

# CONSTRUCTING THE CHICANO MOVEMENT: SYNTHESIS OF A MILITANT ETHOS

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Recent attacks on immigrants and on Affirmative Action, coupled with the mean-spirited political climate in the U.S. Congress, have brought a revival of Chicano activism on college campuses and in scholarly conferences. With it has come a revival of the rhetoric of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Young activists have declared the interred movement alive and refer to their activism as *movimiento*-inspired.<sup>1</sup> This is not new as the movement continues to dwarf all other post-1970s activism within the Mexican American community. Try as they may, Chicano political pundits have yet to successfully label the activism of the post-movement era in any lasting manner. So every new social crisis in the barrio brings out those who claim to be movement activists, even though some of them are not old enough to remember the 1970s.

This should tell us that the movement continues to have ideological and emotional attraction for Chicanos today. The attraction is partly romantic, much like that which the 1960s has on young white activists of today. But another, more important reason is that the movement represented a fundamental shift in the way Mexican Americans saw themselves. During the period in which the movement played itself out, Chicanos developed new ideas, refined cultural characteristics, and adopted new ways to accommodate to American society. New leaders arose, and old ones revamped much of their thinking. As such, it became the basis for modern Chicano activism. This being the case, it is natural that activists today seek to emulate, or at least build on that which came from the movement.

Interestingly, we have never fully understood the Chicano Movement, and much of the scholarship ignores or downplays its real significance by emphasizing its failures. The majority of the narratives and analyses of the movement have failed to provide a framework or theoretical model that would test the varied interpretations of this social upheaval. Most are written from a regional

perspective, or influenced by the author's ideological attachment or detachment from particular *movimiento* organizations. Most who have written about the movement have been Marxist scholars who, for the most part, find fault with the nationalist tendencies of the activism, and its failure to promote a true class-struggle agenda. Except for Armando Navarro's recent work, most nationalist interpretations of the movement promote activism rather than explain it.<sup>2</sup> This should in no way imply that the works have all been lacking in scholarship quality or insight. Rather it signifies that the study of the Chicano Movement is still young. Its legacies are yet to be completely determined. Because of this, there is much popular interpretation of what the movement did or did not do. And like Che Guevara, the movement is used to legitimize a number of political crusades that are not only contradictory to each other but contradict even the spirit of the movement itself.

My interest in this essay is to promote a different framework for the study of the Chicano Movement. I seek to move beyond the narratives of "participation" and from the Marxist and neo-nationalist interpretations of the past.<sup>3</sup> Rather than look at the "story" of the movement, I look at the "process" of what has come to be known as *Chicanismo*. This study of process looks at the development of ideas, strategies, tactics, and rationalizations that the Chicano community used to respond to external and internal challenges. Or what Armando Navarro calls "exogenous and endogenous antagonisms".<sup>4</sup> In this case, the process led to the formation of a Chicano ethos that the Mexican American community used in the 1960s and 1970s to combat racism, discrimination, poverty, and segregation, and to define itself politically and historically.<sup>5</sup> This ethos synthesized at least partially the problems of the Mexican American community in terms that most Mexican Americans could understand.<sup>6</sup> It "spoke" their language, a language buttressed by years of discrimination, violence, and neglect by the American mainstream. The ethos also promoted new solutions to powerlessness and poverty that went further than those of most other non-violent Chicano resistance movements of the past.<sup>7</sup>

Spurred by this ethos, the movement caused a fundamental shift in the way many Mexican Americans perceived themselves within American society. New activists arose who renewed the debate and discussion on being a Mexican in American society. This debate, and the subsequent change in attitude that it engendered, led to a number of new artistic and intellectual currents within the

Mexican American community. Artists gave rise to a form of art that extolled the virtues of the *la raza* and of the Mexican indigenous past; writers and poets wrote a literature inclusive of the community's culture; and scholars and grassroots intellectuals gave rise to a scholarship that promoted a new historical construct that freed Mexican Americans from self-victimization, and shifted the blame for their powerlessness to Anglo American society. All of these actions were motivated by a politics of self-identity and communal empowerment that sought to transcend the class and social barriers that kept Mexican Americans locked in poverty, and political powerlessness. A political "consciousness" of being a *mexicano* in the United States became the impetus for this social upheaval.

I posit that during the early 1960s and through the late 1970s the Chicano community's activists, reformers, and intellectuals went through several stages in their philosophical evolution, and during that process the Chicano Movement arose and played itself out. These stages, which I will explain later, were: 1) a rejection of the liberal agenda; 2) a reinterpretation of history; 3) a reaffirmation of race and class; and 4) the creation of an oppositional polity. The stages proved to be uneven, and at times unfocused and contradictory. Nevertheless they generated a multiplicity of ideas in the Mexican American community. The process helped coalesce numerous philosophical and historical currents within the community. The unification of these thoughts caused Mexican Americans to see themselves as a community with a glorious past and a bright future. It also provided a base for a cultural-political movement that transformed the Chicano landscape. That movement, I repeat, played itself out in phases, rather than through actions or events. Thus, the Chicano Movement should be studied as a *social process* rather than a series of events stimulated by organizations or individuals. I do not downplay the effects that these had on the barrios of the United States, but I try to put them within the context of a larger social catharsis.

A historical definition of the Chicano Movement, and a review of what scholars have said about this social process are imperative before I set forth the steps of this process. The Chicano Movement may be defined as a social movement that erupted in the 1960s to protest the circumstances in which the Mexican American community found itself. Breaking with the legalistic and moralistic strategies of the Mexican American Generation, new activists promoted

mass mobilization against American institutions.<sup>8</sup> This emotional, but predominantly non-violent, reform movement included several concerns of great importance to a diverse community. Among these were the fear of cultural genocide, the lack of economic and social mobility, rampant discrimination, and inadequate educational opportunity and access. The movement did not have an exclusively political-electoral character, as Chicanos fought racism and neglect in education, housing, employment, and in the realm of culture and identity. Calls for self-determination and identity became an important element of the movement.<sup>9</sup> For many activists, the Mexican American community had reached a juncture in its historical odyssey that required a social and political outburst to make significant changes in the barrios.

Rodolfo Acuña describes the movement as a renewal of the ongoing struggle of Chicanos to liberate themselves from racism and exploitation. His analysis, once couched in the theory of internal colonialism,<sup>10</sup> presents the Chicano Movement not as something new or particularly different from the struggles of the past, with the exception that it was more national in scope and waged predominantly in urban areas, notwithstanding the farm workers' union in California and the land grant battles in rural New Mexico. Though he later abandoned his internal colony model, Acuña continued to center his argument of Chicano oppression on the military conquest of the Southwest by U.S. forces and its colonizing effects.<sup>11</sup> Even as new immigrants came into this country, they fell into the segmented circumstances created by conquest and colonization. In Acuña's view, the 1960s were dominated by a search for causes, often leading to a fanatical zeal for what was "Chicano." Mexican American nationalism became a "natural response to 120 years of political, economic, and cultural suppression."<sup>12</sup>

Mario Barrera similarly argues that the Chicano Movement "drew on the heritage of Chicano political activism," but "added distinctive new elements, such as the heavy involvement of youth and the emphasis on academic programs."<sup>13</sup> Barrera posits that Chicano youth perceived a political vacuum in traditional community politics as represented by Mexican American political groups and other middle-class organizations. These organizations were still preaching the moderate liberal agenda, while African Americans were taking to the streets and white youths were closing down universities. Chicano students, says Barrera, became "hypersensitive" to the conditions of the barrio and saw

themselves as the only ones bold enough to agitate for changes. In a way, the more Americanized students were confronting a cultural and generational gap that made them see their elders as being too passive at a time of heightened activism. Barrera argues that external conditions served as the major catalysts for the movement. The Kennedy election, the civil rights movement, the War on Poverty, Vietnam, and the Free Speech Movement were all stimulants to Chicano student activism. Once stimulated, the community activists developed an ideological agenda that combined "communitarian and egalitarian goals . . . and what may be seen as an almost nostalgic vision of community."<sup>14</sup>

Juan Gómez-Quiñones calls the Chicano Movement the liberal phase of Chicano political history, and the twelve years between 1966-1978 were a "junction between self-determination or integration."<sup>15</sup> Chicano reformers were disillusioned with the uneven progress in the areas of civil rights and economic betterment. The Black civil rights and the white anti-war movements, argued Gómez-Quiñones, made the liberal agenda seem even more inadequate as Chicanos saw dissatisfaction within those groups they perceived as having more influence on mainstream society. The Cuban Revolution, and the African wars for independence as well as the Mexican student movement also galvanized "consciousness" among Chicanos. This consciousness was later given direction by the "Farm Workers Union, the Alianza, the Crusade for Justice, student organizations, and . . . La Raza Unida."<sup>16</sup> The working class was key in this action and women were the organizational backbone of the movement. This movement, writes Gómez-Quiñones came to concentrate on the "questions of alienation, ethnicity, identity, class, gender, and chauvinism." It became a struggle for self-identification and a search for a legitimate past.<sup>17</sup>

Carlos Muñoz, the first major figure in the movement to write about it in an autobiographical style, agrees on the question of identity. Muñoz describes the movement as a social phenomenon placed in the "context of the politics of identity." For him, as with Gómez-Quiñones, students were the backbone of the drive for social change among Chicanos. Unlike Acuña, Muñoz does not see the movement as simply another phase of the Chicano struggle for liberation. In fact, the Chicano student movement signalled a departure from the struggles of the past because of its youthful nature, its ideological tendencies, and its search for identity.<sup>18</sup> Working-class youths, many already at the universities, saw two major challenges confronting them. One was the atrocious con-

ditions of the barrios, and the other was their isolation from the historical and cultural process. These were young people who decided to embark on a journey to recapture their culture, history, and primarily their identity as Chicanos.<sup>19</sup>

Like Barrera, Muñoz sees external factors as being important in the politicalization of this generation of young people. These students were moved by events taking place around them. They confronted an unjust war in which Chicanos were dying at a high rate; they were seeing the Johnson liberal years giving way to the Nixon Administration; they were constantly being reminded of white middle-class discontent and Black anger. More important, they were beginning to see their elders radicalizing their politics.<sup>20</sup>

While these Chicano scholars and others have provided an intellectual foundation for studying the Chicano Movement, their works can inadvertently depict Chicanos as no more than ideological emulators or political copycats who have waited for outside stimulants in order to rise from their slumber. This defeats the purpose of studying the movement and continues to perpetuate the notion that Chicanos have done little that is original, consequently little can be learned of social movements by studying them. This is a false analysis. This is based on a limited historical understanding. While outside stimulants were important, particularly in the latter stages of the movement, they were not the original catalysts. Three major events in Chicano history had occurred by the time the Black Power and anti-war movements had gathered steam. The Alianza Federal de Pueblos Libres was founded in 1962; Crystal City had exploded with its first Chicano revolt in 1963; and César Chávez had called his first strike in 1965. All these events occurred before the rise of the Black Power Movement in 1965-66, and the strong surge of the anti-war campaign from 1966 onward.

The Chicano Movement also was not simply a search for identity, nor an outburst of collective anxiety spurred by outside antagonisms. It was a full-fledged transformation in the way Mexican Americans thought, played politics, and promoted their culture. Chicanos embarked on a struggle to make fundamental political changes, and in the process they redefined their position in American society. No more were they to be an invisible minority without history or without a voice. Mexican Americans would no more be known only for their patriotism in time of war, and their work ethic during the harvest time.

To understand this change, one has to analyze the steps taken by significant sectors within the Mexican American community to develop a political consciousness, or ethos, that defined them as a distinct sector in American society. More focused than just a communal philosophy, a political ethos is the manner by which a community rationalizes and justifies its political participation in society. The development of that ethos required intellectuals, politicians, activists, and other influential individuals within *la comunidad* to assess their historical importance; recognize or decide on their class status or statuses; promote their cultural roots; and organize a political agenda. This process was neither uniform nor ideologically consistent throughout all the sectors which embarked on this philosophical odyssey. In fact, its diversity and often contradictory nature maintained this activity as an ethos rather than a political ideology.

During the movement, activists chose to identify certain symbols, events, rhetoric, and forms of resistance, and make them part of a pool of consciousness that gave meaning to the term Chicano, and the philosophy that came to be known as Chicanismo. By popularizing these elements through rhetoric and debate, Chicano activists developed a cultural-political taxonomy that explained their activism. This taxonomy differed from those of the past which were either pro-America or pro-Mexico. This new political identification was pro-barrio, and incorporated Americanism with the barrio's Mexicanism. For Mexican Americans, the negative aspects of the American experience, combined with the historical nostalgia for Mexico, created a cultural ambience that gave rise to Chicanismo. None of the works cited succeed in explaining this militant ethos. In fact, several of the authors completely ignore the existence of a political reservoir of ideas and strategies that go beyond promoting cultural pride or political separatism. The movement was driven by profound political and cultural precepts on being Chicano.<sup>21</sup> To this day, no workable synthesis has been provided for looking at the development of a militant ethos in the Mexican American community.

In the first phase of the movement, Mexican American intellectuals, politicians, students, and others came to believe that the liberal agenda, which had been seen as the solution to the community's problems, was simply morally corrupt and a failure.<sup>22</sup> This liberal agenda centered on an active government that would provide economic development, protect civil rights, and guarantee

cultural pluralism. It was an approach that required faith in the established institutions, and patience in the face of slow change. It was a steady approach of government action, judicial litigation, and Anglo American leadership. It also required that Mexican Americans wait for the “real” civil rights problems—those of Black Americans—to be solved before the focus shifted to them. Carlos Guerra, a Chicano activist and writer, succinctly described the dilemma when he said that Chicanos were not white enough to be accepted and not Black enough for the civil rights movement.<sup>23</sup>

Time and time again, Mexican Americans had attempted to reach out to the mainstream by developing patriotic organizations, serving in the armed forces in large numbers, adopting American ideals and de-emphasizing their national origins. Yet, they remained outside the mainstream, and saw the economic and social gap widening between them and other Americans. Mexican American activists of the G.I. Generation were frustrated over the lack of progress on civil rights by the beginning of the 1960s. Court litigation, creation of patriotic organizations, and the support of liberal candidates had only a limited effect on the large number of Mexicans and Mexican Americans who continued to struggle with poverty and discrimination. Anglo American politicians and reformers did not seem interested in the dilemma. Most seemed only interested in enhancing their coalitions by adding Mexican American voters to their ranks. Wrote Hector P. García of the American G.I. Forum to a friend, “I don’t think that we can expect anything from the Anglo politicians. . . . They want us to help them, but they don’t want to give us a break. What . . . can we do?”<sup>24</sup>

The liberal agenda de-Mexicanized Chicanos but failed to Americanize them as a group, allowing them into the mainstream as individuals, not as a community. Even this entrance had its limited benefits as Americans of Mexican descent continued to be targets of racism and cultural insensitivity. Mexican Americans were allowed into the American mainstream to the degree that they rejected their “Mexicanness” or diluted their historical experience. A false historical experience became the “Spanish” missions, the *fiestas*, the Mexican participants in the battle of the Alamo, and the “Frito Bandito.”

Chicano activists, ignored by the civil rights movement and other liberal crusades, lost faith in American society. They soon rejected the notion of a classless America, and questioned the historical continuity with American society that some of its elders argued existed.<sup>25</sup> They no longer saw the value of

patriotism, or of liberal leaders. In their eyes, American institutions such as government, schools, churches, and social agencies, had failed. American institutions, as far as activists were concerned, were inherently racist. In the passion of the movement, many activists even lost faith in a pluralistic society, believing that pluralism often meant diluting their cultural and philosophical ideas in order to belong to the whole, which remained dominated by those who believed in capitalistic exploitation of the poor, regarded African Americans as the only oppressed minority, and who had no historical understanding of or interest in the Mexican American experience.

The rejection of the liberal agenda led to a search for new solutions. These new solutions were oriented inward, and sought solutions born of experience, and based on cultural and philosophical tendencies native to the community. New leaders arose who were part of the community, and the organizations they founded shunned assimilation, and sought legitimacy not from the integrationist middle class but from the nationalistic working class. These organizations accentuated their ethnic culture for organizing purposes, and tended to be wary of liberal condescension. In rejecting the liberal agenda, Chicano activists sought to destroy the sense of inadequacy that many Mexican Americans felt in their relationship with mainstream society. Organizations such as the Crusade for Justice in Colorado, La Raza Unida Party in Texas, the Alianza Federal de Pueblos Libres in New Mexico and numerous others, competed with the League of United Latin American Citizens, the American G.I. Forum, and the Political Association of Spanish-speaking Organizations and other integrationist organizations as the activist entities of the Mexican American community. Other organizations such as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project (SVREP) and the Mexican American Democrats (MAD) which staked out a ground between the two political philosophies also arose during this time.

In the second phase, Mexican American activists saw a need to reinterpret the past. They understood that the treatment of Mexican Americans was partly the result of the distorted view of them perpetuated by historians, social scientists, journalists, and the media in general. While Mexican American middle-class reformers had taken on many of the stereotypes, few of them had ever attempted a fundamental reinterpretation of the history of Mexican Americans.<sup>26</sup> They had been content with emphasizing inclusion, and telling "their"

side of American history. Chicano activists believed, however, that for the barrios to develop the type of self-esteem and pride necessary for political action, Mexican Americans had to see themselves in a new light.

Chicano activists knew that Mexican Americans could overcome their powerlessness only if they could see themselves as a historical people with heroes, legends, triumphs, and legacies. Chicano historians discovered old heroes, and reinterpreted old events through a new nationalist framework that made Mexican Americans active participants in history. This reinterpretation led Mexican Americans to discard the stereotypes of the lazy, passive, mañana-oriented *mexicano*, and replace it with the proud, historically-rich Chicano/a, who was ready to fight for his or her community.<sup>27</sup> Said Chicana activist and writer, Enriqueta Longeaux y Vásquez, "The *raza* wants [our] history back . . . our cities . . . mountains and rivers were explored and settled by Indians and Spaniards, not pilgrims and wagon masters. The first cattle raisers, cowboys and farmers were *raza*. We weren't waiting here to be saved by the great white fathers."<sup>28</sup>

Chicano scholars, writers, dramatists, poets, and activists found new protagonists in the forgotten history. They discovered revolutionists, journalists, lawyers, union organizers, and others who had fought against an overwhelming Anglo American onslaught.<sup>29</sup> Their history often worked backwards chronologically. They posited that Chicanos were a strong and courageous people who had survived conquest, colonization, and racial brutality. Working back from that premise meant finding the "facts" to support the thesis. This new interpretation of history allowed Chicanos to become the evaluators and legitimizers of their history. And it provided them the opportunity to manipulate their historical significance and importance. Historical interpretation would be one of the most significant by-products of the movement, and would lead to the rise of Chicano studies as an academic discipline. This discipline had a political purpose and was nurtured under the watchful eyes of movement activists. Said an editorial in *El Grito*: "The responsibility . . . of those in Chicano programs is great, for should the end product be disfigured in any way, they will have turned victory into defeat, self-expression into self-denial, a dream into a nightmare, and a promise into . . . purposeless nothings."<sup>30</sup>

The third phase led Chicano activists, intellectuals, and artists to affirm a rediscovered pride in their racial and class status, in their sense of peoplehood.

They emphasized their indigenous past, and glorified the ancient civilizations of Mexico and South America. *Indigenismo* became an important part of the new Chicano genealogy.<sup>31</sup> "I am the eagle and serpent of Aztec civilization," declared Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales in 1969.<sup>32</sup> While Chicanos would never successfully build alliances with the American Indian Movement, they nevertheless saw AIM's struggle as part of theirs.<sup>33</sup> The search for the "Indian" past led many Chicanos to study Mexican history. They soon found that much of the work on Mexico's Indians, written by Anglo American scholars, depicted the Aztecs and Mayans as bloodthirsty, warlike, and repressive of their people.<sup>34</sup> Many Chicanos began to look elsewhere for information. They read books by Mexican scholars, and sought original manuscripts by Mexican Indians. Some simply reconstructed writings by mainstream authors, gleaning every bit of information that contradicted the authors themselves. This search often led to the creation of a mythical past in which Native Americans were "devoid of aggression, warfare . . . perfidy, treason, intoxication, adultery, etc."<sup>35</sup> The search for this past also took them to José Vasconcelos's ideas on the *raza cósmica*. This concept of a new race of mixed blood and origin, which would overshadow intellectually and spiritually other races, captivated Chicano activists. To them, Chicanos were the *raza cósmica*.

By accentuating their class status, Chicano activists and their adherents were able to legitimize, and at times romanticize, the lives of those who lived in the barrio. Mexican Americans, particularly the youth, were not embarrassed by the music they heard, the food they ate, the *curanderas* who cured their illnesses, or the home-grown philosophies shared across countless kitchen tables.<sup>36</sup> This affirmation of race and class brought about a sense of solidarity with Third World movements for liberation, and united Chicanos with a worldwide revolution against oppression. It also spurred a renaissance of Chicano literature, theater, and art. Artists and writers now took the barrio as the setting for their work, and the working people or their indigenous ancestors as the protagonists. The attempt by earlier artists to integrate their works into the American mainstream ceased among many of the new and some of the old artists of the barrio. The search began for a "uniquely" Chicano literature, theater, and art. "*Ser Chicano es vivir como humano* (to be Chicano is to live like a human)," declared the *pinto* poet Ricardo Sánchez.<sup>37</sup>

In the final phase, Chicano activists engaged in oppositional politics. Un-

able to develop a national ideology, they developed platforms, manifestos, and tactics that best represented an oppositional strategy to the American mainstream. Rather than make things bearable for Mexican Americans, Chicano activists sought to empower their community to free it from Anglo American politicians, nativist educational curriculums, and cultural stereotypes. By engaging in oppositional politics, Chicano activists could emphasize the "Mexicanness" of the community and steer it away from integration into American society. To this end, they created their own political party, developed nationalist and quasi-socialist platforms, and manipulated local government agencies to be pro-Chicano and anti-Anglo. Chicano activists sought to question the "goodness" of American society, and undo the effects of years of segregation, discrimination, poverty, and political powerlessness. Without a national political party, or nationally-distributed journal or newspaper, *Chicanismo* often developed a regional context and regional priorities.

These politics of *Aztlán* developed within a framework depicting Mexican Americans as a historically and culturally-rich community seeking to liberate itself from, rather than accommodate to, Anglo American racism.<sup>38</sup> Individuals became committed to the Chicano Movement through indoctrination, but also from the experience of being political. Commitment came when Chicanos in California stood between hostile law enforcement agents and striking farm workers, or when they walked the streets for Chicano candidates. In Tucson, Chicanos became committed when they camped out on the barrio grounds that were to become a golf course for Anglo Americans, and challenged the police to remove them.<sup>39</sup> In Crystal City, Texas, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, Chicanos committed themselves through school boycotts, and the building of the La Raza Unida Party.<sup>40</sup> From each struggle came anecdotes, songs, poems, political slogans, and heroes. These were the essence of political culture. Interpreted by Chicano activists within the context of their local struggles, they formed part of a larger political ethos.

The four phases, while at times sequentially inconsistent, provided an aperture for different sectors within the Mexican American community to enter the philosophical discourse on being Chicano.<sup>41</sup> Intellectuals debated, politicians campaigned, artists drew, *corridistas* sang, and *escritores* wrote. For women, the movement provided an opportunity for them to regain their historical role as strugglers on behalf of the *barrio* and *la familia*.<sup>42</sup> Even as Chicanos attempted

to develop a cultural nationalist philosophy, Chicanas challenged traditional Mexican orthodoxy. Rejection of the liberal agenda meant that new ground rules had to be established. The fact that women were among the first in nearly every Chicano organization of the period, meant that the Chicano Movement would be the most inclusive of all the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, allowing—at times only grudgingly—women to serve in most levels except the very top.

The reinterpretation of history provided Chicanas an opportunity to discover their Aztec goddesses, their union organizers, their radical journalists, their *soldaderas*, and their historical importance. In a history of struggle against oppression, Chicanas fought against the greatest odds, and most remained faithful to their ideals. The cultural renaissance which made the third phase possible depended heavily on women writers and poets. Said one Chicana activist in 1969, “When we talk about equality, we better talk about total equality.”<sup>43</sup> Women such as Inez Tovar, Evangelina Vigil, Carmen Tafolla, Denise Chávez and others wrote against simply reaffirming traditional gender roles within the Chicano family. Other Chicanas took positions of leadership, walked the picket lines, got arrested, and ran as candidates on independent Chicano slates. They also fought to bridge the gap between the public life of activism, and the private life of the family. Chicana activists came to view the oppression of women in the barrio as three-fold. Declared the Colorado Raza Unida Party platform, “For our women . . . there exists a triple exploitation . . . they are exploited as women, as people of *la raza*, and they suffer from . . . poverty.”<sup>44</sup> This meant that Chicana activists had to enlarge the political agenda from one concerned with race and national origins, to one that included gender and familial roles. They created a political paradigm that made the discussion of Chicana issues a permanent part—theoretically, if not always in practice—of the polemics of the struggle for self-determination.

In the politics of opposition, Chicanas were to play their biggest part. From the lettuce fields of southern California and the urban jungles of Colorado, to the political offices of La Raza Unida Party in Texas, Chicanas remained a political presence throughout the *movimiento* period. They could point to Dolores Huerta, Virginia Múzquiz, Luz Bazán Gutiérrez, Rosie Castro, Lupe Castillo, Enriqueta Longeaux y Vásquez, and other women who succeeded in assuming a political role. Unfortunately for Chicana activists, their inability to gain con-

trol of their communities limited the opportunity to put into practice their own version of women's liberation. Crystal City proved one of the few laboratories for the new strategies. In the political and electoral arena, a number of women there were able to blossom and become an integral part of the power elite.<sup>45</sup> They headed the major organizations, were elected to city and county offices, and participated in most of the La Raza Unida Party activities.

But since even in *Cristal* the party never succeeded in gaining significant economic patronage, women did not reach economic parity with men. Also, most of the bureaucratic and educational jobs went to men from outside the community who had the education and training needed to run the "revolution". It is possible that Chicana integration would have occurred if the party had been able to control the town's economic sector. This conjecture is not an attempt to deny the dynamics of male/female relations. There were still significant conflicts between the women and the men in the party. Women's "female" roles were still restricted by the community's social mores. But the women leaders, with elected office, and large numbers of women supporters were negotiating with strength. In *Cristal*, Chicanas had learned to play political hardball and win. While far from being a feminist social movement, the Chicano Movement did prove to be fertile ground for the development of women leaders, and Chicana feminist ideology.

Throughout the different sectors of the Mexican American community, the movement aroused a new sense of militancy based on a historically-rich legacy of resistance, and cultural affirmation. There was considerable romanticizing of the past, and the reinterpretation of events was often as skewed as the one it replaced. But even this ritualization of the Chicano experience proved to be positive in that it made many Mexican Americans proud of themselves, and motivated many of them to seek a change in the status quo. Even those moderate organizations and leaders who resisted the movement's radicalism, changed their own perceptions of their place in American society.<sup>46</sup> The new ethos took hold on the newer Mexican American elites, and among many working-class Chicanos.

This ethos, I argue, is irreversible for the foreseeable future. While some of the militancy is lost, and nationalism is subsumed by practical politics, the militant ethos remains even during this period of "Hispanic" politics. Mexican American politicians still reject the old traditional liberal approach to civil

rights and upward mobility, which disdained race-specific strategies, and demanded assimilation. They see history in much the same way Chicano activist historians taught it,<sup>47</sup> and they have become ethnic politicians, accentuating the racial and cultural differences with the mainstream. Finally, they still practice a politics of opposition, though they do this within the context of coalition politics. That is, they continue to promote issues, and carry out strategies unique to their community, and then find alliances which allow them to promote these issues. Hispanics, while often less than militant in their pursuit of change, no longer see themselves as just Americans. Rather, they are an ethnic group that has a historical notion of itself, and whose importance lies within its uniqueness. In this sense, like the Mexican American Generation of the 1930s, '40s and '50s, and the Chicano Movement Generation of the 1960s and '70s, the Hispanic Generation has its own ethos and generational thought.<sup>48</sup>

By using the four-phase framework in studying the movement, we can recognize it as more than a passing phase in Mexican American history. We then understand it as a critical period in developing political strategies for the Mexican American community in the latter part of the twentieth century. It also distinguishes the movement from other movements that have occurred among the Mexican-origin population. In this manner, the four-phase model is a contribution to the study of the movement, and it can be tested at the national, regional, and local levels. It helps to better identify the changes that took place within the Mexican American community than the previous narratives or analyses. This framework also captures the grassroot, democratic tendencies of the movement by showing how a new dialogue occurs that includes voices from a number of sectors within the community that had not fully participated before.<sup>49</sup> This approach also does not relegate the movement to the political graveyard as an unfocused, passionate social catharsis that arose, played itself out, and left things worse than they were. This is the kind of conclusion that is often made in some of the previous works, which start out praising the ideals of the movement, criticize its ideological foundations, and bemoan its stepchild, the Hispanic Generation.<sup>50</sup>

We can, through this synthesis, see the movement as a process by which the Mexican American community develops a construct to debate its place in American history and society. Mexican Americans no longer react to the problems confronting them as would immigrants, nor as an ethnic group that is slowly

fading into assimilation. Mexican Americans confront the challenges of a society that remains conscious of race through ethnic group solidarity, and through strategies that guarantee their survival as a distinct yet very American community. They reject traditional liberal pressures to assimilate, and they continue to search for a political agenda that opposes the country's new nativism. More importantly, the community has come to depend on native sons and daughters for its leadership. Many would argue against my interpretation of the legacy of *Chicanismo* on Hispanic politicians. And while tempted to agree with their analysis on the failure of this generation, I am reminded that each generation seeks a counter-identity that distinguishes it from those of the past. Hispanics are no different. But for those who reject the politics of this generation, the Chicano Movement will continue to be the crucial juncture in twentieth century Mexican American history. Understanding the Chicano Movement then remains important for those seeking to be different and for those who hope to duplicate the social activism of that most tumultuous period.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Most historians agree that the movement had ended by the latter part of the 1970s. See Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990) 151-153; also, Ignacio M. García, *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party* (Tucson: Mexican American Studies & Research Center, 1989) 219-231.
- <sup>2</sup> See Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1995). Navarro is a long time activist, but he is also a very good scholar who has blended both aspects of his intellectual thought to provide this work.
- <sup>3</sup> This should not imply that I believe there are too many personal accounts of the movement. On the contrary, there should be more, but we cannot depend on them to provide the intellectual framework for understanding the movement in a scholarly manner.
- <sup>4</sup> See Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization*, 1-8. This the latest attempt to provide a framework for studying the Chicano Movement. It is also one of the better works on the Chicano Movement. Unfortunately, it was not available when I began my study of the movement.
- <sup>5</sup> See Carlos Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power* (London: Verso, 1989); and Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics*.
- <sup>6</sup> I say "partially" because the ideology-building never quite reached a mature level. That is, *Chicanismo* did not produce an abundance of written material and many of the ideas were not tested over a long period of time.
- <sup>7</sup> The best two works describing Chicano resistance to Anglo American domination are Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America: The Chicano Struggle for Liberation* (San Francisco:

- Canfield Press, 1972); and Robert J. Rosenbaum's *Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest: The Sacred Right of Self-Preservation* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981).
- <sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the Mexican American Generation's strategy, see Mario T. Garcia's *Mexican Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); also, Guadalupe San Miguel, "Let All of Them Take Heed" (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1987; and Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics*.
- <sup>9</sup> Carlos Muñoz argues in his book that the Chicano Movement was a struggle over identity; see *Youth, Identity, Power*, 8-12. Gómez-Quiñones calls it the "politics of identity" in *Chicano Politics*, 102-105.
- <sup>10</sup> The internal colony model posited that Mexican Americans were a conquered people subjected to conditions of a colonial society: discrimination, dual-wage system, co-optation of its elites, and ruthless violence. For a more in-depth explanation of the internal colony model, see Mario Barrera, Carlos Muñoz, and Charles Ornelas, "The Barrio as Internal Colony," in *Urban Affairs Annual Review* ed. Harlan H. Hahn, 6 (1972); also, Tomás Almaguer, "Toward the Study of Chicano Colonialism," in *Aztlán* 2, 1, (Spring 1977): 7-20.
- <sup>11</sup> By his second edition, Acuña had changed his mind and used the model for only the 19th century. In his third edition, he downplays the model almost to its exclusion. See Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, Third edition. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988)
- <sup>12</sup> Acuña, *Occupied America*, 1-5.
- <sup>13</sup> Mario Barrera, *Beyond Aztlán: Ethnic Autonomy in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1988) 44.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-44.
- <sup>15</sup> Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics*, 101.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power*, 15-16.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>20</sup> For a discussion on the growing middle-class militancy of the 1960s, see Robert A. Cuellar, "A Social and Political History of the Mexican American Population of Texas, 1929-1963" (Master's Thesis, Texas State University, Denton, 1969). Also, see Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics*, 88-97.
- <sup>21</sup> Much literature was written during the movement years on the meaning of being Chicano/a. Even the origins of the word "Chicano" were debated and discussed continually. See Bob Morales, "Chicano: Word Symbol of Confusion or Cohesion?" *Coraje* 1, no. 2 (April 1969): 8, personal collection of Salomón Baldenegro.
- <sup>22</sup> By liberal agenda I mean the traditional manner by which immigrants and minorities were supposed to integrate into the American mainstream. This would include education, good citizenship, patriotism, alliances with liberal groups, faith in government action, and especially patience. It also meant waiting for the problems of Black Americans to be solved.
- <sup>23</sup> This was a statement credited to Guerra and repeated often in the early years of the Chicano Movement.

- <sup>24</sup> See Hector P. García, Corpus Christi, Texas, to Manuel Avila, Jr., Caracas, Venezuela, 22 July 1961, García Papers in Special Collections at Texas A&M University in Corpus Christi, Texas.
- <sup>25</sup> For a discussion of this historical continuity, see Mario T. García's "In Search of History: Carlos E. Castañeda and the Mexican American Generation," *Renato Rosaldo Lecture Series Monograph*. Vol. 4 (MASRC, The University of Arizona, 1988). See also García's *Mexican Americans*, chapters 9-11.
- <sup>26</sup> One who did was Carlos E. Castañeda who wrote what historian Mario T. García calls a "complementary" history of the Mexican American. This history attempted to underscore the similarities between Mexican and American history. It also sought to dispel stereotypes that Anglo Americans had about Mexican Americans. For a further explanation of Castañeda's work, see Mario T. García, "In Search of History: Carlos E. Castañeda and the Mexican American Generation," 1-20.
- <sup>27</sup> See Octavio Romano, "The Anthropology and Sociology of the Mexican American: Distortion of Mexican American History," *El Grito* 2 (1968); also, see Romano, "The Historical and Intellectual Presence of Mexican-Americans," *El Grito* (Winter 1969): 32-46.
- <sup>28</sup> See Enriqueta Longeaux y Vázquez, "Despierten Hermanos," *El Grito del Norte*, 24 August 1968, 6.
- <sup>29</sup> For a later work based on this thesis, see John R. Chávez, *The Lost Land: the Chicano Image of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).
- <sup>30</sup> "Editorial," *El Grito*, vol. 3, no. 3, (Spring 1970): 2.
- <sup>31</sup> See Romano's "The Historical and Intellectual Presence of Mexican Americans," for a discussion on *indigenismo*.
- <sup>32</sup> See Rodolfo Gonzales, *I Am Joaquín, Yo Soy Joaquín* (Toronto/New York/London: Bantam Books, 1972) 16.
- <sup>33</sup> Reies López Tijerina was one of the first Chicano activists to make overtures to Native American activists. He also called himself an Indo-Hispano. See Tony Castro, *Chicano Power: The Emergence of Mexican America* (New York: Saturday Review Press/E.P. Dutton, 1974), 126.
- <sup>34</sup> See, for example, Charles C. Cumberland, *Mexico: The Search for Modernity* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1968).
- <sup>35</sup> See Arnold C. Vento, "Myth, Legend and History of Aztec Origin: The Oral Tradition," *El Grito del Sol* 3 (July-September 1976) 103, for a discussion of this type of myth-making.
- <sup>36</sup> Chicano scholars and organic intellectuals continually promoted the superiority of the barrio over the "sterile" Anglo neighborhood. See Armando Rendon's *Chicano Manifesto: The History and Aspirations of the Second Largest Minority in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), for an all out cultural attack on American "debauchery."
- <sup>37</sup> See his poem, "Desmadrazgo," in *Canto y Grito Mi Liberación* (El Paso: Mictla Publications, 1971), no page number.
- <sup>38</sup> Aztlán was the name of the legendary home of the Aztecs. Chicanos adopted that name to refer to the Southwest, and their political utopia. See Chávez's *The Lost Land*, for a discussion on the concept of Aztlán; also, see "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán," in *Aztlán: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature*, Luis Valdez and Stan Steiner, eds.

- <sup>39</sup> Salomón Baldenegro, interview with author, Tucson, Arizona, 17 September 1987.
- <sup>40</sup> See John Staples Shockley, *Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), and "Walkout in Crystal City," *The Texas Observer* (2 January 1970); also, Harry Ring, "Raza Unida Party in New Mexico/A Talk with Juan José Peña," *The Militant* (15 October 1976).
- <sup>41</sup> By sequentially inconsistent, I mean that these phases did not neatly follow each other. Rather, each phase built on the preceding one, and played itself out throughout the process of the movement.
- <sup>42</sup> See Martha P. Cotera, *The Chicana Feminist* (Austin: Information Systems Development, 1977); and, *Diosa y Hembra* (1976).
- <sup>43</sup> "The Women of La Raza," *El Grito del Norte*, vol. 2, no. 9, 6 July 1969.
- <sup>44</sup> "La Chicana," *El Grito del Norte*, vol. 4, no. 4-5, 5 June 1971.
- <sup>45</sup> See Ignacio M. García, *United We Win*, (Tucson: MASRC, 1989) 229-231.
- <sup>46</sup> Willie Velasquez, interview with author, San Antonio, Texas, 22 December 1986; Albert Peña, 31 December 1986; Joe Bernal, 6 January 1987.
- <sup>47</sup> I would qualify this statement by saying that those who know the history have learned it at the university from Chicano historians.
- <sup>48</sup> For a discussion of this ethos see Ignacio M. García, "Backwards from Aztlán: Politics in the Age of Hispanics," in *Chicanas and Chicanos in Contemporary Society* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996) 191-204.
- <sup>49</sup> These sectors would be the youth and the women. While active within the different oppositional movements of the past, they had not developed the organizational structures similar to those that arose during the movement. See Juan Gómez-Quifiones, *Mexican Students Por La Raza* (Austin: Relámpago Press, 1978) for a discussion of the involvement of youth; and, Martha P. Cotera, *The Chicana Feminist* (Austin: Information Systems Development, 1977) for a discussion of the role of women.
- <sup>50</sup> Acuña, Gómez-Quifiones, and Muñoz have presented this kind of argument. In fairness to them, this is a common view among former activists, and among Chicano scholars in general.