several victories.
On election day the Anglo opposition struck back. Although RUP party leaders had expected some problems, most were not prepared to face the obstacles placed in their way. In Cotulla the election official started out the day giving literacy tests to all those who came to the voting places. Many of the Mexican Americans did not understand or speak English and could not pass the test or were simply too frightened to try. The testing was illegal, but it persisted until RUP voters protested vigorously and threatened to contact state officials. When they were forced to cease that activity, Anglo officials began to harass campaigners within sight of the polling place, and arrested one woman who had set up a table well away from the one-hundred-foot radius where electioneering was prohibited.4

In Dimmit County the election fraud began even before the elections. County officials printed a sample ballot with the candidates in the wrong order. This was done purposely to confuse the illiterate voters who were being instructed by RUP activists to determine where the write-in candidate’s names would go. Consequently, many of the write-in names were not placed next to the offices for which they were running. Election officials also intimidated the voters by not placing voting booth partitions as required by law and by looking over the voters’ shoulders to see for whom they were voting. It was an act of courage for Mexican American voters to add the RUP candidates’ names to the ballot.5

In Crystal City things were even worse. In one precinct RUP poll watchers were prevented from entering the polling station because their credentials carried the wrong precinct number. It had been the correct number until election officials changed it just before the election. When they insisted on entering, the sheriff threatened to arrest them. Then the sheriff forced a sound truck that was urging Chicanos to vote to cease its activities, even though it was within the prescribed limits. In other precincts the judges entered the booths and looked on as the voters wrote in their candidates’ names. They also searched voters to make sure none of the Mexican Americans were carrying hidden
papers with the candidates' names. In one case they forced open an old lady's arthritic hand to make sure she had not written the names on her palm. Still in other precincts, some voters were turned away because they had supposedly already voted and their names were checked off. Only if they insisted were they allowed to vote.56

Some Anglo campaigners made threats, insinuating that Raza Unida voters would be taken off welfare rolls and would no longer receive surplus commodities. The Ciudadanos Unidos newspaper, La Verdad, charged that the head of the county's welfare office, Bruce Ivey, had visited welfare recipients and informed them that voting for Irl Taylor was a way to get an increase in welfare payments. This created fear among the voters because it meant that the Anglo officials were ready to retaliate economically against anyone known to have aided the new Chicano party.57

The most flagrant violations, though, came in the vote counting. Here was an area where Mexican Americans were powerless and they paid a heavy price. The election judges screened the votes with an eye toward magnifying any potential problems with the write-in votes, and they found many opportunities. The illiterate voters misspelled the names of the candidates, and those votes were counted for someone else. Even though the law permitted them to use their judgment in accepting the voters' intentions, the election officials refused to give La Raza Unida the benefit of the doubt. A vote for Isaac Juárez, a vote for Isaac Juáres, and a vote for Isac Juarez were counted as votes for three different people. In the case of Ramón de la Fuente, who was running for county commissioner of Precinct 1, the election judge took one hundred and nine votes from his column because voters forgot to write Jr. at the end of his name.58

The write-in campaign had been a long shot with only a small chance of success, but the obstacles thrown in the way of the Mexican American voters made it all but impossible for the Raza Unida Party to win. Fifteen of the sixteen RUP candidates were defeated by safe margins. Only Roel Rodríguez, of La Salle County, who ran for county commissioner, won—just barely.59 Nevertheless, the candidates averaged nearly 40 percent
of the vote, a significant percentage, giver, the traditional non-participation of Mexican American voters. Had the party leaders not been so shell-shocked from the election fraud, they would have immediately seen that their campaign had had a great impact on the people of the three counties. Musterling up some enthusiasm, Gutiérrez told reporters: "We are capturing the imagination of the Chicano voter. This is the party that is finally opening up an avenue so they [Chicanos] can express themselves, their frustration, anger and aspirations . . . with the 18-year-old vote and a place on the ballot for our party, the gringos can kiss South Texas good-bye." Gutiérrez added that the work on the 1972 state elections would begin in January 1971. And he vowed that the party would be ready and on the ballot.

By the fall of 1971, though, Gutiérrez seemed to have changed his mind about going statewide. He began talking to his closest associates about staying at the county level, which had been the original intent of the Winter Garden Area Project initiated by MAYO. He apparently recognized that the rhetoric had gotten out of hand and party leaders had made grandiose statements that were far from realistic, among them his own claims of a strong state party. It is also possible that the amount of work necessary to consolidate the party's power in the 1971 city and school elections in Crystal City made him reevaluate the party's resources, leadership, and chances. In any case, when the party called its first state convention, he felt that going statewide would be a serious mistake. There simply were not enough trained leaders to mount a state drive. Most of the potential leaders were either in college or had dropped out of school, were unmarried, and had little economic security. The few elected officials were men who lacked the skills to handle the job and consequently needed to be monitored and assisted in most of the complicated decisions they were to make.

The organizational structure in Crystal City was an exception to the rule. Most of the Raza Unida chapters in the state had no money, no hierarchy, and few committed voters. By choosing to organize first among those who had been left out of the political
mainstream both in South Texas and the urban Texas cities, the Raza Unida activists had taken on a long-lasting electoral burden. Their constituency consisted of poor, uneducated, and, up to that point, electorally apathetic citizens. Although the campaign would attract many of the best and the brightest in the population, they would be coming into an organization not equipped to handle, much less train and indoctrinate, the greater numbers.

In his politically sober moments Gutiérrez realized that to establish what he constructed in Crystal City in other South Texas towns would take most of the decade. Crystal City's successful 1970 revolt had actually started with the first Chicano electoral victory in 1963. And most of the organizing had begun among friends and acquaintances who respected him because of his education and his family. Few organizers could claim that the same conditions existed elsewhere. Gutiérrez must also have known that most of the MAYO leaders had not yet shown they possessed comparable skills in organizing. In his master's thesis, where he laid the groundwork for the social revolution to come, he wrote that the young militants of his era would not see the fruits of their labors. In another instance he remarked that it might take thirty years before the political and economic situation really changed in South Texas.  

Unfortunately for Gutiérrez, he had done too good a job of selling the state party in his jubilation after the Crystal City victory. Partidarios from all over Texas came together in San Antonio on October 31, 1971 to discuss the future of El Partido de la Raza Unida, which they believed had much to offer them in the way of assistance for their areas. Some were also naive about the amount of effort necessary to recreate a Crystal City type of revolt. Gutiérrez lined up support for his point of view from the rural delegates who were also leery of a state organization, but he quickly discovered that Compean had done the same thing among the urban delegates and that there were more of them.
The discussions were heated, though not divisive, and they went on for hours, as Gutiérrez pointed out the weaknesses of the party structure, the lack of resources, and the sure-to-come opposition from the Mexican American Democrats, who would see themselves threatened by a third party. Compean rebutted just as emphatically that a statewide party would rally Chicanos and give impetus to the movement. It was a way of gathering resources and recruits and avoiding a county-by-county certification process that could be derailed by any small-town judge. More important, he argued, getting on the state ballot might become harder if there was a large turnout in the 1972 presidential elections because the number of signatures needed would be greater. For the keyed-up delegates, the clinching argument was that a statewide party meant the possibility of establishing little Crystal Cities all over the state. When the voting proceeded, Compean and his supporters won, 21 to 15.4

After the vote a platform committee was established, Compean was elected temporary state chairman after Gutiérrez declined, and a search began for candidates. The search lasted nearly up to the filing date in February 1972. Several prominent Mexican American leaders, including some who were not close to the party, were queried about running for governor. In attempting to recruit a mainstream Chicano, Gutiérrez sought to mend the rift between La Raza Unida and the middle class. He asked Carlos Truan of Corpus Christi, a state representative, but Truan said no. Also asked was Hector García, the founder of the American G.I. Forum, who also refused. One of the last to be considered was Joe Bernal, state senator from San Antonio and a strong supporter of MAYO. Gutiérrez had worked as an intern in the legislature with Bernal and he considered the Democrat one of the better politicians in office. Bernal also declined to run.45

Once they realized that no one outside MAYO or the party would volunteer, Compean, Gutiérrez, and the other party leaders began to look to the membership to find a candidate. Most of the party cadre quickly bowed out of consideration, so the searching
went into the second layer of party members. The next choice was Ernesto Calderón, a war veteran from Waco who was contemplating joining the Raza Unida Party but was still an active participant in local Democratic circles. He said no but suggested a young lawyer from Waco who was an administrator in the Model Cities program. He was Ramsey Muñiz, an active local member of MAYO. Gutiérrez later said that Muñiz had come to file for the state board of education race when he was approached to run for governor. He was reluctant but ended up filing for both positions. Later that day he withdrew from the state board of education race. Compean remembered it differently. Two days before the filing deadline he called Calderón and told him to show up the next day with someone to run for governor or to come dressed in a suit to file himself.66

Considering the major step it was taking in its political infancy, the party’s choosing of a candidate was very chaotic. Without fully knowing Muñiz—Compean had spoken to him only once before—party leaders allowed him to become the candidate. It is probable that three factors were responsible for the seeming laxity of the selection process. First, for the party leaders, getting on the ballot—not selecting the candidates—was the higher priority. None of them actually expected La Raza Unida to win the governor’s race, though by being on the ballot they expected to win local races in several South Texas counties. Most of the party’s leadership had little or no campaigning experience and lacked the overall perspective of a state election. Second, the party activists were more interested in presenting the issues than in selling personalities and believed that a good platform was more important than a good candidate. With a naive dogmatism, they set out to find people who were faithful to the party philosophy regardless of their looks, speaking ability, or political experience. This approach was, after all, consistent with their desire to be a party for all of those who had been excluded in the past and who did not fit the Anglos’ model of a candidate.

The third factor was the party members’ limited ties outside their political circles. Although Gutiérrez and the other leaders had received support from several prominent
Mexican American political and educational leaders in the past, most of these individuals were either too involved in the Democratic Party or not committed enough to the rhetoric and militancy of the Chicano Movement to want to volunteer for what they deemed to be political suicide. Consequently, the party leaders jumped at the chance to lure a young lawyer dedicated enough to the Raza Unida philosophy to put his future on the line for the good of the party and its platform.
CHAPTER FIVE

RAMSEY MUNIZ AND THE STATE CAMPAIGN

Ramsey Muñiz, by his own account, had been active in MAYO since 1968 and had even served as an organizer for the group in northern Texas. Yet he was not well known in party circles. Compean remembered having met him only once, when a small group of Waco activists had come to discuss an issue affecting that university town. Muñiz wrote in the area's Chicano newspaper but otherwise was not prominent in the movement before he became a gubernatorial candidate. Gutiérrez met Muñiz when visiting Waco to speak to the local MAYO group. When he arrived at the agreed-upon place, he found no one there but an "Anglo-looking," muscular young man. After waiting for several minutes, Gutiérrez realized that no one was going to show up except the fellow who sat there waiting. Gutiérrez, always one to fulfill his obligations, began his speech--in English. The fellow kept looking around and finally said, "Párale, ¡a quién le estás hablando?" ("Hold up, who are you talking to?"). At that moment Gutiérrez realized he was speaking to a fellow Chicano. They talked for hours that night and became mutually admiring friends.

Once he became a candidate, Muñiz demonstrated a tenacity and a reservoir of energy and enthusiasm that astonished the party leaders. At twenty-nine, he still possessed the physical strength that had earned him the 1963 Mr. Corpus Christi trophy and an honorable mention in the Southwest Conference's 1965 all-star selection for his play as a lineman for the Baylor University football team. His athletic prowess and his good looks had also gotten him elected Mr. Baylor for two consecutive years.

After graduating from Baylor, Muñiz entered the law school there and paid his way by serving as an assistant student coach for the varsity team. When he received his law degree, he served first as a law clerk for a local attorney, then as an administrative
assistant, and finally as director of the Urban Community Development Corporation of Waco. At the time, he and his wife, Albina Peña, had a one-year-old daughter.

When Muñiz filed to run for governor, there was no state campaign committee and no money, the platform was not complete, and no communications existed between him and the candidate for lieutenant governor, Alma Canales, who lived in Austin. In fact, their relationship proved to be shaky throughout the campaign. Despite being in the same party, they were a contrast in style and approach. Notwithstanding his militancy, Muñiz represented middle-class respectability with his law degree, nice clothing, and attractive spouse. Canales was the radical, poorly dressed, married to a MAYO activist, and a less articulate candidate. Her name on the ballot was a result of the women’s strength in the party caucuses, and she remained on the ballot, despite efforts to remove her by the Waco chapter, because Compean became her strongest supporter. Early on, Muñiz was Gutiérrez’s candidate and Canales represented Compean’s leanings. Eventually, this situation caused friction between Muñiz and the party’s state chairman.

On February 9 Muñiz was unveiled at a press conference in San Antonio along with Canales and a list of fifty-two other RUP candidates. Immediately, two questions arose in regard to the party’s candidates and its ballot status. Reporters quickly pointed out that Canales, at twenty-four, could not legally take office if she won because the state constitution required a lieutenant governor to be at least thirty years old. Compean responded that the party would go to court if necessary to fight the age limitation. Reporters also asked Compean if he felt that raising the 22,358 signatures needed to get on the state ballot would be a problem. He answered that he saw no difficulty in getting them and warned the party’s opponents that RUP stood ready to go through the long court process again to gain ballot status.

When it came her turn, Canales declared that the party had no interest in playing the same political "games" as the Democrats and the Republicans. "We’re not going to replace a system that oppresses people with a brown system that oppresses people," she
said, indirectly opening ground between Mexican American politicians and the RUP. For many, Canales proved to be a direct, gut-level candidate who expounded the MAYO and Raza Unida philosophy. Her candidacy signaled that women would play a major role in the party.

Muñiz was more aggressive in his remarks. He challenged the reporters to compare his credentials to those of two of his Democratic opponents, Lieutenant Governor Ben Barnes, who at the time seemed the favorite of the Democratic Party leadership, and Dolph Briscoe, a South Texas millionaire rancher. "Ben Barnes is the only candidate to have been a dropout from several colleges. He never worked a day in his life. And the other guy [Briscoe] raises cattle."10

Also present at the press conference were Flores Anaya, a lawyer, running for U.S. senator; Rubén Solís, candidate for state treasurer; Fred Garza, of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, running for state railroad commissioner; and Robert Gómez, candidate for land commissioner. Compean told reporters that the party also had candidates for such offices as state representative and county commissioner in nine counties: Hidalgo (Edinburg), Zavala (Crystal City), La Salle (Cotulla), Starr (Rio Grande City), Nueces (Corpus Christi), Victoria (Victoria), McLennan (Waco), Tarrant (Fort Worth), and Bexar (San Antonio).

Shortly after the announcement Muñiz went on the road to rally support for the petition drive. Armed with a red 1962 Plymouth and a Texaco credit card, he toured the Rio Grande Valley, South Texas, West Texas, and cities such as Houston, Dallas, Austin, and his hometown of Corpus Christi. Everywhere he went he hammered away at both parties, although the Democrats, who controlled the state legislature and the governor’s mansion, received the brunt of the criticism.

In a speech at Pan American University in Edinburg, deep in the Rio Grande Valley, Muñiz urged the audience of mostly Mexican American students not to vote in the primaries so they could sign the petitions to put the party on the state ballot. He also
accused Preston Smith, the governor, of remembering the Mexican American only at election time. At Del Mar College in Corpus Christi he blasted both parties for making false promises.

Mexican Americans have had it with the lies. Ya basta. Raza Unida offers the people an alternative and the days of being led to the polls to vote straight ticket for these two other parties are over . . . . It is not a revolt of guns or violence, but by the vote . . . . If it's not done this year, it will come next year or the next . . . . As long as there are Mexican Americans there will be persons to replace people like me.

There and everywhere else he stopped he was greeted by chants of "Viva la Raza!"

In a short time Muñiz became comfortable as the lead man for the party. At first he felt nervous speaking in front of an audience and relied on prepared texts, but soon he discovered that his strength was in speaking extemporaneously, drawing in his audience by asking them questions, leading the chants, and joking. His mingling with the crowds after his speeches proved particularly effective. Said one of the party leaders about him: "Ramsey had a likable personality. People fell in love with him when they met him because he was so personable, so down to earth . . . straightforward, unpretentious. He was a perfect choice as a candidate. He was good at door to door. He worked long hours. He was sincere and he spoke from the heart."

In a rhetoric-conscious community, he not only said many of the things people had been wanting to hear for a long time, but said them in Spanish and in a way that assured people he would not recant them even under Anglo pressure. Young Chicanos, students, and dropouts liked his direct style, his militancy, and some of his salty language. The older Mexican Americans liked him because he carried good credentials, dressed nicely, and could be the perfect gentleman. Wherever he went, Muñiz picked up the signatures.

It was a stroke of good luck for the party that Muñiz was so effective, because the signature gathering did not proceed as well as the leadership had hoped. There were not enough volunteers to carry the petitions, and too many of the registered voters were committed Democrats. Even when they were not, many of them felt uneasy about passing
up the primaries, in which they could vote for a Mexican American or two, to sign a petition for an unknown party. Despite the publicity that MAYO and the Crystal City takeover received, many Mexican American voters were uninformed.

The idea of a third party seemed to catch on faster among those who had not participated in electoral politics before. As Muñiz said at a rally: "The Mexican American and the black communities . . . don't vote because in the past they didn't have a real choice . . . . Our connection with the Democratic Party has been nothing more than a cheap marriage . . . they have lied to us and betrayed [us] . . . . Now we are divorcing ourselves from the Democratic Party." Although many of these unparticipating Mexican Americans were enthusiastic about the new party, it became a big chore to qualify them to sign the petition. These people had to register to vote before they could sign, and the party did not have enough qualified registrars. The petition-gathering effort had been divided by region, and though the South and West Texas chapters had been able to pick up signatures at a fast pace, the big-city chapters in Houston, Dallas, Austin, and San Antonio were not keeping up with their quotas. By June 15, 1972, a month after the primaries, Muñiz told a crowd in San Antonio that the party had fifteen thousand of the twenty-three thousand signatures needed. This, the party leaders realized, was not exactly the groundswell they had expected.

Support began to increase rapidly, however, after the Democratic primaries when Briscoe won the nomination in a close race with Frances "Sissy" Farenthold, a maverick liberal from Corpus Christi who had attracted significant support from mainstream Mexican Americans. To many moderates and liberal Democrats, Briscoe recalled earlier times, when rural conservatives rode from out of their ranches to the state capital, where they maintained a status quo that excluded blacks, Mexican Americans and poor whites. The disappointment and frustration with Briscoe's nomination was made more acute by the fact that liberals had felt this was the year that they would sneak into office because of the disarray in the ranks of the conservative Democrats.
On January 18, 1971, one year before, and one day after Preston Smith had been sworn in for his second term, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) had filed a civil suit against several of the top Democrats in the state for involvement in manipulative and deceptive practices. The "Sharpstown Scandal," as it became known, entangled the governor; Waggoner Carr, the state attorney general; Dr. Elmer Baum, chairman of the Texas Democratic Executive Committee and interim appointee to the three-man State Banking Commission; Tommy Shannon, chairman of the House Administration Committee; William Heatley, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee; Gus Mutscher, Speaker of the House; and Frank Sharp, a Houston millionaire who contributed heavily to conservative Democrat campaigns.

Governor Smith, according to the SEC, had called a special session of the state legislature in order to have State Representative Shannon introduce the Texas Depositor Protection Act. That act would insure deposits of up to one hundred thousand dollars for state banks and would make them exempt from inspection by the Federal Depositors Insurance Corporation, which had cast a leery eye at Sharp's financial dealings. With the knowledge that the bill would pass, the seven individuals had obtained a loan from the Sharpstown Bank in Houston and bought stock in the National Bankers Life Insurance Company owned by Sharp, one of the insuring companies most likely to benefit with this change of law. The bill passed in the House on September 8, 1970, and in the Senate on the following day. With its passage, the SEC charged, the seven made profits in the thousands.

When the scandal broke, the credibility of the top Democrats suffered, and the gubernatorial race opened up. Briscoe decided to run, and Farenthold promised the voters she would clean up Austin if elected. Claiming the voters were still with him, Smith decided to go for reelection; Carr also threw his hat in the ring, though he did not prove to be much of a factor. Barnes, who only a year before had seemed to be the heir apparent to Smith, also filed for the governorship but quickly found that people
considered him part of the tainted group of establishment Democrats. Early in the primary season it became a two-person race between Briscoe and Farenthold.

The Democratic primary developed into a classic confrontation between a conservative and a liberal, a symbol of what had been going on in Texas for several decades at every level of the political spectrum. This time, though, it was a fair fight because both candidates were millionaires and Briscoe was not part of the in-group and consequently did not have the conservative Democratic machinery firmly behind him. When the top Democrats sputtered, Briscoe and Farenthold slipped ahead and into a runoff. Conservative Democrats, deprived of their top politicians, swallowed hard and quickly lined up behind Briscoe, who managed to hold off a furious finish by Farenthold.

Going into the state convention on June 10, Muñiz saw a golden opportunity to recruit disenfranchised Democrats into the Raza Unida fold and move a little more toward the center, where he could attract many Mexican American Democrats. Shortly after the runoffs he called on the liberal Democrats to support his campaign, saying "we're talking about the same things. Liberals have always talked about helping minorities. How much more can they help than by voting for us. What we are saying to liberals is 'how liberal are you.'" Muñiz also offered his sympathies to Farenthold, whom he had helped in legislative races as a college student.

At the convention Muñiz quickly established himself as one of the leaders of the party. He did it with his natural charm and through the number of people he attracted to the convention. In half a year Muñiz had traveled more, met more people, and been interviewed more than anyone else in the party except Gutiérrez and Compean. To many people outside the movement, Muñiz was the party. Whereas Compean prompted association with MAYO and Gutiérrez with Crystal City, Muñiz symbolized the state party, principally because he was its standard-bearer but also because he found himself a dynamic campaigner among a less-than-charismatic group of candidates.
While party activists were still defining the role of the party, its ideology and methodology, Muñiz already had a pattern to follow—that of a politician stumping the state for votes. Deeply conscious of La Raza Unida's premises, he brought to the campaign a militancy not seen since the days of the populist movements in Texas, but it was nevertheless a traditional campaign. He simply added a Chicano and personal twist to it. It was not hard, then, for him to come to the convention radiating confidence and feeling that momentum was on his side. In personal charisma he towered above most of the party cadre, and the less ideological delegates quickly became attracted to him.22

At the convention Compean was elected state chairman, a confirmation of the action taken the previous October, though this time he encountered token opposition. Muñiz and the other candidates were also officially nominated, without opposition, although a few of the original candidates had dropped out by this time.23 After the formalities of nominations the party delegates debated and then approved a party platform.

Contained in the various sections of this document are the hopes, ideals, and the future of many people . . . . Those who understand the full meaning of this document cannot deny that the course of history will be affected by the ideas contained herein. For the first time, a political party will exist which was started by Chicanos for Chicanos. The momentum that Raza Unida Party has started will continue, however, not only for Chicanos but for all who see the need for the people to once again have control of the government so . . . the voice of the people will be heard.24

As might be expected from activists who concentrated so much time on educational issues and who gained their militancy through school boycotts and protests, the RUP platform committee made education its top priority, devoting fourteen pages to it.25 After decrying the large dropout rates in Texas schools, the cultural genocide practiced in them, and the unfair school financing system, the platform called for specific measures that at the time were radical. The party demanded that all school districts develop multilingual and multicultural programs at all levels from preschool to college; that state funds be distributed equally to all school districts; that school officials and school boards be
proportionally representative of the community; that free early-childhood education, including daycare and preschool activities, be provided for all children; that schools without walls be created; and that standardized tests be eliminated as a measure of achievement until they accurately reflected the language usage and culture of those tested. And finally, the platform called for aid to private Chicano and black schools and colleges.\

Aside from education, there were thirteen other sections dealing with politics, welfare, housing, justice, international affairs, natural resources, transportation, and health. In all areas the party platform followed a leftist-liberal line. It called for free education; lowering of the voting age to eighteen; giving the right to vote to foreigners; breaking up monopolies; fair distribution of wealth; implementation of equal minority representation in the judicial system; abolishment of capital punishment; passage of the Equal Rights Amendment; removal of trade embargoes and economic sanctions against Cuba; and the reduction of U.S. forces in Europe. The abolishment of the Texas Rangers was a popular resolution at the convention. The platform also called for the recognition of the new state of Bangladesh.

For a party representing the vanguard of Chicano separatism, its governing document was only mildly nationalistic. It reflected both an effort to attract liberal groups outside the Mexican American community and the influence of the antiwar movement. The quasi-ideology of the platform also revealed that most of the party activists were not as sophisticated as Gutiérrez in this area. It was evident in the document that party leaders recognized their own communities' conservatism in economic and social matters. They purposely avoided much of the socialist rhetoric fashionable at the time.

Immediately after the convention the signature gathering intensified, and the party leaders worried. Most of the rural areas were doing well, and Muñiz was picking up signatures wherever he went, but the goal of thirty thousand names did not seem realistic with less than a month to go. At that moment some members of the San Antonio RUP took the matter into their own hands and set up what they later called petition-signing
parties. A select group of party faithful began to sign petitions with phony names and addresses, staying up late at night to fill out as many forms as possible. In a matter of weeks the RUP had enough signatures to submit to the secretary of state, and the San Antonio chapter was credited with making a face-saving, monumental effort. More than 70 percent of the signatures from San Antonio were false, but few party members ever knew it during the life of the party.\footnote{One activist later said that the falsifying of names was done after Gutiérrez hinted that the secretary of state, Robert D. Bullock, a neo-liberal loyal to Governor Smith, had implied that he would not scrutinize the signatures.}\footnote{Bu'lock was a boisterous maverick with conservative credentials but a flair for taking unorthodox stands. He proved to be supportive of the Raza Unida Party effort because he saw no threat from it. Gutiérrez later recalled with a chuckle the day he gave Bullock the petitions. The secretary of state asked him the name of the party, to which Gutiérrez replied "La Raza Unida." Bullock remarked angrily that he wanted the "English" name, to which Gutiérrez again replied "La Raza Unida." Bullock exploded with several expletives, whereupon Gutiérrez asked him his name. Bullock pointed to the plate on his door and said, "Bob Bullock--can't you read?" Gutiérrez then asked, "What's your name in Spanish?" After loudly answering "Bob Bullock," the angry state officer cracked a smile and then started laughing. "I like that," he kept repeating and laughing as he gave Gutiérrez a receipt for the names.}\footnote{Ironically, campaign workers for Senator Joe Bernal, who had been an outspoken supporter of MAYO and Gutiérrez, accused the Raza Unida of being responsible for his defeat in the primaries. They argued that petition signers had abstained from voting in order to help the party get on the ballot. Though not bitter, Bernal made the same claim many years later.}\footnote{Ironically, few of the legitimate signatures came from that district. Unable to tell the senator or the public about the way some signatures were gathered, party leaders simply responded that such was life in politics. After all, Bernal had been asked to run for governor under the party banner.}
After the convention, party leaders came out swinging, mostly at the Democrats. Briscoe was perceived to be vulnerable, and some party activists were angry because Farenthold had refused to support Muñiz, whose views were closer to hers. Muñiz avoided criticizing Farenthold, choosing instead to woo her supporters by pointing out some of the similarities of his campaign with that of the defeated liberal. He suggested to liberals that they initiate a "Democrats for Muñiz" movement. In the same vein he told black leaders in Austin that any demands they would make, he would sign. He also announced that in Houston and Dallas several black activists were organizing a "blacks for Muñiz" drive.

In seeking black support, Muñiz received two major boosts. The first came at the Democratic National Convention in Miami, where Briscoe, following the lead of numerous southern delegates, voted for George Wallace for the presidential nomination. After Wallace's apparent defeat Briscoe quickly shifted his vote to George McGovern, but most Texas liberal delegates left the convention sure that Briscoe was not going to do anything to help the Democrats carry the election in the state. Muñiz quickly announced that through his action Briscoe had given the RUP campaign "at least $300,000 worth of free [media] time." He had come out and shown his true colors on color television, said Muñiz. He added that if Wallace's supporters launched another presidential campaign, as they had four years before, it would give the party a better chance of winning, because moderates and liberals who would vote against Wallace might also vote against Briscoe. Sarcastically, Muñiz offered to help Wallace's American Party find a candidate to run for governor of Texas.

The second major boost for the campaign came when the Reverend Ralph Abernathy, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the organization led at one time by Martin Luther King, Jr., endorsed Muñiz for governor. It was a major triumph for the RUP candidate, who was grooping for big-name and liberal support. His black support was bolstered even more when a former high-school teammate, who had
played in the National Football League, joined the campaign as a state organizer in the black community."

On August 8 the party was certified to appear on the state ballot. With the party legitimate, Muñiz, who up to this time had been without an official campaign manager, named Gutiérrez to direct his electoral effort. In announcing Gutiérrez, he criticized the Republicans and Democrats for hiring out-of-state, big-name public relations agencies to handle their campaigns. Briscoe had hired a Tennessee firm and Henry Grover a New York company. Said Muñiz: "I don't have to go to New York City and I'm not going to have to go to Tennessee to run my political campaign. All I'm going to do is go to Crystal City. There is a firm right there and it has a staff of 10,000 people . . . and José Angel is going to be my campaign manager." Muñiz rejected the reporters' notions that because of his reputation Gutiérrez would be a hindrance to the campaign. He added that already the organization was picking up support among conservative and older Mexican Americans.

The reference to Grover indicated that even La Raza Unida could see that the Republican candidate's campaign was picking up momentum. Grover had not been the choice of the Republican leadership, but he had won the primaries, had millions to spend, and excelled as a campaigner. Some political observers also believed that a McGovern-led Democratic Party meant a sure victory in Texas for Richard Nixon and a strong coat-tail effect. Middle-level party officials and campaigners seemed to understand this, but unfortunately for Grover, the top Republicans did not, and they dragged their feet almost until the end in throwing the party's manpower and money behind him.

In Houston, a few days before naming Gutiérrez his manager, Muñiz lashed out at the Republicans, who had just concluded their national convention. He accused them of talking through both sides of their mouths because they promised to recruit minorities but had only one Mexican American in the Texas delegation and no blacks. Talking about both parties, he said, "We've put them in the state house, we've put them in the White
House, but we stay in the dog house. We don't want to stay there anymore." Muñiz predicted that RUP and not the Republicans would be the second majority party in the state and added that he offered an alternative to the look-alike conservatism of Grover and Briscoe. He also denied that the party was trying to help elect a Republican to get back at the Democrats.38

On August 28 some liberals who had remained silent, sulking after Farenthold's defeat, spoke cautiously about Muñiz and the RUP. In a cover story in The Texas Observer entitled Ya basta! they introduced Muñiz to their readers in this fashion: "If you can't stomach Dolph Briscoe and Henry Grover is unthinkable, the name of the Raza Unida candidate is Ramsey Muñiz." They went on to give some details of Muñiz's background, highlighting his assistance to Farenthold's legislative races. Then, in an almost melancholic reflection of their own party's failure to provide a better alternative, the editors wrote:

Among many black, chicano and liberal Democratic leaders to whom the Observer has talked, it seems clear that as John Kennedy once said, "Sometimes party loyalty asks too much." For their own political sakes, they cannot support Muñiz against Briscoe. However, they are planning to telegraph to their supporters, in various ways, the equivalent of McGovern's great line from the Democratic convention, "Vote your conscience, folks, just vote your conscience."39

It was at this juncture, with momentum seemingly building, that Muñiz and the rest of the party took a break to attend the National La Raza Unida Conference in El Paso. For those not interested in the moderate tone of the campaign, this was a chance to go back to radical rhetoric and militant posturing. It also meant meeting thousands of other radicals and activists nationwide and taking part in a historic moment.
CHAPTER SIX

THE SIX PERCENT VICTORY

Muñiz was happy to get back on the stump at the end of the national meeting. Although he had been elected one of the three Texas delegates to the party's national advisory committee, his participation at the convention had done little for his campaign. A few delegates from outside the state had stayed to do some campaigning and some monetary assistance had been promised, though little if any ever came. Muñiz knew that the campaign's real constituency was far from El Paso's Liberty Hall. Even those Mexican Americans who lived in the border town were ideologically and politically removed from the radicals and militants who had congregated for three days to discuss and debate.

Fully aware of this fact, the Muñiz organization went back to the campaign in a traditional manner. The prime stops were in the Rio Grande Valley, South Texas, and the Winter Garden Area. As he traveled, Muñiz continued to build an organization. At the beginning of his candidacy he had campaigned alone because no one knew him and few were willing to take a risk with him. Now, with media exposure and some significant endorsements behind him, more people were willing to be active in his crusade, including some who were not interested in joining the party. Tony Bonilla, state director of LULAC, was one important middle-class supporter, especially in South Texas, where LULAC had long been active. At a banquet honoring Muñiz, he endorsed the entire Raza Unida slate: "I am here as a Chicano and a carnal to Ramsey Muñiz. There is no question who should get the vote. One of his opponents has become rich by using the Mexican American and Mexicans and the other has ideas that run along with the John Birch Society. Briscoe and Grover are not different."

At the banquet were several Mexican American mayors and ex-mayors who were taking a close look at La Raza Unida. Muñiz told the group that he respected all Mexican
American groups. "We will not fight among ourselves. I don't have anything against Dr. [Hector] García [founder of the American G.I. Forum] or labor leader Paul Montemayor. We all want the same thing. And if they want to help us . . . here we are." A short time later, Muñiz received the endorsement of the Hays County Independent Organization, a mostly Democratic group that also endorsed McGovern for president and "Barefoot" Sanders for U.S. senator.

The weekend after the convention, Muñiz named Dr. George Treviño, an associate professor of physics at Del Mar College, the local campaign manager in his hometown of Corpus Christi. The appointment was another effort to get credible, high-profile people on the bandwagon. "He will have an impact with the students, the faculty and the community," said Muñiz. And he added that the party was already having an impact on the state. He quoted a "good source" from the Briscoe campaign that a survey done for the Democrats showed that Muñiz was leading in South Texas. Joking with the reporters, Muñiz told them he would ask Briscoe for a copy of the survey to show to a conference of student councils in Lubbock where they were both scheduled to speak.

Ramsey was not the only Muñiz hard on the trail. Albina (Abbie), his wife, along with their two-year-old daughter Delinda, was also traveling the state seeking votes and attending receptions, rallies, and picnics. She was often described by the media as "bouncy and zealous." A former cheerleader and senior class president, Abbie seemed out of place among the Chicana activists, and she never really belonged to the party as much as she did to her husband's campaign. She spent four-day weekends making speeches and traveling with and without him. The other three days she attended Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio, where she worked toward a master's degree in educational administration.

Meeting up with Muñiz and his wife as they crisscrossed the state were the other RUP candidates. They got less exposure and for the most part much less support from nonactivists. Except for a few local candidates in South Texas, none could muster any
momentum. Still, most were benefiting from Muñiz's appeal. On October 8 the AFL-CIO Local 180, Radio Electricians and Machine Workers Union of San Antonio, endorsed Muñiz and state assembly candidates Albert Peña III, Hector Rodríguez, and Rubén Sandoval. The union also endorsed Martín Sada for Bexar County sheriff. Peña was one of the stronger candidates. Son of Albert Peña, Jr., the old hardline liberal Democrat and endorser of the La Raza Unida local slate, Peña seemed capable of beating Democrat Joe Hernández in a district that was 85 to 90 percent Mexican American. The other real chances of victory were in South Texas, particularly in La Salle and Zavala counties.

Gutiérrez, who had not done any intensive campaigning before the convention, engaged in an all-out tour of the state, hammering away at the Democrats and Republicans and exhorting Mexican Americans to pull the lever for the whole party slate. In Dallas Gutiérrez referred to the other two parties' candidates as animals who were concerned only with self-interest. In Houston he put to rest any hopes liberals had that he or the party might opt to endorse McGovern. A Houston Post reporter wrote: "The Crystal City native said the party, in line with the position it took at its national convention . . . is discouraging Chicanos from voting for either President Nixon or Senator . . . McGovern. That will be the party's posture through the November 7 election." Gutiérrez told the San Antonio-based Chicano Times newspaper that the liberal Democrats "are asking us to support McGovern, but they don't want to support the candidacy of Ramsey Muñiz."

By this time the Democrats had begun responding to the Raza Unida's charges, with the liberals taking the lead in the attack. Representative Tom Moore of Waco called Muñiz a "con artist." Said Moore: "He's screwed us up from hell to hog valley, running around here getting the Mexicans stirred up, voting against their own best interests." Moore was a member of the "Dirty Thirty," a group of liberal-to-moderate legislators, some whom lost close primary elections and blamed the defeats on La Raza Unida. A number
of Farenthold's supporters also blamed Muñiz for her defeat. Said one of them: "Sissy [Farenthold] has done more for Chicanos than any of those guys [RUP candidates]. Who was there in Del Rio? Who was there after Celia? Christ, we had to drag her away from the Fernández trial in Pharr. Why don't they realize? They can't win, but they are willing to screw us up. How could they?" State Senator Bernal, a former ally who lost a close bid for reelection to the legislature, chastised Muñiz mildly. "Ramsey . . . made mistakes. I told him, 'how can you expect Sissy to support you? How can you even ask her when you slammed her so? You didn't slam anyone else, you didn't slam Briscoe, you slammed Sissy, to lead the young Chicanos out of her camp.' . . . It was a mistake."

Mark Smith, a lawyer from Lubbock, warned Chicano liberals that a vote for Muñiz would silence their already-muffled "voice" in the Democratic Party councils. It was a thinly veiled threat. Smith went on to put the future of the liberal wing of the state's Democratic Party on the shoulders of the Chicano community.

A vote for La Raza Unida . . . is nothing more than a vote for destruction of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party in Texas. It can only result in destroying any hope for a two-party state in which the Democratic Party is representative of the voice of the people and their aspirations for justice. Every Democrat must tell people why we cannot support La Raza Unida and the vendidos. This year we must hold our noses and vote the straight party ticket.

In a letter to the editor of The Texas Observer, James Keller accused Gutiérrez of racism for having said, "We are pro-Chicano . . . we want our own candidates . . . we want South Texas." Such statements, said Keller, were tantamount to Anglos saying they wanted their own party. "It is unfortunate . . . that the politics of racial division is still being practiced. If the raza is to be truly unida, then the raza must include us all, right down to the lowliest white liberal. Viva la gente! Toda la gente!"

Some liberals, such as John Rohde of Irving, were supportive: "You bet I can't stomach Briscoe. You bet I'll vote for Muñiz . . . . I hope to God there are thousands more like me." Several university student-body presidents also endorsed Muñiz, along
with Paul Moreno, state representative from El Paso, and Mickey Leland, a black Democrat running for state representative in Houston. Overall, though, Muñiz received little liberal support. Most liberals chose to vote the party ticket or stay home. Even Chicano liberals who liked Muñiz chose the path of Paul Montemayor, well-known unionist from Corpus Christi, who said:

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Ramsey is a wonderful person, honest, sincere and intelligent. He is a fine, fine man and we're very proud of him. He is one of those who have become totally disgusted with the Democratic Party... and all the crap we get from them. I think Ramsey will make a contribution... [but] I myself will, of course, vote for the Democratic ticket.
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Montemayor's reaction was typical of most of the Chicano Democrats who held elective offices or who were integrated into the party structure. They liked a militant Chicano on the campaign trail who brought up legitimate concerns and issues, but they were not willing to sacrifice their own political futures to help. Most had gotten where they were through difficult struggles and only after paying their political dues for years. Many of them thought Muñiz would become a Democrat after he got the anger out of his system. It is possible that the Muñiz campaign would have been considered more seriously if it had been funded well. But Muñiz spent only a few thousand dollars statewide.

The funding of La Raza Unida Party, however, did become an issue in the campaign, with the Democrats charging that the Muñiz organization was receiving contributions from the Republicans. McGovern made the first major charge shortly after the national convention, as his supporters reacted negatively to the nonendorsement position of the national La Raza Unida Party. One rumor that circulated among Democrats was that La Raza Unida leaders had asked the McGovern campaign for a two-hundred-thousand-dollar contribution in exchange for an endorsement. Another rumor said that the Committee to Re-elect the President (CREEP) had given Muñiz eight thousand dollars. Muñiz denied it and so did Gutiérrez, but the charges resurfaced during the Watergate hearings in 1974 and throughout the 1974 gubernatorial campaign.
Gutiérrez did in fact meet with Republican officials on two or three occasions to discuss strategies of mutual benefit. He saw his balance-of-power approach as still the most beneficial, and he sought a guarantee from Republican officials that his grant proposals would be read and funded. He even got a team of Nixon administration bureaucrats to go to Crystal City and see the poverty there.

The Republicans had designs for La Raza Unida but were divided on methodology. One element in the GOP felt that Gutiérrez could be manipulated through bribes, and another believed that quiet, uncompromising support would prove the most fruitful. In a letter to Fred Malek, a member of the White House staff, Alex Armendáriz, of CREEP, wrote, "We have no way of publicly supporting this group [Raza Unida] without antagonizing Republicans and making La Raza Unida look as though they had sold out. At the same time, neither do we want to antagonize Raza Unida supporters and drive them back to their old position as Democrat voters." The last sentence implied that Gutiérrez had already expressed his "wants."

This memorandum came one month after another Armendáriz wrote in which he reported being told by "various observers" that the issue of an eight-thousand dollar contribution to the Muñiz campaign had been brought up during a meeting outside the convention hall in El Paso. In return, the party would publicly condemn George McGovern. The memo did not specify who brought up the issue, who was in the meeting, or whether any arrangements had been made. Yet it was this memorandum that was used repeatedly to accuse the party of having taken money from the Republicans. Even "Corky" González eventually used it against the Texas party.

The Nixon campaign staff did attempt to bribe Gutiérrez. A member of the president's committee arrived in Crystal City with a briefcase full of money seeking not an endorsement but either neutrality or condemnation of the Democrats. "It was a lot more than the eight-thousand dollars I was accused of taking," Gutiérrez said later. Gutiérrez rejected the money, probably because it would have been almost impossible for him to
hide it and because in and of itself the money was not enough to do much for the poor county. Gutiérrez had no qualms about negotiating with the enemy, but only if it benefited La Raza.

What Gutiérrez did get was an assurance that Republican officials would help his grant proposals along. In the October 9, 1972, memo to Malek, Armendáriz recommended that an override of Governor Smith's veto of the Zavala County Health Corporation be sustained because, "should the poll gap tighten in Texas, the neutrality of La Raza Unida will be important." He then cited a Republican study indicating that nearly 70 percent of Mexican Americans in Texas approved of the party. He added:

The fact that there are about 1 million Mexican American voters in Texas and that [Hubert] Humphrey won that state in 1968 by only 38,000 votes, substantiate the possible importance of La Raza Unida neutrality in this election . . . The Zavala County grant provides us with an opportunity to support the party directly in a positive and legitimate manner. Such an action is likely to strengthen their position of neutrality which is so politically beneficial to us. 28

In another memo, dated September 14, 1972, Armendáriz noted that Gutiérrez had killed a "Dump Nixon" resolution introduced by the California delegation and which seemed to have had strong support among the delegates.

Ironically, the Raza Unida Texas Chapter had arrived at the convention ready to endorse McGovern if the Democrats agreed to several conditions. But McGovern made a mistake by first condemning the killing of Richard Falcón and then retracting his condemnation. It is unlikely, though, that the Texas chapter would have obtained the endorsement of McGovern from the national delegates. 29

To the people in Crystal City, Gutiérrez explained that he had told both the Democrats and the Republicans what Mexican Americans needed, as was his responsibility as head of the national La Raza Unida Party. "Immediately after my visit [to CREEP]," he wrote in La Verdad, the party's local newspaper, "...they [Republicans] began to investigate our grant proposals that we had submitted to the government." Gutiérrez
exonerated himself by implying that the Republicans had taken the initiative and sought to
gain a neutrality which, he pointed out, was already there.  

Gutiérrez did do some serious negotiating. Shortly before the election, after the
Zavala County Health Corporation had been approved but amended to include an
advisory committee that would have brought some Anglos into the administration,
Gutiérrez called Armendáriz and threatened to condemn the president publicly for
insensitivity to the Mexican American community. The Republicans quickly responded to
his demands by eliminating the advisory committee.

Gutiérrez had kept his dealings with the Republicans quiet during the convention
because of the large number of delegates who opposed any contact with the two parties.
González would have most likely been elected party chairman if the majority of delegates
had known that Gutiérrez was dealing with the more conservative head of "the monster
with two heads." For Gutiérrez, the negotiations with the Republicans were just one more
step in his goal of Chicano empowerment. He saw no moral or philosophical conflict in
condemning both parties and then opening fruitful dialogue with one of them. He also
found nothing wrong with establishing agreements without letting the party leadership
know.

The accusations of Republican support did not really hamper Muñiz's efforts. Lack of money proved to be the real problem. There were no funds for radio and
television commercials, large signs, or massive mailings. Most of the traveling was done
by car, and except for an occasional stop at a cheap motel, the campaigners stayed at
supporters' homes. Every campaign stop had to pay for itself, and that meant a lot of
tamales, beer selling, and passing around of the hat. Instead of large halls for rallies,
Muñiz and the other candidates attended numerous backyard gatherings that drew as
many as two hundred and fifty people. They were much like the tardeadas with
music, food, and often performances by Chicano theater groups. At these gatherings the
local party chapter had an opportunity to introduce its candidates or activists to a larger
audience that Muñiz would attract. Often, professors or university students made educational presentations to *concientizar* (sensitize) the crowds about their history, their past, struggles and their culture. Participants received them well, particularly those in the lower classes, who saw their own lives lauded and glorified by young scholars anxious to organize them into a voting bloc. Muñiz was the main attraction at these backyard rallies, and he rarely disappointed the crowds.

By the end of the campaign Muñiz was frantically dashing from town to town and barrio to barrio. The other candidates were also blitzing the state, making sure that no part of it remained unattended. In one campaign day Fred Garza spoke in El Paso; Flores Anaya in Dallas, Fort Worth, and San Marcos; and Alma Canales in San Antonio and Waco. At the same time, Muñiz traveled to rallies in Odessa, San Angelo, and Dallas, a tour of three hundred miles. At these stops the candidates passed out bumper stickers, buttons, leaflets, and party platforms. Nearly half a million pieces of political paraphernalia were distributed to try to make up for the party’s inability to buy television and radio time for political advertisements.

In the last two days before the election Muñiz made his final attacks on Briscoe. Talking to a crowd of about six hundred people in his hometown of Corpus Christi, he accused Briscoe of harboring “illegal aliens” in decrepit housing at the Catarina Ranch and paying them fifty cents an hour for farm labor. He also showed the crowd and reporters an affidavit from Luis Anaya, who delivered feed to the ranch three times a week. Anaya claimed that he “had seen a great number of illegal aliens from Mexico employed there as ranch hands.” Muñiz showed photos taken by a Raza Unida free-lance photographer of the huts in which the workers lived. Said Muñiz, “All you have to do is go near the ranch and ask where the *mojados* (wetbacks) live and anyone will take you there.” In Laredo both Gutiérrez and Muñiz reiterated an earlier charge that Briscoe had undergone treatment for mental depression in 1971 under an assumed name. Gutiérrez challenged the Democrat to sue him if the charges were unfounded.
On election day party leaders were predicting that Muñiz would receive seven hundred thousand votes. Gutiérrez, always the exaggerator, spearheaded the prophesying about the party's role in the election. They did such a good job that the morale of the campaign workers implied a possible victory, and some supporters actually believed that Muñiz could win. Emilio Zamora, a university student in Austin, later recalled that he and a friend were shocked by the possibility of a win. "What will we do if we win?" had been their reaction. They would not have to worry.

The real worry belonged to the Democrats, who by now realized that they were in a fight for the governor's mansion. In the last three weeks of the campaign Grover's money and his hard-hitting television and radio spots had shifted momentum toward the Republicans. It seemed clear to the Democrats that Briscoe, a traditional, rural conservative, was going to have trouble keeping the urban centers in the Democratic column. It would be especially tough if Nixon's victory in Texas was an electoral avalanche, and most thought it would be. If the Republican took the cities, Briscoe would have to take the rural areas plus South Texas by a wide margin, and herein lay his fear of Muñiz and La Raza Unida Party. No one could predict Muñiz's impact on the race. The Chicano vote in South Texas could become the deciding factor in the governor's race, and no one knew how it would be divided.

On election day the voting results came in, as they usually did, with the Democrats taking an early lead. That trend lasted until nine P.M. when the returns began to show a move toward Grover, who caught and passed Briscoe before ten P.M. He kept that lead much of the night, which led to some early celebrating by Republicans and La Raza Unida supporters. Muñiz had said at the end of the campaign that he would either win or prove to be the balance of power in the state. Early in the night it became clear that he would not be a serious contender, but the chance for a Republican victory was encouraging. An upset would give the party a tremendous bargaining opportunity, regardless of the national convention's resolution not to negotiate. Unfortunately for the
party and the Republicans, however, Briscoe made a surge at the end and slipped by Grover, capturing 47 percent of the vote total for a plurality of the votes cast. It was the lowest winning percentage in the state’s history, and it made Democrats and Republicans take notice of the new Chicano third party.

Muñiz received 214,149 votes, or 6.28 percent of the vote, to Briscoe’s 1,631,724 (47.8%) and Grover’s 1,534,460 (45.08%). When the disappointment over not causing an upset wore off, the party leaders were ecstatic about their showing. Muñiz told reporters, "The people . . . have experienced true democracy for the first time, a democracy they never experienced under the Republican or Democratic party."

Some Mexican American politicians had predicted an insignificant showing for Muñiz and the other Raza Unida candidates. One even claimed that the party would not get 10 percent of the vote in the Mexican American districts. But Muñiz did get that and more. He received 51 percent of the total vote in Brooks County, 46 percent in Jim Hogg County, and 19 percent in Nueces County his home county. He defeated Grover in Duval, Kleberg, Jim Wells, Jim Hogg, Webb, Zapata, Kinney, La Salle, Maverick, Uvalde, Valverde, Brooks, Dimmit, and Zavala counties and lost to him by only fifty-four votes in Hidalgo County. Most of these counties were in South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley. Muñiz also won Zavala, Brooks, and Jim Hogg counties against Briscoe but lost the other twelve predominantly Mexican American counties in South Texas to him. In the fifteen-county area Muñiz received 30,020 votes to Grover’s 31,641 and Briscoe’s 60,697.

In the urban areas Muñiz’s percentage was lower but his vote total was higher. In San Antonio he received 32,121 votes; in Dallas, 21,962; in Austin, 21,964; in Houston, 18,970; and in Corpus Christi, 15,281. In the eighteen major metropolitan centers outside the South Texas area, Muñiz garnered enough votes to claim 38 percent of the ethnic vote. In some of the university towns, such as Austin (University of Texas), Waco (Baylor), Lubbock (Texas Tech), and Bryan (Texas A&M), he received support from young Anglo voters.
Notwithstanding the support Muñiz received, it was Briscoe who benefited the most from the Mexican American vote. He lost every major urban center in the state except San Antonio and El Paso, two cities with large numbers of Mexican American voters. Briscoe won El Paso and San Antonio over Grover by 25,000 votes and South Texas by 29,000. That was a 54,000-vote advantage. The other share of his 97,164-vote margin was provided by West Texas and East Texas rural areas.

There are many reasons why Briscoe did well in those areas, but the primary one was that Texas politics had been dominated since the days of Reconstruction by rural conservatives. The legislative districts were gerrymandered in ways that gave the less-populated rural areas greater representation than the major urban centers. Most Texans lived in cities, but the rural populations had a larger share of the congressmen, state representatives, and state senators. The power of the large landholders and oil producers, as well as the ability of the rural areas to deliver solid votes for particular candidates or slates of candidates, were the major factors in their legislative imbalance. Small-town politics was an art in Texas. When Lyndon Johnson ran for the U.S. Senate, he won on questionable returns from South Texas. He trailed throughout the night but pulled ahead at the last minute. The last two counties to deliver the exact votes he needed to win were Jim Hogg and Duval. Duval was literally ruled by the family of George Parr, a political ally of Johnson. The Pairs were known to deliver almost 100 percent of the Mexican American vote in any election. Though practically tyrants in their counties, they had befriended the Mexican Americans when other Anglos had not. This kind of vote delivery was characteristic of many all-Anglo rural counties as well.

Conservative Democrats could count on the rural counties to come through for them in overwhelming numbers. That is one reason why many rural politicians held top positions in the legislature and the state government. With political power came the spoils. Not only could conservative Democrats give state jobs, contracts, and valuable "inside" information, but they could also take them away. And they were quick to
retaliated, as Republicans and liberal Democrats found when they tried to force an investigation of the people involved in the Sharpstown scandal.\footnote{45}

It is surprising, then, that Muñiz received as many votes as he did. One reason might have been that the Republicans were also keeping an eye on the Democrats' questionable methods. Nonetheless, the powerful Democratic machine created numerous problems in the rural as well as urban voting polls. In some precincts paper ballots ran out as early as one o'clock P.M., in others evidence emerged that "dead people" were casting votes. In Crystal City two hundred absentee ballots, folded identically, were mailed from the same area and arrived the same day. In San Antonio, the lower Rio Grande Valley, and Dallas La Raza Unida’s candidates were left off some ballots. And the usual intimidation tactics witnessed in the 1970 election were also evident.\footnote{46}

In the end, though, the biggest obstacle to the Raza Unida candidates proved to be the lever and the X at the top of the paper ballot. For years the Democratic Party had taught its members to pull the lever at the top of the voting machine or punch the X at the top of the paper ballot to vote for the entire slate. This was particularly effective as a strategy in San Antonio and El Paso. Mexican American voters first pulled the lever and then tried to votes for the few Raza Unida candidates on the ballot, not realizing that their vote had already been cast for the Democratic slate.\footnote{47} Said one Raza Unida candidate, "Many of our people would have voted for our candidates had we taken the time to educate them about that bastardly little lever on top."\footnote{48}

The conservative Democrats were not the only ones making the most of the lever. McGovern's supporters also took advantage of confused voters. They passed out leaflets urging a vote for the Democrat on one side and on the other a vote for La Raza Unida candidates. Since there were no instructions on how to split the votes, some Mexican Americans pulled the lever next to McGovern's name and locked in votes for the whole Democratic slate. This happened in San Antonio and South Texas.\footnote{49}
All these tactics lowered the party’s vote total, but they could not account for the disparity of votes between Muñiz and the rest of the slate. Alma Canales received 88,811 votes to Bill Hobby’s 1,734,835; Rubén Solís, Jr., 83,299 to Jesse James’s 1,239,877; Fred Garza, 106,397 to Byron Tunnell’s 1,392,552; and Flores Anaya, 41,946 to John Tower’s 1,365,708. In Robstown, twenty-nine miles west of Corpus Christi, Muñiz received 33 percent of the vote, but the other candidates received less than 10 percent. In most areas with strong Mexican American voting patterns, the other candidates received less than 10 percent of the vote. The electoral thrashing of La Raza Unida appeared more evident in races involving Mexican American Democrats. In a Nueces County commissioner’s race, for example, Democrat Solomón Ortiz defeated RUP’s Lupe Youngblood nine to one. Paul Longoria, Democrat, defeated Ricardo Molina in Molina’s hometown of Brownsville by a margin of 17 to 2 for a state senate seat. It was much the same in the other local races statewide that pitted Mexican American Democrats against Raza Unida candidates.

One bright spot was the race for state representative on San Antonio’s west side, where Albert Peña III received nearly 35 percent of the vote. It is likely that his high vote total resulted from his father’s prominence and the fact that he, like Muñiz, ran a more traditional race. As a lawyer with a private practice, he also seemed more credible than other RUP candidates.

In spite of the defeats of most of the local, regional, and state candidates, the party did consolidate its gains in Zavala and La Salle counties. In Crystal City the party won the sheriff’s and county attorney’s offices and two of three county commissioner seats, but it lost the tax collector’s position and two of three constable posts. In La Salle it won two county wide races.

Although not the balance of power, the party, as far as the leaders were concerned, did become the tangible third force in Texas electoral politics. Mexican Americans now had a choice, and La Raza Unida activists were sure the people would choose them. In two years the party had obtained two hundred thousand votes, two
counties under Chicano rule, a host of young and dedicated organizers, a rising political star, and the driver’s seat of the movimiento. With these achievements, the party shifted its focus toward the community level. Local, nonpartisan elections were in April, and party leaders intended to be ready.
CHAPTER SEVEN

LA RAZA UNIDA SPREADS

Both urban and rural communities were supposed to be targets for Texas Raza Unida organizers, but only the rural towns really fit into the immediate future of the party. The Crystal City experience in political organizing proved to be of little help in the urban areas. Races there required large amounts of money, mainstream political endorsements, and large-scale electoral machines, none of which the Raza candidates could claim to possess. In most of the cities they did not have any of the three. The thousands of votes Muñiz received in the urban areas were a potential base for the future, but for the present the identities of the majority of those who had cast them were unknown. In contrast to the metropolitan areas, most rural towns seemed ripe for an electoral revolution. There was organizing activity of some kind in nearly every county in South Texas and in parts of West Texas.

There were two reasons for this compatibility of the party with rural areas. First, it was easier to gain political control in small towns with few voters and a predominantly Mexican American population. Here the limited geography meant that candidates and their supporters could canvass all the precincts personally, and a truck with a loudspeaker would do as well as or better than radio or television spots. The issues were simpler to define and easier to articulate. Also, family networks could be effectively used to get out the vote or to work the polling places. Second, the most experienced organizers were from the rural areas, where they had been recruited in the South Texas colleges and universities during MAYO's most active years. Although the party had no ongoing training program for organizers, MAYO had had one in the past. Many of these organizers were already veterans of school boycotts, picket lines, demonstrations, and litigation. Consequently, these activists had significant contacts with the people in the
barrios and were popular in certain sectors of their neighborhoods. They were also likely to be a part of the family networks already in place in the rural areas.

The rural strategy came straight from the Crystal City model: use nationalism as a unifying theme, polarize the town, discredit the vendidos, register voters, and get them out on election day. Along with Crystal City, Cotulla in La Salle County had been one of the earliest areas to embrace the Raza Unida philosophy. Of all the other South Texas towns, none appeared as similar politically and socially to Crystal City as did Cotulla, a town of nearly four thousand, of which three thousand two hundred were Mexican American and of those nearly two thousand were migrant, seasonal farm workers. Cotulla’s only claim to fame was that Lyndon Johnson had taught elementary school there in 1928. Seventy miles south of San Antonio and about the same distance from Zavala County, it was even further away from sharing the nation’s prosperity of the 1960s and early 1970s. Mexican Americans there were powerless politically, segregation of public schools remained the standard, poverty was rampant, and racial polarization was obvious even to the uncritical eye. One activist described the people’s lives this way:

The discrimination . . . has continued. They [Mexican Americans] have been given separate "Hoteles del Gobierno" [housing projects], separate schools, separate health care, separate beatings by Texas Rangers and Border Patrolmen, separate restaurants, in short, separate everything.

Their treatment has been separate but not equal. They have paid the price by having only a 49-year life span.

Cotulla’s barrios and their one- and two-room houses were a decrepit island in a sea of beautiful farmland that produced vegetables and profits for its Anglo owners throughout the year. Mexican Americans there were less sophisticated and had no history of politically challenging the Anglo as Chicanos in Crystal City had done in the mid-1960s. Yet the possibilities of a political revolt caught the townspeople’s imagination.

Taking advantage of this yearning were several young men: Raúl Martínez; Leodoro Martínez, his brother; Alfredo Zamora, a schoolteacher; and Roel Rodríguez.
They began organizing through a voter-registration drive while they were affiliated with MAYO. Later they got involved in self-help neighborhood projects that included picking up trash in the barrio and lobbying for more recreational facilities. These efforts were an attempt to win the confidence of the Mexican American citizens. Once the activists were able to get a following, they formed a loose coalition named Barrios Unidos to serve as a base to register voters and to launch an electoral challenge against the Anglo ranchers and long-time resident families, both Anglo and Mexican American, that supported them.

Voter-registration drives were not new or original in South Texas. Periodically, local individuals, Democratic committees, LULAC, and other groups conducted them to benefit from the Mexican American vote. However, these drives were done on behalf of national and state candidacies and the effort that went into them had had little effect in places like Cotulla; consequently, few of the voters reregistered. Most Anglo politicians had stopped taking the drives seriously—if they ever did—and so they were unprepared for an electoral challenge. After all, few Mexican Americans had ever been elected to office in Cotulla.

While the attention focused on Crystal City and Carrizo Springs, Zamora, who had returned to Cotulla from the Midwest only a year earlier, and the other organizers prepared for the elections by setting up voters' schools, where they taught Mexican Americans, many illiterate, how to vote. Zamora, who ran for mayor, told a reporter:

We . . . had a little song, a chant telling them who to vote for. We divided the candidates into groups of three and then made a chant according to the position of the La Raza Unida candidate. If there were five groups it went "At the top, at the top, at the top, in the middle, at the top." But if they couldn't see groups—you know some people can't see groups—we would just teach them numbers and those who couldn't read, could read Chicano names okay anyhow.

Finding candidates in the spring of 1970 to run proved as hard as teaching illiterate voters to use the ballot. Many were afraid of jeopardizing their jobs in a town where employment was the first concern. Aside from positions in the handful of service
stations and grocery stores, there were few jobs other than those of the farm workers'.
Most of the jobs that did exist were with Anglo bosses who did not appreciate their
workers' involvement with a party such as La Raza Unida.  

The two candidates besides Zamora who did announce were owners of small
businesses. They were described by Zamora as "conservatives," though they did stay with
the party for at least one more election. They were George Carpenter and Enrique
Jiménez. The three pulled an amazing upset in spite of the fact that Anglo precinct
judges invalidated one hundred ballots likely to go to them. The Raza Unida organizers
expected to duplicate the feat in the November 1970 county elections, but the party was
ruled off the ballot and only Roel Rodríguez was elected, as county commissioner, through
a write-in campaign. 

When the Raza Unida candidates took office, they found the city and county
governments in disarray. Rodríguez discovered that he had a budget of $1.13 and that the
three other members of the commissioner's court were not interested in his proposals for a
more effective food-stamp program, a health insurance plan, or adequate housing for the
poor. County roads were in poor condition, and there were no real services for people
who lived outside the city limits. The city was in no better shape, as Zamora quickly
found out. The fire department was segregated and its equipment antiquated, streets were
rutted or unpaved, parks were not maintained, and the city well's water level often fell so
low in the summer that some homes had to do without water.

The scarcity of money in the city treasury forced Zamora to look elsewhere for
funds. Mirroring the Crystal City approach, he went after federal funds, but he soon
found there was more to it than just asking. Unlike Gutiérrez, who had been a successful
grant writer even before he came back to the Winter Garden Area, Zamora learned by
trial and error. He applied to the Economic Development Administration for funds to dig
a new water well, but the proposal was rejected. In the application he wrote that the
water well would be used for the citizens. He had to rewrite it to show that it would be
used for employment and industry.

Zamora traveled to Washington, D.C., and began making the rounds to learn the process of getting the available monies. His search was facilitated by the fact that Cotulla met just about every one of the criteria of a depressed area eligible for federal funds. In a period of two years the Raza Unida officials were able to get enough local and federal funds to conduct a $15,000 street pavement operation, buy a new fire engine, and begin construction of a new, $175,000 water well. They also installed street lights in the barrio, desegregated the fire department, and refurbished a park on the "Mexican" side of town.

Changes at the school district were less tangible, since Anglos still held numerical control of the board. Two Raza Unida members sat on the board and they were outvoted constantly when they made proposals to reform the district's status quo in the same manner that Gutiérrez had done in Crystal City. Ironically, the biggest change came outside the board's meeting room, and it was initiated by Zamora and several other activists. During the district's fall registration they stood outside the doors of Welhausen Elementary School and encouraged parents to take their children to Amanda Burkes Elementary School, where all the Anglo children attended. Welhausen was where former President Johnson first started teaching and it had not changed much since then. It was a school 100 percent Mexican American in composition, poorly equipped, run-down, and had toilet facilities in an annex room separated from the main building. Both schools housed first through fourth grades. Older children were integrated with Anglos at Amanda Burkes and in junior high and the high school, but even there Mexican American students were segregated by means of a "tracking system" that placed them in classes for slow learners.

School officials defended the school's population composition by claiming that the district had allowed a freedom of choice for more than ten years. Superintendent C. R. Landrum told parents that Welhausen was segregated because it served as "a community school in a Mexican American community." The freedom-of-choice concept was one used
by numerous southern and southwestern school districts as a way to get around the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision banning segregated facilities for people of different races or nationalities. By the 1970s the federal courts and the federal government were claiming that free-choice desegregation plans were not fulfilling the spirit or letter of the law.

This type of maneuvering had helped school administrators weather a public protest by Cotulla parents in the late 1940s over de facto segregation in the public schools. Several residents ostensibly organized as the Club Latino Americano, brought in well-known San Antonio attorney Gus García to argue their case before a state education commission. The commission ruled in favor of the parents, but little changed because school officials made no effort to facilitate the transfer of students.11

Zamora and ten other Mexican American activists were able to convince almost two hundred parents to register their children at Amanda Burkes through the freedom-of-choice policy. They even offered rides to those parents unable to walk the one-mile distance between the schools. Anglo administrators bound by their own policies accepted the new students, though they murmured about not having enough room in the school for all the transfer students.

A few days later two hundred parents attended a school board meeting with a list of reforms which included demands for bilingual education, an expanded lunch program, more Mexican American teachers and counselors, Mexican history courses, and bus transportation for elementary school children. The besieged non-Raza Unida majority on the board listened attentively and then promised to implement a bilingual education program immediately at the kindergarten level and to consider all other demands at subsequent meetings. Then, with the assistance of the parents and the party leaders, they developed a "total integration" plan. In this plan both Mexican American and Anglo students attending first and second grade would meet at Welhausen Elementary School and those in the third and fourth grade would enroll at Amanda Burkes School.12
The meeting proved to be a major victory for the Mexican American community in Cotulla and served to enhance the party's stature in the county. On April 1, 1972, the party again swept to victory at the polls, though it did not increase its majority. This time the slate was headed by twenty-four-year-old Arseno García, director of the Cotulla Neighborhood Center, who was elected mayor.

Zamora decided not to run for reelection because of economic hardships, even though he would have won easily. Shortly after his election in 1970, the school district refused to hire him as a teacher even though he had a college degree and several other teachers did not. He remained unemployed or underemployed until he was hired to teach math at the Crystal City junior high school, but that proved to be a burden because he had to travel ninety miles roundtrip every day. With a wife and four children and a salary of only seven dollars per meeting from the city, Zamora was forced to leave office and seek employment in the Midwest. He left behind what seemed to be a well-entrenched party. Zamora’s exodus marked the beginning of a much larger one throughout Texas by Raza Unida activists. They were forced out of their communities by economic hardships brought about by employers who did not approve of their politics. When people joined the Raza Unida Party, they jeopardized their jobs, financial security, and at times even their reputations.

Nearly two hundred fifty miles to the southeast, Guadalupe Youngblood organized a La Raza Unida Party chapter in Robstown, a cotton-growing community twenty-nine miles west of Corpus Christi. Youngblood had stayed close to his hometown by attending Texas A&I University, twenty-seven miles west of "Robe," as Robstown came to be known. There he became involved with MAYO, first as a participant and later as one of the organizers who traveled around the state founding chapters. A quiet, unassuming individual, Youngblood proved to be the kind of activist MAYO leaders wanted. Though articulate, well educated and a tenacious workaholic, Youngblood never abandoned the Robstown barrio for the city. He did not adopt the militant garb worn by other activists,
and he did not expound leftist slogans, which seemed irrelevant to many in the Mexican American community. He was a cultural nationalist of the purest kind. Mexican traditions were important to him, and he spoke mostly Spanish or calo.¹⁴

Robstown's Raza Unida activism, like that of Crystal City, began with a school boycott, but unlike the case in Crystal City, it had reached the walkout stage by the time MAYO organizers entered the scene. Youngblood later recalled: "We called people from San Antonio and Crystal City and we told them: Something happened here and we did not plan it. It was spontaneous! We need support! Help us in any way you can!"¹⁵

The problems at the high school began in May 1969, when a group of students presented the school board with a list of changes it wanted to see implemented. The demands were similar to those raised by MAYO activists throughout the state. Nothing came of the student rumblings, and by the following year an organization known as Movimiento Chicano de Robe was founded. It consisted of students, parents, and a few civic leaders. Unfortunately, many of the participants were migrant workers, and when they left town to work, the organization folded. In 1971 the students were able to get the school to let them celebrate Cinco de Mayo on the school grounds. One year later, on Wednesday April 5, 1972, the students finally walked out of school over the grievances.

School officials acted promptly to defuse the problem by promising to look into the demands and taking action on the ones they could. A meeting of the board was scheduled for the following Monday on the condition that the students return to school for the remainder of the week. In the meantime, though, the students held several rallies at La Lomita, a neighborhood park, to explain the issues to the parents and to invite them to pack the Monday school board meeting. When the meeting convened, several hundred people were in attendance, causing the board members to feel besieged. The president quickly warned the audience that the meeting would be adjourned if any "disruptions occurred."¹⁶
The students presented their list of grievances and the reasons for the changes. Most of the demands were greeted by comments of support or criticism by the highly polarized audience, which divided itself along racial lines. The members of the board were not willing to make any commitments and replied with the same answer to all the demands. They promised to investigate each one of them but added that it would take as long as six weeks to gather the information required to make a decision. In six weeks the school year would be over and the protest would face a similar death to the one in 1969, which had been defused by the summer vacation.

In a dramatic move one of the students rose to the microphone and said, "You people don't understand. We want action on these things now. All you want is for us to forget what has been happening. Now what we want to know is, are you going to take action on these demands or not?" A shocked board president replied that the board had voted unanimously to investigate the demands. The student repeated the question and added, "If you're not, I think we are only wasting time here and we are prepared to walk out tomorrow with a lot more support than before." Again the board president restated the board's decision. "The student shrugged his shoulders and said into the microphone, "Walkout tomorrow." Most of the Mexican American parents and students then got up and left the high school gym."

At this point the MAYO, now Raza Unida, activists became involved. They quickly moved to organize the school boycotters into a disciplined group with a small newspaper, a place to meet, and parental support. The initial walkout had taken nearly five hundred students out of school. Some of the parents were unsure about the walkout because it came so close to graduation time and the seniors might have to repeat the year. Youngblood, Armando Cavada, and several other activists developed small student teams that went to the Robstown barrios to talk to parents about the reasons for the student protest. In a short time the adult support for the school strike rose significantly.
During the boycott La Lomita became the gathering place for all the students and many of their parents. Rather than allow the young people to stay at home, the student leaders and their Raza Unida advisers kept the students together at the park, days and evenings. Mexican American volunteer teachers from Corpus Christi, Laredo, Kingsville, San Antonio, and Crystal City conducted classes out in the open. Most of the teachers were Raza Unida members or sympathizers and used the open-air classrooms to teach Chicano history, culture, and politics. This curriculum proved new to most of the students, and many of them liked it and actually found learning enjoyable for the first time. One senior student told the group that in his twelve years of school he had never heard anything as interesting as what he learned at La Lomita.

The parents were also kept busy. They were organized into small discussion groups to talk about their own school experiences and other topics that added to their discontent. They were encouraged to be at the nightly rallies where they heard party speakers lambast the Anglo "power structure." Also on the nightly agenda were student musical groups and poets from the locality or around the state. Bumper stickers and T-shirts were sold, dances were held, and barbecued beef was served. A fiesta atmosphere prevailed, and it kept the students and parents together and talking about the problems of the Robstown barrios.

When the crowd grew to several hundred people, the authorities responded by bringing sheriffs, deputies, highway patrolmen, and other law enforcement agents to stand guard at the park. In a short time the accumulation of the officers created a siege mentality among the protesters. One incident almost led to a shoot-out between the crowd and the policemen. It began when liquor-control agents arrested Cavada for not having a license to sell beer. When the crowd protested, the law enforcement officers attempted to intimidate it by cocking their guns. The protesters ran, many searching for their guns in their cars. In Robstown many carried guns, and the Raza Unida activists realized that a bloody confrontation was likely. It took all their efforts, especially those of
"Guero" Villarreal, Youngblood, and Muñiz, who at the time was campaigning in Robstown, to calm the aroused, gun-toting protesters. Cavada and Youngblood were arrested but released shortly afterward.19

After nearly three weeks the boycotters received a major boost of support. On Saturday, April 30, several busloads of students, parents, school administrators, and city officials from Crystal City arrived to join a four-mile march through the streets of the town. The buses entered the park escorted by Crystal City policemen armed with shotguns. Chicanos at the park were impressed by what the Raza Unida Party could do. For the first time in their lives the "law" and government officials were on their side. The Crystal City support lifted the morale of weary parents and students who were wavering in their commitment to the walkout.

In another week the boycott ended in a stalemate, with students and school officials agreeing to continue the discussion. With less than a month before the end of the school year, the student leaders and their advisers decided to project an image of strong negotiators, rather than letting the boycott end with nothing accomplished.

Although not initiated by La Raza Unida, the student protest nonetheless served the party's purpose. After almost four years of activity Chicano activists finally had an issue controversial enough around which to organize the citizenry. Party members established Familias Unidas, a group based on the concept of the family, with roles for women, men, and children. Interestingly, the women took most of the leadership positions because they had more time and few of them held jobs from which they could be fired. Only families could join, and everyone in the organization had a vote. Business was handled strictly democratically, and initially none of the activists was allowed to hold an office within the entity. Youngblood later said:

We . . . had developed a . . . glue . . . that emphasized the culture. Without the family it was impossible. We created the ideal family—the model family . . . . From there we applied it to the organization. We behaved like a family. There [is] discipline; you pick each other up. We saw each other daily. The meeting was once a week but we kept seeing each other daily. We began to know each other and know what was
Within a year of its formation, Familias Unidas won a seat in the city council, but more important, it became a model for other South Texas towns as Crystal City had in the Winter Garden Area. Robstown lay in a strategic area at the edge of the port city of Corpus Christi and on the road that led to the heart of South Texas. At nearby Texas A&I University in Kingsville, students could be recruited from a strong Raza Unida Club that had begun to take control of student politics and the student governing board, which had a budget of forty thousand dollars.

Solidly in control of the party's activities in Kingsville were Raul Villarreal and Abel Cavada, the former a college dropout who managed a bar and the latter a student. Villarreal, like Youngblood, espoused a fervent Chicano nationalism, while Cavada tempered his views with socialist thought. They were close friends and admirers of the Robstown leadership. The two party chapters became the proponents of a cultural isolationism that later ran counter to the politics of the urban Raza Unida chapters, which sought coalitions with Anglo leftist groups and black militants.

Kingsville did not fit the mold of most of the other targeted communities because only 50 percent of the town's population was Mexican American. Adjacent to the town stood the famous King Ranch, which had been built, according to Chicano old-timers, on "Mexican land" and had been the site of the last battle between federal troops and a group of Tejano separatists. Numerous Chicanos and Mexican nationals lived on the property, where their children attended a ranch elementary school, and it was not uncommon to find families whose history could not be traced before the ranch's founding.

For Chicano activists the King Ranch represented Anglo oppression and Mexican American subservience. A "takeover" of Kingsville, they believed, would shake the foundations of Anglo control in all of South Texas and ignite electoral revolts in the numerous rural towns that spotted the short stretch to the border one hundred and forty miles to the south. Control of these little towns meant taking over the reigns of the
taxing authorities and law enforcement agencies, two powers that could change the political and social equilibrium of the area.

A win in Kingsville, however, required almost the complete backing of the Mexican American community, including the middle class which had designs of its own of taking control. Since the barrios there were not as destitute as the ones in other targeted areas, the party used the issues of discrimination and cultural genocide as the main organizing themes. At a time of heightened preoccupation with cultural identification, even better-off Chicanos could be attracted, if not recruited, to the movement. Especially susceptible to the pressures were those Mexican Americans who worked at the university. They were either forced to be role models for the students or were castigated for being "agringados" or Anglocized. Many, trying to avoid conflict with the students and also with the university administration, became silent partners, providing information and some monetary support in private.

At the same time they were receiving quiet support, the Raza Unida activists were visibly taking control of student government budgets and committees. With the student population nearly 54 percent Chicano, it became feasible with some planning. The Raza Unida Club members controlled a Chicano student party named PEP and ran student sympathizers and party members for student government positions, student president, and membership on the Student Governing Board, which regulated facilities and money for events such as dances, concerts, and lectures. Students who ran under the PEP banner who were not Raza Unida members usually ended up being supportive of radical platforms as a result of conversion, coercion, or intimidation.22

By controlling money for student activities, RUP activists were able to hire bands for Chicano dances and speakers for militant lectures and to open the university's facilities to Mexican American groups that rarely had access to the campus. State-supported classrooms became Raza Unida Party gathering places.
From an old, graying, white house across the street from the university, Villarreal
and his fellow activists made most of the decisions. A former MAYO organizer from
Premont, a tiny rural town just south of Kingsville, Villarreal demanded and received
unwavering loyalty from student party members, who carried out his instructions. The
party had no presence outside the university until the Raza Unida Club organized a
countrywide workers' association. The university's maintenance workers became the core
of the membership. These workers gave the activists legitimacy in the eyes of those in
the barrio. No longer were they "just students," but unionists and grassroots organizers.
Through the families of these workers, the Raza Unida cadre became involved in the
school board meetings and in the governing board of the Texas Rural Legal Aid, a public
agency responsible for providing free or low-cost legal advice and representation to
indigent clients. The agency's by-laws required it to have an executive board elected by
the people it served, and the Raza Unida members were able to elect Jorge Guerra as the
president. Guerra had moved into the "headquarters" and replaced Cavada, who left to go
to law school.

Guerra and Villarreal were able to influence the legal agency into filing class-action
discrimination suits against the city, the university, and a major chemical plant within the
county limits on behalf of Mexican American workers. With all this activity and with one
of the better-written and more consistent newspapers in the party, El Chile, the Kingsville
chapter became more influential than its real political muscle warranted. At that stage it
jumped into the electoral activities of the city by running Villarreal for city council in a
nonpartisan election that drew an "Anglo slate," a "Mexican American slate," and a Raza
Unida candidate. Running for reelection were Gilbert Acuña, a pharmacist who had been
the city's first Mexican American mayor, and two other Mexican Americans, who had been
part of a "Mexican takeover" of Kingsville only four years earlier. They were later joined
by a liberal Anglo woman. Running on the Anglo ticket was another Mexican American
who had been elected with Acuña but had split with the mayor and the other two
councilmen.

The party decided to run an issue-oriented, nonconfrontational campaign to avoid battling Acuña’s slate. Acuña, who had once been a popular mayor, was in trouble because the Anglos seemed solidly behind an Anglo doctor running for mayor. Acuña also had the predominantly Mexican American firefighters’ union campaigning against him because of a dispute over collective bargaining rights, which Acuña had helped to defeat in a referendum. The union was supporting Villarreal, the only strong advocate of collective bargaining.

The Raza Unida Party canvassed every house in the barrio in a concerted leaflet campaign. Villarreal vowed to talk to every Chicano in Kingsville and he practically did. With a budget of only seven hundred dollars, the party’s intensive walking effort with only a few volunteers gained momentum as the campaign came to a close. In contrast, the Mexican American slate had hundreds of volunteers, an adequate budget, and large rallies but at the last days felt nervous about the outcome. They were shocked at Villarreal's stamina and at the way the Chicano voters seemed to be responding to his low-budget politics. For some of the middle-class candidates and their supporters, it was hard to imagine that a short, overweight, sloppily dressed, unemployed bartender had a legitimate chance for a seat on the city council. They realized only a few days before the election that numerous university professors, staff members, and students were working feverishly on Villarreal’s behalf. He had the most educated and best-organized campaign committee in the race. The political flyers were written well, the posters were impressive, and the block walking had been more sophisticated than anyone else’s.

Three days before the election the Mexican American slate endorsed Villarreal at a rally and told its campaigners to work for him. They were hoping for a reciprocal endorsement but Villarreal never offered one publicly, although on the afternoon of election day he did walk the streets for the slate. But he did it only after explaining to the firefighters’ union that this kind of coalition would make a victory possible.
Election day proved to be a disaster for the Mexican American community as every one of their candidates, except the one on the Anglo ticket, lost. Even Acuña was solidly beaten by the Anglo candidate, who spent election day in bed because of a heart attack days before the voting. Only Villarreal’s race remained in doubt until the final count. He lost the city council race by just five votes.

Anywhere else the outcome would have been taken as a triumph, but not in Kingsville. The party leadership there did not believe in political martyrdom or symbolic victories. They felt they had had a magnificent chance for a victory that would have established them as the Mexican American powerbrokers in Kingsville. It would also have proved José Angel Gutiérrez wrong. Gutiérrez had once declared that the Anglos would never allow Chicanos to take over “King Ranch city” and advised Chicanos there to help the surrounding communities and to be content with being political gadflies.4

Several party members wanted a recount, but a bitterly disappointed Villarreal was too depressed and financially broke to think about it for the first few days after the election. Only after talking to some of the middle-class slate workers, who offered to pay for the recount, did he decide to go to court and demand it. Within three weeks Villarreal was declared the winner by five votes, and Kingsville had its first Raza Unida official. The party had its foot in the door and quickly began preparing to continue the challenge with a full slate the next time around.

Two other communities proved to be important to the Texas Raza Unida rural strategy. Pearsall, thirty miles south of San Antonio, and San Juan, in the heart of the Rio Grande Valley, became crucial to the net the party sought to cast over the twenty-six counties in the South Texas and Rio Grande Valley area.

Pearsall, like Kingsville, presented a different challenge to the party’s strategy because in the spring of 1972 a loosely knit group of families had elected four Mexican Americans to office, two on the city council and two on the school board. Since Mexican Americans were already on both governing boards, many Anglos soon saw it as a
"Chicano takeover," even though the candidates were moderates with no official ties to the Raza Unida Party. But within the groups of supporters existed a small core of militants who had kept an eye on Crystal City and were anxious to adopt the same reforms. One of the leaders among this group was Modesto Rodríguez, a melon farmer in his early thirties with strong "anti-Anglo" sentiments. He was deeply involved in the social life of this town of 11,159 as chairman of the Diez y Seis celebration and as vice-president of a community health organization.

Attempts by Rodríguez to get the group, which came to be known as Ciudadanos Unidos Mexicanos, into Raza Unida were futile until after the 1973 city and school board elections. Just before that, the Anglos decided to form the Better Government League (BGL) and combat the "Raza-types." Groups of Anglo citizens went to the meetings of the council and school board to act as watchdogs and challenge the newly elected officials on practically all the decisions they made. Anglo bureaucrats in the city and in the schools dragged their feet in complying with new policies and even physically challenged the new officeholders on matters unrelated to the job at hand. One fight took place between one of the city councilmen and the husband of a city clerk who claimed the councilman called her a "Mexican hater."

Anglo citizens accused the new "Mexican majority" of being belligerent, unsophisticated, and racist. It is probable that some of the Mexican American officials saw this as a good time to get back at Anglos for years of injustice, but for the most part they were not ideologically anti-Anglo. Most of these middle-class Mexican Americans felt that they could work with the "good Anglos" in town. A rude awakening came when they found few if any Anglos willing to join them in a political partnership. In the city elections of 1973 the Ciudadanos were solidly defeated by the BGL. This left them bitter and in disarray, and it opened the door for Rodríguez to push for a strong pro-Chicano stance. He urged them to stop seeking only equal representation and to take control of the city and then the county. With the effects of the defeat still lingering, a small majority
of the Ciudadanos group decided to invite Gutiérrez and other party leaders to come establish a Raza Unida chapter in Pearsall.

Rodríguez had pulled off a major feat considering that many in the Ciudadanos organization were middle-class businessmen and a good number were veterans of the armed forces, the same kinds of individuals who had avoided the party in places like San Antonio and Robstown. There was no major exodus from the group by the moderates, but a significant number did begin to miss the meetings. The organizational meeting of the Raza Unida chapter had one of the smallest attendances of the year. Still, Ciudadanos had two people on the school board and two on the city council and what seemed a solid five hundred to seven hundred votes. The Raza Unida in Pearsall had been born among the Mexican American middle class by passing up much, though not all, of the grassroots organizing that had made the Crystal City victory possible.

In San Juan, Raza Unida found fertile ground among a group of twenty young people, most of them in college, who created Citizens for a Better San Juan. Leader of this group was Jesús Ramírez, already a veteran of party national politics while a student at Pan American University and editor of El Portavoz, the group’s newspaper. He projected the image of a strong leader. Juan Maldonado served as his first lieutenant.

On April 3, 1971, Maldonado, Antonio García, and Lalo Arcaute were swept into office under the banner of the Citizens for a Better San Juan. Arcaute was elected mayor and García and Maldonado, city commissioners. It was a surprising victory in an area where Anglos made the decisions, which were carried out by vicious, Mexican American law enforcement agents. Only two months before, in the neighboring town of Pharr, a police-brutality protest march had turned into a riot, leaving Alfonso "Poncho" Flores, an innocent bystander, dead from a policeman’s slug.

Hidalgo County, where both Pharr and San Juan were located, had the reputation of being the home of more migrants than any other county in the country. More than thirty thousand Mexican Americans left the county each year to work in the fields up
north, even though the county's fertile lands were some of the biggest citrus producers in the state. Most of the land was owned by Anglo farmers and ranchers. Amid the bountiful citrus crop of El Valle de Lágrimas (the Valley of Tears), the average life expectancy was forty-nine years. High rates of polio, tuberculosis, and malnutrition were the norm. With a dropout rate of more than 50 percent, the cycle of poverty and ill health was perpetuated generation after generation.

Most of the organizing activity among San Juan's five thousand or more Mexican Americans first began in the late 1960s with the United Farm Workers Union. There were marches, strikes, and boycotts in support of the unionization of migrant workers, although this never led to any form of organized politics. Nevertheless, the union activity had prepared the people for Chicano politics. Ramírez and others began planning an electoral revolt in December 1970, and four months later, with a 60 percent turnout at the polls, they had a majority in the city government. The party activists moved quickly to consolidate after what seemed an easy victory. They had done it without a real grassroots organization, and they wanted to go back to Gutierrez's strategy, which they had seen firsthand in Crystal City. Said Ramirez:

Some of us would like to see a mass Chicano group that would guarantee Chicanos control of the city council and the school board. We have to organize truckers . . . farm workers . . . a city employees union, we have to get people to go to school and we have to educate people on the war. We have to make people aware of not only local politics, but also of state, national and international politics.*

By 1973 the San Juan chapter had not been able to capitalize on its gains or develop the kind of organization the party had in Crystal City, Cotulla, or Robstown, and it lost control of the city council that spring in nonpartisan elections. But the party did win control of the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo school board. By this time most of the Anglo politicians were out of the picture and the Chicano Democrats were providing the opposition. Although they had been unwilling or unable to strongly challenge Anglo rule, these "new Democrats" saw a great opportunity to run for office against a party that had
made ethnic voting a way of life in South Texas. The Democrats were to have a lot of
successes, but between 1971 and 1974, Raza Unida candidates were triumphant in
numerous nonpartisan elections.

In the spring of 1973 the party put together a string of impressive nonpartisan
victories throughout South Texas and the Winter Garden Area. In Crystal City it retained
control of the city and increased its membership on the school board from five to six. It
won control of both the city and the school board in Edcouch-Elsa, two city council seats
in Kyle, another one in Lockhart, one school board seat in Hebbronville, one in Robstown,
and two in Beeville. In Carrizo Springs the party regained a seat in the city council, and
in Asherton it won back control of the city council and the mayor’s office.²⁹

The party made inroads into a new area when it secured control of the Marathon
city council, and it maintained a majority presence in Anthony, a little town just west of
El Paso. It also won two school board seats, to increase its number to five. In La Joya it
picked up three more seats in the schools. In Eagle Pass and in San Marcos, candidates
backed by the party won.³⁰ In a mere three years the party’s rural strategy had been
extremely successful in the context of a statewide effort. The Aztec warrior symbol
appeared to be everywhere in the state. For the Democrats it seemed that a series of
political brushfires was threatening to become a full-fledged electoral inferno. Gutiérrez’s
one-region-at-a-time approach now seemed silly even to his closest advisers, and the
party’s rank and file began talking of mass takeovers around the state.
CHAPTER EIGHT

LA RAZA UNIDA IN RETROSPECT

The Raza Unida Party's electoral momentum did not survive two more years. The gubernatorial campaign failed to attract new supporters, and in 1975 two of the party's major candidates were indicted on drug-related charges. By this time, the Democrats had also welcomed into its fold the Mexican American Democrats (MAD) — an organization of liberal Mexican American, a number of which were ex-Raza Unida members — who proved to be very successful in getting elected and particularly in defeating Raza Unida candidates.

The party's political agenda never quite caught on. It proved too radical for some; others did not see it as implementable; most, however, never had a chance to learn of it because the party's limited resources kept it from promoting it in a fashion that would reach large numbers. The electoral campaign committees never had enough money to buy radio and television spots in which to present their platforms. The antagonism of the media and established political figures made the party's job more difficult. Negative articles, exposes and documentaries were followed by suits, judicial harassment and overturned elections. Those obstacles to growth were compounded by the party's own mistakes. In the end, the Raza Unida Party of Texas crumbled under the weight of its difficulties.1

While the Raza Unida Party proved to be a short-lived phenomenon, it changed the way many Mexican Americans saw the electoral process. Victories by the party showed that Mexican Americans could win, and it revealed the vulnerabilities of Anglo politicians who had governed unchallenged for many years.

La Raza Unida was a product of the 1950s and early 1960s. In a way, it was the culmination of efforts to change American society's relationship to the barrios in the
Southwest. And yet, party activists were not interested in integration or even acceptance by the dominant society. They sought a philosophical and political break from the mainstream. Chicanos were to be empowered to take control of their destiny. Rather than political spoils, party leaders were after a shift in power bases. They wanted to eliminate Anglo power and influence in the schools, the city government and even in the area of economics.

Electoral campaigns were a way of using the "system" against Anglos who held power. Gutiérrez continually remarked that Crystal City was a model in democracy. The majority—in this case Chicanos—had taken over the reigns of government as it should. Once the party was in power it was able to use all the mechanism of government (police, taxes, courts, etc.) to retain power.

Again, this use of power went beyond the retention of authority for a given set of officials. Maintaining power was the first process in a revolution that would make radical politics the norm. Playing "Jalisco" at the football games, and painting militant murals on the school walls was meant to create an ideology of empowerment, which would give Chicanos the confidence to challenge Anglo authority at every level.

The electoral campaigns of La Raza-Unida also attracted large number of young people, coming of voting age as well as older potential voters who had never had a reason to vote. The registration drive initiated by the party brought new voters, and it brought new candidates since the party chose not to support the few Chicanos already in office. Farm workers, gas station attendants, students and housewives became candidates to positions that in the past had been the sole domain of the "respectable" business types. Chicanos also learned the inner workings of a political party as they served as registrants, precinct workers, party chairpersons, executive committee people and election judges. Most of these positions had also been limited to a few urban Mexican Americans or to those who had proven their absolute loyalty to the two established parties.
La Raza Unida politics introduced a new type of Mexican American politician. These new candidates ran on specific platforms, rather than on vague promises or on "personalismo" that had been common among barrio politics. These candidates also were often considered less than acceptable by more mainstream voters, but they were chosen because they were seen as part of the lower class constituency. Once in office the Raza Unida officials worked in unison to make dramatic changes. There was no attempt to establish a caretaker administration. In every instance, party members made substantial efforts to change the way government dollars were spent in the school districts or the city and county governments. Party leaders saw public funds as the financial base for their social revolution. Party members were hired in mass. Government funding was sought tenaciously to offset the law tax base and to circumvent Anglo taxpayers who refused to pay their share to maintain the government functioning.

Some of the party's initial goals do not seem so radical now, but in the early 1960s any small change in the conditions of the Mexican American neighborhoods seemed revolutionary. Street lights, paved roads, police protection, jobs and parks for the "Mexican" side of town were something unheard of back then, particularly in the rural communities of South and West Texas.

Others of the party's goals were in fact revolutionary in a capitalist, pluralistic society. The party codes sought to regiment decision-making through the establishment of grass-roots organizations such as Cuidadanos Unidos, which provided the mass support for "committee" decisions. It also demanded loyalty beyond that normally given to other parties. The establishment of a brown nation-within-a-nation was the most radical of all ideas. Early on, the party had a quasi-foreign policy, particularly toward Mexico, and there were small militant elements within the party that felt that arm struggle would one day be necessary. These groups tended to belong to party chapters outside Texas, though some had sympathizers in the Lone Star state. These extreme tendencies eventually led the government to infiltrate and disrupt party activities.
The initial success of the party, however, opened a new avenue for Mexican Americans to pursue in fighting discrimination and powerlessness. Because this avenue was within the framework of the American electoral system, Chicanos voters were brought in to the political mainstream and they became an important voting bloc.
1. David Montejano, in his outstanding work *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, pp. 220-234, discusses what he calls the culture of segregation, a pervasive attitude that governed the Anglo view of the Mexican American.

2. Ibid., pp. 275-276.


4. Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., *Let All of Them Take Heed*, pp. 113-134. In his chapter "Compelled to Litigate," San Miguel outlines the major legal suits brought by Mexican American activists against the Texas public school system.

5. Ibid., pp. 39, 40, 49, 55. Also see Robert A. Carlson, *The Quest for Conformity: Americanization Through Education*.

6. This was the case in many schools in the Southwest. The author experienced such practices when he attended junior high school in San Antonio in 1962-63.


8. Stephen Castro was a student leader at Sidney Lanier High School in San Antonio and a friend of the author. He made those comments during the time the school was threatened with a boycott by students in 1968.


12. Ibid., p. 151.


17. Montejano's "The Rivalship of Peace," in his *Anglos and Mexicans*, provides a glimpse of voting in Texas, characterized often as the most repressive state for Mexican Americans. See also Arnold De León, *They called them Greasers: Anglo attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900*. 
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19. Ibid., pp. viii-ix.


28. Ibid.


31. Ibid.

32. Chicano was an old term in the barrio used by lower-working-class people and youth gangs. It signified that they were Mexicans born in the United States. Many considered it derogatory until the 1960s, when it came to symbolize a Mexican American proud of his heritage.

33. For a look at the role legitimacy plays in politics, especially in the eyes of youth activists, see David Easton, *A System's Analysis of Political Life*; S. I. Benn and R. S. Peter, *Social Principles and the Democratic State*; and Frederick Leo Wallace, "Legitimacy

A NEW KIND OF ACTIVIST

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. For a general overview of these two leaders, see F. Chris García, ed., La Causa Política: A Chicano Politics Reader; Stan Steiner, La Raza, The Mexican Americans.
11. Ibid.
14. Ibid. For an example of this kind of activism, see Alonso S. Perales, The Mexican American: Are We Good Neighbors? Perales was one of the founders of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the one to whom Compean referred.
19. The United Farm Worker's Union provided the first organizing symbol nationally for Chicano activists. No other organization was more symbolically identified with the Chicano Movement than Cesár Chávez's union.


22. Mario Compean, interview with author, Boulder, Colorado, 14 April 1988. Velásquez spoke about the conference in his interview with Stephen Casanova and claimed to have come up with the name. Compean remembers differently, saying that Nacho Pérez came up with the name and that Velásquez was instructed to present it to the El Paso conference.

23. "Bernal Urges Political Involvement To Make Gains, 2,000 May Be at UMA Meet," San Antonio Express/News, 4 January 1968. Several more Raza Unida conferences were convened, but most of the middle-class participants slowly left as the conferences became more militant. The organization, Raza Unida, that came from the El Paso Conference did not remain active long, though offshoot groups such as the Ohio Raza Unida and the Michigan Raza Unida survived as social advocate agencies until the late 1970s.


25. Gutiérrez, interview, 1985. For more on the MAYO structure and its inner workings, see Navarro, "El Partido de la Raza Unida in Crystal City."


27. Ibid., p. 32.


30. Ibid.


34. Congressional Record (15 April 1969): 9059 and (16 April 1969): 9309. This information also comes from interviews with Gutiérrez and Compean and from the author's personal knowledge of MAUC.


36. "On the History of LRUP," Para La Gente 1, 4 (October 1977): 13. This was the official newspaper of the La Raza Unida Party, though it came late in the party's development and at times was disguised as simply a Chicano statewide newspaper.


39. El Deguello was the bugle call ordered by General Antonio de Santa Anna at the Battle of the Alamo so no prisoners would be taken.


53. Particularly involved in education issues were LULAC, the American G.I. Forum, and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund. See San Miguel, Jr., Let All of Them Take Heed.


55. Compean, interview, 1985. To base funds on school attendance was a common practice in many states.

56. Little has been written on the MAYO boycotts other than Navarro's excellent
section in his dissertation starting on p. 66. Unfortunately, Navarro deals only with the boycotts in Edcouch-Elsa, Kingsville, and Crystal City, and not with the one in Sidney Lanier. Stephen Casanova's unpublished paper, "The Movement for Bilingual/Bicultural Education in Texas: School Boycotts and the Mexican American Youth Organization," gives an overall analysis of the use of the boycott. The paper also sheds some light on the Lanier controversy. Most of the information on that student protest, though, comes from personal experience as the author was a junior at Lanier High School when the protests occurred.

57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. From an unfinished autobiography by the author which deals in depth with Sidney Lanier High School and the west side of San Antonio.
60. Casanova, "The Movement for Bilingual/Bicultural Education," p. 11.
61. Ibid., p. 10. Also author's personal recollection.
63. Casanova, "The Movement for Bilingual/Bicultural Education."
DESTINY CALLS AGAIN

1. See Shockley, Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town, pp. 24-41. For information on Mathis see "Mexican Americans 'Want To Get on Top,' and They're Gaining," National Observer (Monday, 12 April 1965).


3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.


7. Luz was a native of Falfarrias, Texas. She attended Texas A&I University for a short time, where she met Gutíerrez. A strong-willed woman, she served as Gutíerrez's right hand in organizing the women of Crystal City and became the first party official La Raza Unida ever had when she became county chairperson in Zavala County. Luz and José Angel were later divorced.


11. For an overview of Compean's campaign see issues of the San Antonio Express and the San Antonio News, 1 March-4 April 1969. For a more in-depth but biased view of the election results I used Miguel Berry, Armando Cavada, Richard Sánchez, and Ernesto Flores (all members of MAYO or La Raza Unida Party), "Latent Resentment Against the Political Order: An Interpretation of Chicano Voting Behavior" (research paper, 1971). Personal collection.

12. Ibid.


15. Ibid., p. 201.

16. Ibid., p. 213.

17. Gutíerrez, interview, 1985; Shockley, Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town, p. 120.

18. Shockley, Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town, pp. 120-121.


20. Ibid.


24. Ibid., pp. 219-220.

25. Crystal City Anglos knew about Gutiérrez's tenure at MAYO and some were suspicious, but his low profile kept them from investigating his activities. When the student walkout occurred, he was the first to be blamed.


28. Ibid.


30. Ibid.


33. Shockley, Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town, pp. 129-130.

34. Ibid., p. 130.


40. Ibid., p. 137.

41. During his involvement with Los Cinco, Gutiérrez had a run-in with the Texas Rangers. Only his mother's intervention, with a shotgun in hand, saved him from a bad beating. Gutiérrez, interview, 1988.

42. Gutiérrez, interview, 1985; Shockley, Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town, p. 132.


LA RAZA UNIDA BECOMES A PARTY

10. Ibid., p. 250. Gutiérrez disagreed during an interview with Navarro's information. Though he could not recall specifically the details, he claims to have always supported the name Raza Unida.
11. Shockley, Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town, pp. 141-142.
12. Ibid.
13. Shockley, Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town, pp. 142-143.
14. Ibid.
15. Navarro, "El Partido de La Raza Unida," p. 258. Also see "MAYO Is Accused of Trying to Hide Story," Corpus Christi Caller, 3 April 1970. Gutiérrez was quoted as saying God was a pimp. Gutiérrez denied ever saying that.
17. Ibid., pp. 150-154.
20. Ibid.
21. Velásquez, interview with Stephen Casanova, San Antonio, Texas, 22 December
1986. In an interview with the author, Velásquez described himself as such.


24. Ibid.


29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.


34. Martin made this decision after the Hidalgo County attorney requested information on placing RUP candidate Alejandro Morales on the ballot; See "Martin says La Raza can't get on the ballot," San Antonio News, 9 June 1970.


36. Ibid.


38. "La Raza Unida election plea," p. 7-A.

39. Ibid.


41. "Raza Unida blocked by Supreme Court."

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

"41 Subpoenaed for La Raza Case," *San Antonio Express*, 7 October 1970.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

"How They Stole La Raza Unida's vote."

Shockley, *Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town*, p. 159.

Ibid.


Compean, who favored a statewide strategy, told the author that Gutiérrez's initial enthusiasm had spread to many of the organizers, especially those in the urban centers who felt left out of the Crystal City struggles and those of the other rural communities.

Compean, interview, 1986; Tatcho Mindiola, interview with author, Salt Lake City, 10 April 1987. Also see "Statewide Status Proposal Approved by Raza Unida," *Corpus Christi Times*, 31 October 1971.

"Statewide Status Proposal Approved"; Joe Bernal, interview with Stephen Casanova, San Antonio, Texas, 6 January 1987. Bernal claims that about ten members of the party were in his office trying to convince him to run. He told them the plan was not feasible and that, as the only Mexican American senator in the state, he could not abandon
his position.

RAMSEY MUNIZ AND THE STATE CAMPAIGN

4. Ibid.
5. The party platform was not adopted until June. The party depended on its MAYO networks for a semblance of structure.
6. Alma Canales, questionnaire. Also an informal conversation with Mario Compean, 28 December 1986.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
17. Fernando Piñón, Of Myths and Realities: Dynamics of Ethnic Politics, p. 76.
18. Ibid., p. 77.
19. Ibid.
22. The one thing people most often mentioned about Muñiz was his ability to overshadow those around him, and his skill at taking charge of a meeting or conversation.
25. Ibid., pp. 4-17.
26. Ibid.
27. Texas Raza Unida Party platform.
29. For a better understanding of the secretary of state, see "No Bull Bullock," The Texas Observer (3 March 1972).
34. Ibid.
36. "Liberals defecting Demos, Says Muñiz," Corpus Christi Caller, 1 September 1972. Bobby Smith, an all-state running back and formerly of the Buffalo Bills, was a friend of Muñiz.
39. "Ya basta!"
THE SIX PERCENT VICTORY

2. Ibid.
8. "Confidence marks campaign."
11. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 5.
19. Tank Barrera, "Raza Unida Party Campaigns in Texas," The Militant (20 October 1972). Moreno had lost a reelection bid in the primaries and decided to endorse Muñiz when the Raza Unida candidate was in El Paso for the national convention. Leland began a colorful political career as a maverick liberal radical. He was eventually elected to Congress.
20. "Ya basta!" p. 4.
22. The memo was written on 14 September 1972 and was one of the documents collected during the Watergate hearings, which led to President Nixon's resignation.

24. Memo dated 9 October 1972, from Armendáriz to Fred Malek. It seems that Armendáriz was at the convention or was privy to inside information.

25. Memo dated 8 September 1972, from Armendáriz to Fred Malek.

26. Gutiérrez, interview, 1988. Gutiérrez denied that he ever took money from the Republicans, saying it was stupid to even consider it. But he did unequivocally state that he negotiated to get his grant proposals funded. He felt he had nothing to lose since the party, both national and state, had already made it clear it would not endorse anyone in the presidential elections.

27. Armendáriz memo, 9 October 1972.

28. Compean admitted this to be true when I asked him about some claims by the Socialist Workers Party that the Texas delegation was leaning toward endorsing McGovern. Compean indicated that Gutiérrez was supportive of the idea, which implies that Gutiérrez was negotiating with the Republicans without the knowledge of Compean, who was party chairman.

29. La Verdad 4, 6 (December 1973).

30. Piñón, Of Myths and Realities, pp. 11-12.

31. Afternoon fiestas that can include from one or two family picnics to whole neighborhood gatherings. Campaigning at the tardeadas was a way to eliminate the negative image that some had of the Raza Unida candidates.


33. Ibid.

34. "Briscoe Alien use charged," Corpus Christi Caller, 6 November 1972. These charges were similar to others made against most ranchers in South Texas. Few ever bothered to deny them because most of the time they were true. Even though native-born farm workers worked for low wages, Anglo ranchers still sought even cheaper labor from Mexico.


36. This anecdote was told to the author by Emilio Zamora in Kingsville, Texas. Zamora later ran for state representative in Tarrant County.

37. For the most thorough analysis available on the La Raza Unida’s participation in the 1972 gubernatorial election, see Piñón’s Of Myths and Realities, chap. 4. Piñón is extremely biased against the Raza Unida Party, but he brings up interesting questions and provides statistics and information not compiled anywhere else.


39. Piñón, Of Myths and Realities, p. 84.
40. Ibid., p. 81.

41. Ibid., pp. 88-90. Figures used in making these claims are from Douglas S. Harlan, ed., "U.S. Census of Population and Texas State 1972." Because they are only projections, these figures may include black and white liberal voters.

42. Ibid., p. 83.

43. Harvey Katz, Shadow on the Alamo, pp. 36-37. The final senate race count was held up as state officials waited for Ballot Box 13 from Alice (Jim Hogg) Texas, which went heavily to Johnson. Years later investigators found that 203 ballots had been added after the polls closed. In Duval County a Mexican American poll judge admitted shortly before his death that he had been told by the Parr family to stuff ballots for Johnson after the polls were closed.

44. Ibid. John Connally, who served as governor until 1970, brought rural conservatives into the twentieth century by adding public-relations people, financial advisers, speech monitors, and pollsters to the big business/landowners rural coalition.


46. "Muniz wins six percent of Texas vote," The Militant, p. 12. In Zavala County the party demanded that the ballots be impounded. Also in Zavala, Gutierrez's wife, Luz, was physically carried out of a polling place for protesting irregularities.

47. This was such an effective method of controlling the Mexican American vote that Raza Unida and Republican leaders were united in several cities to promote anti-lever campaigns.


49. Ibid.

LA RAZA UNIDA SPREADS

1. See José Angel Gutiérrez, "La Raza and Revolution."


3. The organization was so loosely formed that it had no real hierarchy and no developed by-laws. Alfredo Zamora, who served as mayor of Cotulla under Raza Unida, did not even remember the group when he was interviewed in the summer of 1985.


6. Ibid.


8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. "Cotulla Group to Enroll." Undated newspaper clip with UPI dateline. This clip was taken from the personal file of Alfredo Zamora.

11. This information comes from a letter sent to Alfredo Zamora on August 27 1970, by Antonio M. Rojas, who had served as a minister of the Iglesia Metodista Mexicana of Cotulla from 1944 to 1949. Zamora's personal files.

12. "Total Integration Approved for Two Schools in Cotulla." From Zamora's personal files.

13. "Cotulla Tejas"; also an interview with Zamora conducted in the summer of 1985.


16. "La Lomita de la Libertad," El Grito del Norte, 27 June 1972. This article is actually a letter from Robstown High School students explaining the reasons for their walking out of school. Judging from its sophistication, it is probable that some older Raza Unida activist helped in the composition. Unfortunately, little other information was available on the school protest.

17. Ibid.


20. Ibid.

21. Richard Kleberg, Plan de San Diego, 1915. The author spent four years in Kingsville during the height of the party’s strength there and in the neighboring communities. He eventually became county party chairman and vice-president of the local organization, Trabajadores Unidos de Kingsville (United Workers of Kingsville).

22. Ibid.

23. Most of these events happened after the 1974 election but had their origin before the second statewide race. This case study, nonetheless, provides a better view of party activities and strategies. It also underscores the diversity of political priorities, approaches, and opportunities.

24. Gutiérrez’s comments had come during an informal meeting with Kingsville activists a few years before. Gutiérrez had never attempted to organize in the community while he was a student activist at Texas A&I.

25. Douglas E. Foley, Clarice Mota, Donald E. Post, and Ignacio Lozano, From Peones to Politicos: Ethnic Relations in a South Texas Town 1900-1977. This monograph recounts the history of Pearsall, Texas, but does it by changing the name of the town and the people involved. Although not well done, it is one of only two sizable works on the Raza Unida Party’s activities. The monograph takes a general approach and does not detail party inner workings. Most of the information on Pearsall comes from an interpretation of this book and from the author’s personal knowledge of Rodríguez and his activities.


28. “San Antonio, and San Juan, Texas.”


30. Ibid.
CONCLUSION

1. For information on the Raza Unida Party's decline see United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party by the author (forthcoming August 1989).


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