

THE CUCAMONGA EXPERIMENT: A STRUGGLE FOR COMMUNITY CONTROL AND SELF-DETERMINATION

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During the early months of 1968, in a turbulent era of protest, “the Cucamonga Experiment”¹ in community control, social change, and self-determination was begun. In 1969, in what was then a small and unincorporated community in southern California, Mexicanos² orchestrated the Chicano Movement’s first political takeover of a school board in Aztlán.³ After one year of intensive organizing, Mexicanos took political control from the local racist white elite by winning three seats on the Cucamonga School District’s board of trustees, giving them a majority. This political takeover preceded the successful electoral revolts orchestrated by the Raza Unida Party (RUP)⁴ in the Winter Garden area of Texas in April 1970. In other words, it was the Chicano Movement’s first successful effort at community control of a local school board. What would follow during the next four years in Cucamonga and San Bernardino and Riverside counties was truly an experiment in the politics of community control,⁵ social change, and self-determination.

While this article provides a historical case study of the organizing activities and salient events that shaped what I have designated as the “Cucamonga Experiment,” its primary focus is on the formative organizing years of 1968 to 1970. I do, however, examine, if only briefly, some of the important events and politics that occurred between 1970 and 1973.

Chicano Politics: A History of Resistance

The evolution of Chicano politics began in 1848 with robbery of Mexican territory by the United States under the guise of “Manifest Destiny.” Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteed the civil, property, religious, and cultural rights of Mexicanos, it became “the treaty of broken promises.” With the exception of Nuevo México, where they constituted a majority, throughout

the rest of the occupied and conquered Mexican territory, Mexicanos were relegated to a powerless status. For over one hundred and twenty years, the Chicano experience could be characterized as one of ongoing resistance⁶ to their subjugation by the United States' liberal capitalist system.

I argue that the history of Chicano politics consists of four stages: the Politics of Armed Resistance, the Politics of Accommodation, the Politics of Social Action, and the Politics of Protest.⁷ It was during the latter stage, when protest movements sprang up across the nation, that the Cucamonga Experiment occurred.

From 1965 to 1974, Chicano activists organized and embraced a new mode of protest and militant action under the aegis of the Chicano Movement or CM. During this epoch of unprecedented militancy, Chicanos rejected accommodation and social action politics and opted for unconventional protest strategies and tactics that included demonstrations, marches, picketing, boycotts, school walkouts, and other forms of civil disobedience. They struggled to extricate themselves from their powerless, subordinate, and impoverished status. Their political and cultural awakening, or identification with Chicanismo, engendered a political climate that was propitious for embracing the politics of community control, social change, and self-determination. One such example of this new mode of resistance politics occurred in Cucamonga.⁸

Genesis of the Cucamonga Experiment

Inspired by the growing militancy and power of the CM, on March 12, 1968, the experiment began in the barrios of Cucamonga with the formation of the Cucamonga/Upland Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) chapter.⁹ The idea to form a political organization began several months before at Turi's (Arthur's) Barber Shop, located in *el barrio de El Dipo* (in the neighborhood where the train depot was located). Almost every Saturday, people from the local community and surrounding areas would gather at the barbershop to engage in discussion on various topics—from music to politics.¹⁰

In January 1968 the discussions focused solely on the myriad social problems plaguing the community. I had a growing interest in movement politics, particularly writings by and about Reies López Tijerina, César Chávez, and Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales. I began reading works on social movements, community organizing, and leadership formation. Our discussions at Turi's brought

us to the conclusion that Cucamonga's situation was no different than that of other barrios throughout the nation, particularly those of Aztlán. Life for Chicanos was a reality scarred by innumerable acute social problems. The most salient of these were poverty, substandard housing, *cantinas* (bars) situated within residential areas, unemployment, schools with high "push out" rates, functional illiteracy, crime and gangs, alcoholism, drug abuse, unpaved streets with no curbs or gutters, an absence of individual and organizational leadership, and political disenfranchisement. Cucamonga's three contiguous barrios—El Dipo, El Norte, and Dog Patch—were cauldrons of growing discontent.

Based on the barbershop discussions, during the next two months several community meetings were held at the Contact Station, a community center located in El Norte. Three exploratory meetings were held with the main purposes of introducing the idea of forming a community political organization, ascertaining if barrio residents were interested in forming such an organization, and conducting power structure research using the "reputation" method.¹¹ The power structure research was started immediately. Local residents were asked to identify those whom they perceived as community leaders, the intent being to identify those who might be willing to attend the meetings and subsequently support the forthcoming organizing efforts. During the process, people were also asked to identify pivotal barrio issues.

The meetings only drew a handful of people. Not discouraged, we formed a core group of seven, three of whom were from Upland, including myself. The seven decided to form a political action group. It was decided that the effort should begin in Cucamonga since it had three contiguous barrios, whereas Upland's were small and separated. First, we took an inventory of what organizations were already in place. These included the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the G.I. Forum, the Community Service Organization (CSO), and the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA). The group was overwhelmingly of the opinion that neither LULAC, the G.I. Forum, nor the CSO were sufficiently advocacy-oriented to meet the pressing problems of the barrios of Cucamonga and Upland.

The group decided to consider forming a chapter of the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA). There were some, however, who felt that it was too militant and expressed concerns about allegations made by some white politicians that it was "Communist infiltrated." The young people, on the

other hand, felt that MAPA lacked political accomplishments and clout. They said it was "too bourgeois" and lacked a barrio power base. In order to address these concerns, MAPA officials were invited to speak at the organizing meetings. In late February, the initial core group, which had now grown to some twenty people, decided that while MAPA had some problems, its political focus and progressiveness made it the most viable choice.

Meeting the requisite start-up membership of fifteen, the Cucamonga/Upland MAPA chapter was formed. Elections were held and I was elected chair, Delfino Segovia vice-chair, Carmen Betancourt secretary, and Larry Zambrano treasurer. Immediately, the chapter sought to gain the support of the barrio residents and expand its membership base. It quickly became a well-structured organization. Recruitment and scholarship committees were formed. Dues were collected and a checking account was opened. In order to coalesce the membership's diverse interests and views meant spending considerable time holding individual and group "conscientization" sessions on a variety of topics. This was done with two organizing objectives in mind: to engender a feeling of community—of being a unified *familia* (family) imbued with the spirit of *carnalismo* (brotherhood)—and to formulate the chapter's philosophy, goals, and objectives. A collective leadership emerged.

From the onset, the leadership¹² sought to create a chapter that was politically reform-oriented. Its five cardinal objectives were: 1) the creation of a nonpartisan organization for the social, economic, cultural and civic betterment of Mexican Americans through political action; 2) the election and appointment to public office of Mexican Americans and other persons sympathetic to our aims; 3) the running and endorsement of candidates for public office; 4) the launching of voter registration drives; and 5) the promotion of a program of political education.¹³

The chapter's mission statement complemented its aforementioned objectives. In a pamphlet titled, "M.A.P.A.," it stated:

The Cucamonga-Upland Chapter of the Mexican American Political Association was organized because we (the Chicanos) can no longer be the passive element in our society, because of the necessity of social and political reform, because the education of our children has suffered for the last 122 years, because of the great amount of discrimination in employment against the Mexican/American and because we have no government representation.

M.A.P.A. members believe the "Mexican cause" is every American's cause. An injustice to one is an injustice to all Americans. Chicanos are distinctly

signifying their participation and involvement in movements such as M.A.P.A. attempting to achieve the realization of the true principles stated in the United States Constitution.

Join M.A.P.A. today and become and start interjecting your ideas—become part of the movement. BE INVOLVED ¡DESPIERTEN! ¡VIVA LA RAZA!¹⁴

From the onset, the local MAPA chapter embraced the CM's victimization thrust and rhetoric as well as its adherence to a strong cultural nationalist posture, which denoted feelings of ethnic pride in being Chicano or Mexicano.¹⁵ Although some of the barrio residents resented the usage of the name "Chicano" in all its literature and public statements, believing that it was a pejorative term, "Chicano" and "Mexicano" were used interchangeably. There was a categorical rejection of assimilation, and "chicanismo" was zealously propounded. The chapter developed a progressive and *movimiento* reputation. It was an admixture of cultural nationalist, socialist, and liberal capitalist beliefs.

Throughout 1968, the chapter charted a strategic organizing course that included increasing membership, winning support from barrio residents, ensuring a high media profile, organizing community projects, and taking on issues via political action. Developing links between the *mapistas* (MAPA members) and the barrio residents was a slow process. Some of the people were wary of MAPA's political posture and questioned my intentions, despite the fact that I was raised in the barrio of El Dipo and my parents still lived there.

Moreover, while a majority of MAPA's membership lived in the barrio, some of the entrenched business elite adamantly opposed the organization's entrance.¹⁶ MAPA's emphasis on politics and its usage of *movimiento* rhetoric troubled others, who construed it as being too militant and radical. Those averse to MAPA spread rumors that it was composed mostly of outsiders and troublemakers.

MAPA's meetings were held twice a month in the barrios. Initially, the agenda was innocuous so as not to antagonize those who were distrustful. The leadership felt it needed time to consolidate and build a base of support among residents. They felt that once the base was solidified it could fend off the attacks that were sure to come when taking on "heavy" polarizing issues.

Education became the chapter's immediate focus, not as an issue, but as a project. We felt that education was a safe enough issue to begin galvanizing the public, especially since what was proposed was a scholarship drive. In late May

1968, an officer's installation dance was held, and the proceeds were used to set up a scholarship fund for Chicano students graduating from high school. The dance was attended by some 250 people and drew participation from MAPA regional officials, local politicians, and people from throughout the area. The event netted a profit, and in June two scholarships were given to two Mexicano students who had graduated from Altaloma High School and planned to attend Chaffey College (the area's local community college).

That summer, MAPA initiated its first community project, "Operation Clean-up," in El Norte, Cucamonga's largest barrio. This beautification and self-help project cleaned-up the barrio's empty lots and streets that were overgrown with weeds, and littered with trash. The effort sought to win-over the people's confidence and support via the children. Tractors and large trucks were borrowed from sympathetic contractors and the school district. MAPA asked for contributions from the owners of the lots cleaned. The monies collected were donated to the local Boy's Club for the purchase of sports equipment.

Every Saturday morning for two months, mapistas, accompanied by some forty to fifty barrio youth, as if conducting a military operation, drove tractors and trucks into the barrio. As hoped, the project garnered the support of both the youth and their parents. The media depicted the project as being illustrative of MAPA's innovative "self-help" philosophy. It emphasized the organization's commitment to change via the people's own energies, determination, and resources, and not on government funding.

After finishing "Operation Clean-up," MAPA continued with its summer recreation program. Without external funding, MAPA worked throughout the summer with the youth in order to alleviate the community's gang and juvenile delinquency problems. Administered by volunteers, the chapter organized field trips to the beach, a camping trip to the San Bernardino Mountains, and conducted weekly recreational activities that included sports as well as "rap" sessions on various aspects of the CM. The intent was to bring the youth into the movement by instilling in them a sense of *orgullo* (pride), and *carnalismo* (brotherhood). At the same time that they were given heavy doses of Chicano history and politics, they were exhorted to stop their involvement in gangs, to stop juvenile criminal behavior, and to stay in school. The older youth were encouraged to finish high school and get involved with a local chapter of the Brown

Berets. The youth became a powerful support group for MAPA and an effective “organizing hook” in getting their parents to become involved as well.

In August, the chapter organized and financed a major field trip for 75 youths to go to Universal Studios in Hollywood to see the “Mardi Gras” from Mexico. As with any activity MAPA organized, media coverage was part of its image-shaping strategy. With its emphasis on Mexican culture, music, and indigenous past, the field trip served to enhance MAPA’s strong cultural-nationalist ethos. Because of MAPA’s youth activities and support for the Boy’s Club, the barrios witnessed a dramatic decline of gang activity and juvenile delinquency. In a matter of a few months, MAPA had succeeded in creating a sense of *espíritu* (spirit). The Chicano Movement had finally arrived in the barrios of Cucamonga.

In order to raise the needed resources for its diverse programs and activities, the chapter spent a considerable amount of time fund raising and recruiting new members. However, some were still apprehensive and reluctant to join. By the end of 1968, the chapter’s membership comprised some forty poor and middle-class Mexicanos, including community college and university students, and white- and blue-collar workers.¹⁷ Since, up to this point, little organizing had been done in Upland, most of the chapter’s members were from Cucamonga.

The chapter began to gradually flex its political muscle. In preparation for the upcoming November 1968 general elections, it organized several political forums and conducted a voter registration, political education, and get-out-the-vote drive. A number of Democrat and Republican politicians running for various offices attended the forums and sought the chapter’s endorsement. The candidates gave their pitch to audiences ranging from 50 to 75 people. The politicians were drilled on a myriad of issues pertinent to the Mexicano community. The forums proved to be effective mediums for politically educating the community as well as the politicians. Both witnessed a mapista leadership that was articulate, assertive, and politically knowledgeable.

MAPA’s leadership sought to instill confidence in the people and to make it clear to politicians that Mexicanos would no longer be ignored, taken for granted, or stereotyped as politically apathetic, sitting under a cactus chanting “*mañana*.” Candidates were endorsed and a voter registration and political education drive was organized for the barrios of Cucamonga and Upland. On election day, mapistas canvassed and worked the barrio precincts to get out the vote.¹⁸

By the latter part of the year, after weeks of research and meetings with community leaders and chapter supporters, MAPA initiated its own barrio renewal program. The program sought to build curbs and gutters, pave streets, and build low-income housing in the barrios of El Norte and El Dipo. Meetings were held with county and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) officials in order to secure federal funds for both projects.¹⁹ The curb, gutter, and street pavement aspect of the program failed to galvanize the people's support because of several reasons; one was that some of the barrio residents simply did not understand the HUD guidelines. They fell victim to the old adage, "what people do not understand, they fear." Foremost, however, was that some of the economic elite who owned businesses in the area refused to support the effort since it would cost them money. MAPA lost its first political battle due to its inability to remove people's fears. Nonetheless, the low-income housing aspect of MAPA's barrio renewal program did get the required support and those efforts were continued in 1969.

As part of MAPA's efforts to preserve Mexicano culture, it organized, in December 1968, the first *Posadas* (traditional Christmas celebration) in the barrios of Cucamonga. The local newspaper, *The Daily Report*, featured a full-page pictorial account of the event. The article read, "Some 100 persons, including processions, and spectators shuffled along the streets of 'Little Mexico' stopping at the dusty yards of the inns to seek lodging . . . MAPA sponsored the Posada ceremony to teach Anglos as well as Mexican Americans something of the traditions and culture of Mexico."²⁰ As the year ended, MAPA prepared for the Cucamonga School District board elections scheduled for April. From the beginning, MAPA's leadership used the various projects as a means to support its major priority, which was creating major educational change.

The Cucamonga Electoral Revolt

In January 1969, MAPA prepared for what could be described as an electoral revolt by taking control of the Cucamonga School District.²¹ A cardinal problem the chapter had to overcome, however, was public apathy. Decades of discrimination and segregation had engendered attitudes of political resignation and indifference among many barrio residents.

After months of researching the educational problems of the district, MAPA, in January and February of 1969, held community meetings with school offi-

cialists to present its findings. MAPA concluded that the district was in the midst of an educational crisis due to the 60 percent “push-out” rate for Mexicano students and the prevalence of functional illiteracy. In addition, MAPA pointed out that the overwhelming number of teachers and administrators were white, while the majority of the students were Mexicano. Lastly, because of the conservative philosophy of school officials, the district had brought in few federal programs, the only major one being Head Start. Adjacent school districts, while having a lower tax base, had more educational programs than did Cucamonga, which had a rich tax base—a result of industry moving into the district.²² Up to that point, few Mexicano parents participated in the white-controlled Parent Teachers Association (PTA).

MAPA presented a series of educational change proposals to school officials in February. The proposals included the implementation of a bilingual/bicultural program, the hiring of Mexicano teachers, revision of the curriculum to include instruction on Chicano history and culture, a tutorial and a remedial reading program, and the construction of a baseball diamond for public use.²³ The meetings with school officials included some one hundred people from the barrio. School officials, however, were not interested in implementing MAPA’s proposals. This angered barrio residents and, as Saul Alinsky would say, MAPA had to thus “rub the people’s sores of discontent.”²⁴ MAPA’s leadership decided that the only option was to take control of the school board. The stage had been set for the CM’s “first” struggle for community control.

Later in February, while building up its efforts to win the three open seats on the school board, MAPA responded to a flood disaster in Cucamonga. It got people from throughout the various West End communities to donate clothing, furniture, food, and money to its flood relief effort. Numerous Mexicano and white families were given assistance.²⁵ That same month it started up a blood bank for the residents of Cucamonga and Upland’s barrios. MAPA’s education committee concomitantly established a Saturday school, which was a tutorial program involving some 75 students and 35 tutors. The curriculum focused on the three R’s, with heavy doses of Chicano history and culture.²⁶

In the midst of all this activity, MAPA conducted a voter registration drive and began its search for three viable school board candidates. A political action committee was formed to organize the campaign. Members of the committee met with Juan Martinez, the only Mexicano on the school board, to find out if

he was going to run for re-election. Initially, he said he would not, but soon after he and his son-in-law, Joe Sandoval, announced their candidacies. MAPA learned from reliable sources that their decision to run was encouraged by Superintendent Scott, who perceived MAPA as a threat to both himself and the white-controlled board.

MAPA responded by getting two whites to run on the pretext that it would give them financial and manpower support. A MAPA committee member actually went as far as filing papers for one of the candidates, just 10 minutes prior to the deadline and a check for \$25.00 was contributed to the other white candidate's campaign. At no time, however, did MAPA really make a commitment to endorse or support any of the white candidates. It merely inferred that it would.

The recruitment of three viable Mexicanos candidates was problematic. The political committee took inventory of potential candidates who lived within the district. Potential candidates were evaluated according to three main criteria: they needed to be intelligent and possess leadership qualities, committed to the movement, and supportive of MAPA's educational change proposals. Some of the prospective candidates were afraid to run while others felt they were not qualified.

The search finally produced a three-candidate MAPA slate: Carmen Betancourt, an assistant librarian at Altaloma High School; Arnold Urtiaga, a barber; and Manuel Luna, a masonry sub-contractor. Betancourt had two years of college; Luna and Urtiaga both had only an eighth-grade education. None had ever been involved in politics. They were political neophytes.²⁷ When approached to run, Urtiaga expressed total surprise that he was considered because of his limited education and no previous political involvement.²⁸

Armed with its slate, MAPA went into full mobilization mode. By this time, it had done an excellent job of educating the people as to what was at stake. The political awakening in the barrios was evidenced by the large number of people who attended meetings and fund-raisers. After a year, MAPA's meetings and forums were attended by anywhere from 75 to more than 100 people.

Very few people were initially made cognizant that MAPA was running a slate of its own. This was intentional. MAPA's strategy was to conceal from the opposition that it was going to initiate a full-scale voter mobilization drive in

the Mexicano community. For weeks, especially in the white areas, MAPA sought to project the image of political neutrality. It did not want to alert the white community that a Mexicano political mobilization was in motion.

Without fanfare, MAPA organized a massive voter registration and education drive in Cucamonga's three barrios. Registrars were secured from the area's Democratic Party headquarters and Woman's League as well as from within the ranks of MAPA. The registrars accompanied numerous volunteers, especially youth, who went door-to-door identifying Mexicanos who needed to be registered. In spite of poor weather conditions, more than one hundred Mexicanos were registered to vote. However, the voter registration drive revealed that many barrio residents were not United States citizens, but regardless, the gap closed to where Mexicanos constituted some 48 percent of the district's registered voters.²⁹

Injecting the element of surprise into the campaign strategy, a couple of weeks prior to the election, MAPA publicly announced its slate. The inexperienced mapistas unveiled their get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaign, which was predicated on targeting only the Mexicano precincts. Precinct captains and block leaders were selected, campaign literature was developed, house-to-house canvassing was conducted, community meetings were held, a telephone canvassing campaign was organized, and a vehicle with a sound system was sent to the targeted precincts.³⁰ Every targeted precinct was canvassed several times. Sample ballots indicating where voters needed to mark their choices were distributed. It was constantly mentioned that unless all three MAPA candidates were elected the educational problems of the children would surely worsen.

MAPA's leadership also met with heads of the largest and most influential families in order to secure their support and the support of their extended family members. A "crescendo strategy" was used, and MAPA sought to "peak at the right time." For weeks the white community was not aware of MAPA's ongoing well-orchestrated mobilization and thus did not appear worried or threatened. Their perception that Mexicanos were politically unsophisticated worked in MAPA's favor. Never in the history of Cucamonga had Mexicanos demonstrated such a degree of political participation, organization, and sophistication.

Integral to its mobilization strategy, MAPA sponsored several political forums to which all the candidates were invited. In an effort to ensure that MAPA

candidates shined before the people and the press, the three were given access to the questions that were going to be asked by the political action committee. The opposition candidates did little campaigning in the barrios. They seemed conditioned by past history to believe that Mexicanos did not vote and that the white community was going to elect them since they had Superintendent Scott's support. Conversely, MAPA candidates concentrated their efforts in the barrios. They walked the precincts and made direct contact with the voters explaining the importance of the election.

A few days prior to the election, an anonymous letter was mailed to all the white voters of the district alleging that the three Mexicano candidates were nothing more than MAPA's puppets. MAPA's leadership chose not to directly or openly respond to the letter. Instead, it accelerated its GOTV drive and its appeal to the barrio residents' sense of *mexicanismo*. By the closing days, the campaign was polarized along ethnic lines.

On election day, MAPA set up a command headquarters at the Contact Station to coordinate the precinct and block GOTV efforts. Some fifty volunteers canvassed the precincts, manned telephone banks, provided child care while mothers voted, drove the sound vehicle canvassing the precincts, cooked food for the volunteers, provided transportation to the polls, and acted as poll watchers.

At about 11:00 p.m., the results were in. MAPA's three candidates had won by a wide majority. Carmen Betancourt garnered the highest number of votes with 247, followed by Manuel Luna with 212, and Arnold Uriaga, who received 181. The two incumbents, Paul Makabe and Juan Martinez, got 134 and 93 votes. The other three candidates received 88, 70, and 68 votes.³¹

History was made that evening in Cucamonga. Never before in California's history had Mexicanos successfully taken over a school district. Equally important was that it was the first electoral takeover produced by the CM. No other movimiento organization in the nation, up to that point, could claim that it had achieved such a political feat. Prior to the CM's emergence, only once before, in 1963, had Mexicanos won control of a local governmental entity. This occurred in Crystal City, Texas, with the election of five Mexicanos to the city council.³² Although it was not publicized extensively, the political victory served to enhance the CM's growing demand for "Chicano Power" in San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

The Experiment Accelerates

The three mapista board members officially took office in July 1969. Having taken control of the school board, MAPA could now focus on implementing its proposals. Their first policy priority was to move on its bilingual/bicultural education proposal. Inexperienced and concerned with the growing ethnic divisions and polarization, the three initially moved rather slowly and cautiously in implementing the proposals. Their procrastination created major concern within the organization. Prior to their election, MAPA's leadership had made it very clear to the candidates that, once elected they would be expected to implement the proposals. A warning was given to them: if they broke the accord, MAPA would respond.

Superintendent Scott continued to resist attempts to implement the proposals. While he was on vacation, the mapista board moved to appoint Ray Trujillo as acting superintendent. By late summer, federal funding was secured and several Mexicano teachers and teacher aides were hired. In September, the district implemented a bilingual/bicultural pilot program without any Title VII funds. Manuel Ramirez from Pitzer College was hired to further develop the program.³³ Under his guidance, it became one of the finest bilingual/bicultural programs in the nation.

During this same period, MAPA had also been pressuring the school board to fire Scott. Becoming increasingly impatient with their slow progress, in November 1969, MAPA convened a meeting at a private home, at which time the three board members were given the ultimatum to fire the superintendent. The board chairman, Manuel Luna, reacted angrily that he was being dictated to. Consequently, schisms developed within the board over MAPA's proposals.

MAPA's aggressive organizing helped strengthen its political muscle and clout. In January 1970, members from the defunct MAPA chapter in Ontario became part of the West End chapter, which now included the neighboring communities of Montclair, and Claremont. Its membership increased to 100, making it one of the largest chapters in the state. The leadership essentially remained the same (i.e., I remained chairman, and Ruben Andrade from Ontario was elected vice-chairman along with the other vice-chair, Arnold Urriaga from Cucamonga). New MAPA members were incorporated into the chapter's various committees.

On January 13, 1970, at a school board meeting, attended by some three

hundred people, West End MAPA confronted the board for not firing the Scott. The reluctance of School Board President Luna to do so compelled MAPA's leadership to resort to stronger pressure. The proposals introduced prior to the takeover now became "demands."³⁴ By this time, MAPA had developed a strong working relationship with other CM youth and student organizations from the area, such as the Brown Berets, United Mexican American Students (UMAS), and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). They all agreed to support MAPA. That night after a blistering attack on the superintendent, I called for his resignation: "In the name of the people, in the name of change, we demand your resignation."

The call for resignation produced a counter petition drive in support of retaining him. On February 24, at a second board meeting held to address MAPA's demands, Carmen Vasquez presented the board with a petition bearing some 200 signatures supporting Scott. She charged that the board members represented MAPA more than the community. Manuel Luna responded sharply. "Mrs. Vasquez," he said, "MAPA does not control this board."³⁵ The several hundred people present, who were mostly MAPA supporters, discounted the petition. The chairman's comments, however, were the first public indicator of emerging schisms on the board.

On May 12, 1970, the board finally took decisive action and fired Scott as superintendent. In a motion made by Urriaga, and seconded by Betancourt, the board voted unanimously to relieve him of his duties as superintendent (he was subsequently hired as a district consultant), and Trujillo was appointed in his place.³⁶ The action allowed the board to expedite the implementation of MAPA's educational reforms. For the West End MAPA chapter, Scott's resignation and the changes that followed were major victories, which served to enhance its reputation among Mexicanos and whites alike as a group that had the leadership, and organizational skill to buttress its politics of change.

West End MAPA Chapter: Precursor to La Raza Unida Party

From 1969 to 1973, few organizations outside of Crystal City, Texas, or *Cristal* as Mexicanos call it, produced as many tangible victories as did the West End MAPA Chapter. Unfortunately, because the West End Chicano population was relatively small in comparison to that of Los Angeles, where the major media were located, the Cucamonga Experiment got very little publicity. Only

the local Riverside and San Bernardino county media reported extensively on its successes. Further limiting its recognition was that the MAPA leadership in L.A. downplayed the significance of any effort that did not come out of Los Angeles. L.A.'s MAPA leaders saw it as competition and were envious because they had not produced comparable results.

In October 1970, the West End MAPA chapter became the precursor to the Raza Unida Party (RUP) in California. Inspired by the electoral success of the RUP in Crystal City, Cotulla, and Carrizo Springs in Texas, it organized several regional RUP conferences and meetings, and in April 1971 spearheaded one of the first major statewide RUP organizing conferences, which took place at Chaffey Community College.³⁷ Texas RUP founder José Angel Gutiérrez, political scientist Carlos Muñoz, and longtime activist Bert Corona addressed the 400 activists. I presented a plan of action for developing a statewide *partido*, which I called the "Trinity Concept for Community Development." The plan called for concurrent political, economic, and social change activities that would ultimately lead to building a "nation-within-a-nation" for Chicanos, with RUP at the political vanguard of the struggle. Ideologically, it was eclectic in that it was a synthesis of cultural nationalist, socialist, and capitalist propositions and convictions.³⁸

From October 1970 to June 1972, while working on a Ph.D. in political science at the University of California, Riverside, I was the RUP's main organizer in San Bernardino and Riverside counties. After the conference, I moved to transform the West End MAPA chapter into an RUP two-county structure. It included a central coordinating committee, which was composed of representatives from the various local or barrio-based organizing *focos*.³⁹ Concurrently, in order to get the RUP on the ballot statewide, voter registration drives were initiated. The *focos* were used to address issues as a means for developing the RUP organizationally as well as increasing its constituency base.

One such issue occurred in October 1971, when the RUP in the West End initiated the second successful school walkout in the history of the CM.⁴⁰ The beating of a Chicano student by three white football players precipitated the protest. The walkout started at Upland High School and within a week spread throughout the Chaffey Union High School District's five high schools. Over one thousand high school students stayed out for a period of two weeks. Three barrio high schools were set up in community centers where instruction was

provided by a number of volunteer teachers. After nearly two weeks of intensive direct action (e.g., marches, pickets, pressure applied by the RUP and supported by MEChA, the Brown Berets, and other groups) the all-white board was forced to capitulate and give in to all the RUP's demands, which included hiring more Chicano teachers and administrators, and the inclusion of Chicano Studies courses in the curriculum.⁴¹ Approval of their demands meant an incredible victory for RUP and for the students and parents who stood strong in the struggle for educational change.

In 1970, the West End MAPA Labor Committee took on cases involving employment discrimination. After serious negotiations and political pressure, three accords were reached: the Ontario Motor Speedway agreed to hire 25 Mexicanos; the Ontario Airport agreed to do the same; and the Kaiser Steel plant in Fontana agreed to promote Mexicanos to supervisory positions. In support of the United Farm Workers, several pickets of Safeway stores were organized. In Cucamonga, the mapista board voted to support the UFW's lettuce boycotts. Replacing the West End MAPA chapter with the RUP focus did not lessen the ability of each community to implement the change-oriented agenda of the experiment.

Moreover, as part of the economic empowerment plan, the Barrio Investment Group (BIG) was formed. With 26 persons investing anywhere from \$200 to \$1000, BIG served as the catalyst for the organization's economic empowerment efforts. Supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a self-help "barrio renewal" project was initiated that entailed buying empty lots in the barrio and building low-income housing. By 1971, five homes had been built in the barrios of Cucamonga using a Mexicano contractor and sub-contractors.⁴²

In 1971, BIG was transformed into a people's corporation, and named *Corporación Económica para el Desarrollo de Aztlán* (CEDA—Economic Corporation for the Development of the Southwest). The central thrust behind CEDA was to promote Mexicano control of the barrio economy by setting up a myriad of business enterprises and light industries.⁴³ By 1973, CEDA had built two more homes in Cucamonga.

The RUP focus continued to carry out the efforts initiated by the West End MAPA chapter in 1970—developing youth and cultural activities and programs. They continued to support the Cucamonga Boy's Club by organizing field

trips, cultural and music programs, group counseling, and political consciousness sessions. The blood bank was expanded to serve the West End. Dances, the annual Posada, Cinco de Mayo, and Mexican Independence (16th of September) celebrations were all used to reinforce MAPA, and subsequently, the RUP's cultural-nationalist orientation.

The chapter's constant high profile, while positive in one sense, was negative in another for the simple reason that the chapter's leadership could not always keep up with the demands for assistance. For that reason, in 1972 efforts were initiated to implement the "social developmental" aspects of the Trinity Plan. Proyecto Acción Social (PAS—Project Social Action), a non-profit corporation, was designed as the vanguard social service agency within the triad of entities. Its cardinal purpose was to develop cultural, social, and educational programs and cooperatives to complement the political and economic empowerment struggles.

In April 1971, RUP candidate David Ortega was elected to the Cucamonga School District board giving RUP a 4 to 1 majority. The following year in Ontario, a city where Mexicanos were only about 17 percent of the population, the RUP was successful in electing the first Mexicano ever to the city council, Gustavo Ramos. That same year, Roger Granados ran unsuccessfully as an RUP write-in candidate for Congress against liberal Democrat George Brown. In April 1973 two more RUP supporters, David Hernandez and Luis Gonzales, were elected to the Cucamonga School District, thus holding on to the 4 to 1 majority. In 1971 and 1972 the Cucamonga School District accelerated the hiring of more Mexicano administrators, teachers, teacher aides, and maintenance and custodial personnel.

The End of the Experiment

By late 1972, the Cucamonga Experiment went into a precipitous decline, and eventually ended in 1973. With so many victories to its credit, why did it fail?

The Cucamonga Experiment's end was the result of several micro and macro factors. At the micro level, with my resignation as central coordinator for the two counties in June 1972 (I was preparing for my doctoral exams coming up in September), the RUP's new leadership was not able to sustain its organizing efforts. Divisions developed among the West End MAPA leadership over school board policies, the sale of three acres of land, and the transition from MAPA

into the RUP. Without having the required resources and trained organizing personnel the "experiment" became over-extended and could not maintain the momentum that was created with the transition into the RUP. Without the aforementioned system being in place, other communities within the two counties could not replicate what was done in Cucamonga and Upland.

At the macro level, the Cucamonga Experiment was affected by several factors. By 1973, the CM, along with other existing social movements, such as the Black Power Movement, had all entered a state of decline. The decline of the CM was also due to numerous schisms, power struggles, co-optation by mainstream organizations, burn-out of leaders, and law enforcement infiltration that permeated it and the RUP in general. By 1973, the "Viva Yo Generation" with its materialistic emphasis, and a nascent conservatism began to displace the "CM Generation." The epoch of activism and militancy was being replaced by a climate of growing political apathy and complacency.⁴⁴

Many continued supporting the RUP, but there was no longer a formal organization or structure, since most of RUP's organizing efforts in the San Bernardino and Riverside counties came to a halt in 1973. PAS was funded for a drug prevention program in 1974 and functioned until 1977, when it became defunct due to non-renewal of funding. As for CEDA, after building seven low-income houses between 1970 and 1973, it too became defunct due to failed financial ventures.

The Cucamonga Experiment entailed a holistic struggle for community control, social change, and self-determination that produced unprecedented results. Occurring at the height of the CM (1968 to 1973), few community organizing efforts scored as many victories as those produced in Cucamonga. While Chicano activists in California by and large transformed their defeats into adulated symbolic victories, mapistas and RUP activists provided communities, especially in the West End of San Bernardino County, with tangible results.

The experiment's accomplishments were numerous. Community control of the schools in Cucamonga was achieved. Numerous educational reforms were instituted, bilingual/bicultural education most notably. Most of the battles taken on either by MAPA or the RUP in the areas of education, labor discrimination, and civil rights, were won. Likewise, the various youth, labor, housing, cultural, civic participation, and political education projects were successfully

implemented. It became one of first and main organizing forces for the RUP in California. In fact, outside of Texas and New Mexico, it was the only successful RUP effort to elect Chicanos to office. All of which was done without full-time staff, an office, or federal funding. Impelled by a powerful sense of self-reliance and self-help, the Cucamonga Experiment's activities and projects were carried out by volunteers and financed by the people themselves.

There are three salient lessons to be learned from the experiment. First, movements for social change are products of the material and political conditions of the time. Without the presence of a CM, there would have been no experiment. However, struggles, such as those taken up in Cucamonga, contribute to the making and nourishment of social movements.

Second, for any struggle for social change to succeed, certain characteristics must be present: a climate of change, a viable leadership, a strong organization, a common vision or ideology, a hybrid tactical strategy, and power capability. And lastly, without a major transformation of the liberal capitalist system, the degree or scope of change possible is limited.⁴⁵

Thus, in the end, the Cucamonga Experiment's legacy is that it succeeded for a few years where others failed. It planned for, and won, community control. It empowered people, and it brought about positive social change. But in the end, like so many other Chicano resistance struggles, it succumbed to its own weaknesses and the omnipotence of the liberal capitalist system. Nonetheless, out of the ashes of the Cucamonga Experiment, a more extensive, state-wide Mexicano empowerment struggle emerged between 1977 and 1992.⁴⁶

NOTES

¹ At that time, Cucamonga was an unincorporated farming community located in San Bernardino County approximately 40 miles south of the city of Los Angeles and 25 miles north of San Bernardino. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, in 1970 its population was 5796 people of whom approximately 40 percent was Mexicano and the rest white. In addition, according to Donald Clucas, author of *Light Over the Mountain: A History of the Rancho Cucamonga Area*, the name of Cucamonga denotes "a sandy place or place of many waters." Cucamonga had two school districts: the Cucamonga School District, of which 60 percent of the students were Mexicanos, two of the administrators were Mexicano, and most of the teachers were white; and the Cucamonga Central School District of which the overwhelming number of students, teachers, and administrators were white.

"Experiment" is used in the context of the organizing activities, issues, and projects

that emanated from the struggle for community control, social change, and self-determination between 1968 and 1973 involving initially the communities of Cucamonga and Upland, then by 1970 Ontario, Montclair, and Claremont. With the emergence of RUP in late 1970, the experiment was expanded to include various communities within San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

² Throughout the article “Mexicano” and “Chicano” are used interchangeably. Chicano denotes those Mexicanos born in the United States. There are more than 18 million Mexicanos that were born in Mexico in the United States and their number is growing. For purposes of unity and action, I prefer the usage of Mexicano.

³ The term “Aztlán” is defined by some scholars and activists as the place of origin of the Aztecs. It was said to be somewhere within the five southwestern states: California, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona. I use the word “Aztlán” to describe the one million square miles that were lost by México because of the annexation of Texas and the U.S. war on México (1846-1848).

⁴ For comprehensive examinations of the RUP’s rise, history, politics, and decline, see my most recent book: *La Raza Unida Party, A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two Party Dictatorship*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

⁵ The concept of “community control” denotes the people’s direct participation in the decision-making process. It emerged out of the various struggles of the epoch of protest that sought to democratize local government by having the people more directly involved in it.

⁶ Since 1972 Chicano historians and social scientists have developed a number of works that posit the thesis that Mexicanos from the onset of the U.S. occupation in 1848 to the present have resisted their iniquitous and oppressive conditions using a variety of forms of resistance. One such scholar who strongly identifies with this view is Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

⁷ See Armando Navarro, “The Evolution of Chicano Politics,” *Aztlán: Chicano Journal of the Social Sciences and the Arts*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring and Fall 1974.

⁸ I designed the political action plan I call the “Cucamonga Experiment,” and was a leader in the political battles the experiment helped to win. Throughout the period of the experiment, I was married with children, and was a full-time undergraduate student at Chaffey College (1966-68), Claremont Men’s College (1968-70), and graduate student at the University of California, Riverside (1970-74) from which I received my doctorate in political science.

⁹ Upland /Cucamonga MAPA Chapter Minutes, March 12, 1968.

¹⁰ It is important to note that both Arthur and myself were professional musicians. I played trumpet and he played the conga drums. Moreover, at the time I was a sophomore at a nearby community college, Chaffey College. Hence, the following analysis is very much a product of not only my research that relies on primary and secondary sources, but on my observations as an active participant.

¹¹ For an examination of research conducted using the reputational method see Willis D. Hawley and Frederick M. Wirt, (eds.) *The Search for Community Power*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 41-92.

¹² Usage of leadership hereafter denotes the chapter’s elected officers, committee chairpersons, and others who formed the collective leadership core or cadre. The number varied from time to time. At the apogee of the Experiment it numbered some 25 persons. Women constituted about a third of the leadership.

¹³ Upland/Cucamonga MAPA Chapter Minutes, March 21, 1968.

- 14 Pamphlet, Upland /Cucamonga MAPA Chapter, "M.A.P.A., Mexican American Political Association," printed in 1969.
- 15 For most of MAPA's membership, Mexicano and Chicano were synonymous and used interchangeably.
- 16 Interview, Arnold Urriaga, April 11, 1998. Mr. Urriaga became one of the main leaders of MAPA in Cucamonga. He was one of three Mexicanos to get elected in the takeover of 1969.
- 17 Navarro, "Educational Change Through Political Action," 105.
- 18 Ibid. 116.
- 19 Upland /Cucamonga MAPA Chapter, Minutes, November 18, 1968; December 16, 1968.
- 20 *The Daily Report*, "The Chicano Tradition: a Christmas 'Posada,'" December 25, 1968.
- 21 The Cucamonga School District initially was a product of de jure segregation, and later, de facto segregation. When I graduated from eighth grade in 1956, of the seventy-five students who graduated, only five were white. What was known as the township of Cucamonga was divided into two school districts: one for Mexicanos, which was Cucamonga School District; and the Cucamonga Central District, which up to the late 1950s was predominantly white.
- 22 Armando Navarro, "Educational Change Through Political Action," in *Mexican Americans and Educational Change*, edited by Alfredo Castañeda, Manuel Ramirez III, Carlos Cortés, Mario Barrera, (Riverside, CA: Mexican American Studies Program and Project Follow Through, 1971) 105-139.
- 23 Interview, Urriaga, April 11, 1998.
- 24 For an extensive description of the principles of the Saul Alinsky school of organizing see his two books: *Rules for Radicals*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), and *Reveille for Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969).
- 25 Interview, Ayala, April 25, 1998.
- 26 Upland/Cucamonga MAPA Chapter, Minutes, February 26, 1969.
- 27 *The Daily Report*, "Cucamonga School District Candidates," April 11, 1969.
- 28 Interview, Urriaga, April 11, 1998.
- 29 Navarro, "Educational Change Through Political Action," 119-120.
- 30 MAPA minutes, March 26, 1969.
- 31 *The Daily Report*, "Incumbents Win and Lose in Area School Elections," April 16, 1969.
- 32 For an examination of the 1963 electoral revolt in Cristal, Texas see my book: *The Cristal Experiment: The Chicano Struggle for Community Control* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 17-51.
- 33 Cucamonga School District Board Minutes, August 28, 1969.
- 34 The demands called for the hiring of more Mexicano teachers, administrators, and staff commensurate with the district's ethnic/racial make-up; retirement of teachers and administrators past the age of 65; ongoing evaluation of teachers and administrators; expansion of the bilingual/bicultural program; an investigation of why the district was not using Title VII funds for its bilingual/bicultural program; establishment of reading and tutorial programs; and the activation of a Title I parent advisory committee. (Source: Cucamonga School District Minutes, January 13, 1970).
- 35 *The Daily Report*, "Cucamonga School Boss Fired, Hired," May (no-date available) 1970.
- 36 Cucamonga School District Minutes, May 12, 1970.
- 37 *The Daily Report*, "La Raza Unida Conference," April 7, 1971.

- 38 I formulated the Trinity Concept for Community Development to a response to what I considered was the Chicano Movement's lack of a well-defined ideology or comprehensive strategy for change. For explanations on the particulars of the model see my article, "The Development of a New Concept," *Agenda: A Journal of Hispanic Issues*, Vol. 10, No. 5, and September/October 1980.
- 39 I used the term "foco" instead of the conventional term "chapter." Focos were small organizing units or cells, no more than 25 members in size.
- 40 The first major Chicano school walkout occurred in late 1969 in Cristal City, Texas, under the leadership of José Angel Gutiérrez.
- 41 The demands included: Hiring of Chicano teachers and administrators; establishment of cultural centers in each high school; Chicano Studies courses in the curriculum; teacher cultural awareness in-service training; establishment of a 15-person community committee to monitor implementation of demands, etc. A plethora of front-page articles appeared in local newspapers.
- 42 Mark Johnson, "5 New Homes give breath to barrio rebirth," *The Daily Report*, August 24, 1971.
- 43 Interview, Alfonso Navarro, April 26, 1998. Alfonso is my bother. He was the primary mover and organizer for the implementation of CEDA's projects.
- 44 For a more thorough examination on the "Viva Yo Generation" and decline of the Chicano Movement see my article "The Post Mortem Politics of the Chicano Movement, 1975-1996" *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies*, Vol. 6, 52-79.
- 45 See the epilogue of *The Cristal Experiment* for a more thorough examination of this analysis.
- 46 In 1977, I resigned my faculty position in Political Science at the University of Utah and returned to California where for the next 15 years I taught part-time at a number of universities and colleges and organized full-time. During these years, I formed several advocacy organizations and coalitions and dealt with a multiplicity of civil rights, social justice, and international issues. In 1992, I decided to return full-time to the academy and took a position at the University of California, Riverside, in Ethnic Studies.