

"Chicano Youth and the '72 Elections"

by

Mario T. Garcia

Chicano Studies Professor

San Diego State College

Paper presented to

a YSA Political Forum

at San Diego State College,

February 29, 1972

(1) Ph.

(2)

(1) How do we build

(2) Leadership

The question of youth is a very important one to Chicanos. The fact is that the median age of the Mexican population in the United States is about twenty-one years. We are a young population, and this, I believe, is reflected in the vitality of the Chicano Movement.

Yet, this vitality and, indeed, radicalization that we see in Chicano youth is not an isolated phenomena. It is part of a general national and world-wide youth and student radicalization. The decade of the 1960's saw students in this country throw away the so-called apathy of the 1950's and engage in the most momentous student movement in the history of this nation. The "apathetic generation" of the 50's gave way to Mario Savio, Jerry Rubin, Stokeley Carmichael, Angela Davis, Los Siete, Jose Angel Guitierrez, etc., etc., of the 60's.

Inspired by the courage displayed by Blacks--both young and old--in the Civil Rights Movement, young whites began to mobilize not only around civil and human rights issues, but as the war in Southeast Asia was expanded, after the election of the "peace" candidate L.B.J. in 1964, students began to demonstrate and to demand that the United States stop the killing of Vietnamese and remove the troops from Southeast Asia. Young people by the tens of thousands

took to the streets to protest the imperialism of the United States--in the fall of 1969, for example; and, of course, in the historic student strikes of May, 1970, after the invasion of Cambodia by the Nixon administration. This youth rebellion found outlets, also, in protests against the enslavement and dehumanization of students in our universities, colleges, and high schools; in protests against the destruction of the environment by the profit-oriented industries of this country; and, in the continued struggle of Blacks, Chicanos, Native Americans, Latinos, Puerto Ricans, Asian-Americans, and women to secure their just and legal rights.

These demands by youth in the United States: to end the war, for student control of their schools, for the rights denied national minorities and women, and for the humanization of an exploitive economics and political system--these demands, and others, are, also, similar to the demands being raised by young people all over the world, be it France, Czechoslovakia, Mexico, Japan, etc. The youth radicalization of the 1960's, which continues into this decade, despite the attempts of the mass media to make us believe otherwise, is a world-wide phenomena. It is the result, not of a generation gap, but of the failure of the Capitalist system as well as the bureaucratic worker's states, to meet the needs of their

people, especially the young. It is this failure that has created the youth and student movements of today.

Chicano youth are a part of this movement--they have been influenced by it, but, at the same time, they have contributed to it greatly. The Chicano Movement, indeed, has been a youth movement. Look at the faces of those walking picket lines around Safeway and Big Bear; look at the faces of those who marched to Sacramento with Caesar Chavez; look at the faces of those who attended the San Jose State Chicano Commencement of 1968, which, in many respects, began the Chicano Movement on the state college campuses of California; look at the faces around Corky Gonzalez at the Crusade for Justice in Denver; look at the faces of those who marched on August 29, 1970 in the Chicano Moratorium in Los Angeles; look at the faces of those who assisted in the rise of the Raza Unida in South Texas, which has led to significant victories in Crystal City and San Juan; indeed, look at the face of Jose Angel Guitierrez! Look at the faces of those who attended the mile-stone Chicana Conference in Houston last May! What do you see? You see the faces of young Chicanos and Chicanas! There are many who castigate and downgrade the contribution of our youth and our students, but they do so out of ignorance, for it has been the Chicano students

and young people, in general, who have been, and continue to be, in the forefront of "El Movimiento"--it is this segment of our population that represents the most radicalized sector of the Chicano Community'.

This was not always the case, however. For many years, young Chicanos were alienated and disillusioned, but their ~~only~~ solutions were to lash out at each other, as seen in the Pachuco and gang movements of the 40's and 50's; or else, as the novel Pocho so well illustrates, young Chicanos simply joined the army and lashed out at Germans, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese. And if they did not go to these extremes, they went to other extremes: we joined Viva Kennedy and Viva Johnson Clubs!

Yet all this has changed to a considerable degree, and the Chicano Movement is a testimony to this. No clearer example of the politization and radicalization of our young "hermanos y hermanas" can be given than the historic first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver, Colorado in March, 1969. It was at this conference, attended by hundreds of young people, that the Plan of Aztlan was drawn up.

The Preamble of the Plan points out the increased awareness of young Chicanos of their national identity and

of the roots of their exploitation:

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historic heritage but also of the brutal "gringo" invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlan from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny.

We are free and sovereign to determine those tasks which are justly called for by our house, our land, the sweat of our brows, and by our hearts. Aztlan belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not to the foreign Europeans. We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continent.

Brotherhood unites us, and love for our brothers makes us a people whose time has come and who struggles against the foreigner "gabacho" who exploits our riches and destroys our culture. With our heart in our hands and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence of our mestizo nation. We are a bronze people with a bronze culture. Before the world, before all of North America, before all of our brothers in the bronze continent, we are a nation, we are a union of free pueblos, we are Aztlan.

Por La Raza Todo. Fuera de La Raza Nada.

The implementation of this nationalist plan for liberation is spelled out in six specific points of action:

1. Awareness and distribution of El Plan Espiritual Aztlan. Presented at every meeting, demonstration, confrontation, court house, institution, administration, church, school, tree, building, car, and every place of human existence.
2. September 16, on the birthdate of Mexican independence, a national walk-out by all Chicanos of

all colleges and schools to be sustained until the complete revision of the educational system: its policy makers, administration, its curriculum, and its personnel to meet the needs of our community. [This was widely carried out in 1969. In San Jose where I was at the time, 10,000 students walked out and demonstrated.]

3. Self-defense against the occupying forces of the oppressors at every school, every available man, woman, and child.
4. Community nationalization and organization of all Chicanos: El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan.
5. Economic program to drive the exploiter out of our community and a welding together of our people's combined resources to control their own production through cooperative effort.
6. Creation of an independent local, regional, and national political party.

A nation autonomous and free--culturally, socially, economically, and politically, will make its own decisions on the usage of our lands, the taxation of our goods, the utilization of our bodies for war, the determination of justice (reward and punishment), and the profit of our sweat.

El Plan de Aztlan is the plan of liberation!

The Plan of Aztlan and other pronouncements by Chicano youths, as well as their actions, demonstrate their disillusionment with the "system." Chicano youth--unlike some of our older brothers and sisters, or our "padres,"--no longer believe in the words of a Kennedy, a Johnson, a McCarthy, a McGovern, a Muskie, and certainly not of a Nixon! Our "juventude" realize, as the Plan of Aztlan so graphically

puts it, that "the two-party system is the same animal with two heads that feed from the same trough." Our young people realize that both the Democratic and Republican parties do not serve the interests of Chicanos, or of Blacks, other national minorities, women, and working people, in general; but, instead, serve the interest of the ruling class of capitalists: the Rockefellers, the Fords, the Vanderbuilts, the Kennedys, etc., who run this country.

This disillusionment and awareness has led to the execution of point six under Action of the Plan of Aztlan-- the development of Raza Unida parties. The most notable example of this development has been the success of the Raza Unida in South Texas, where, beginning in April of 1970, the Raza Unida has proceeded to gain political control of both Crystal City and San Juan, Texas. No more lucid demonstrations of what Raza Unida can do was seen this past January when during a farmworker's strike near Crystal City, the Raza Unida mobilized all segments of the Chicano community in support of the farmworker's demands for higher wages. Chicano students and faculty walked out of their schools and joined other Chicanos in picket lines and in a climactic march and rally involving more than 1,800 people. This mass pressure and mobilization led to the farmworker's demands



being met.

In Southern California, the significant vote gained late last year by the Raza Unida Campaign of Raul Ruiz in the 48th assembly district in Los Angeles exemplifies the growing awareness of Chicanos in this part of the Southwest of the necessity for an independent Chicano political party that will address itself to the needs of Chicanos: an independent party that will organize, mobilize, and politicize the Chicano community 365 days a year, and not just during election time. An example of this is the support the Raza Unida in Southern California gave to the March 4 demonstration in Los Angeles to protest the passage of the Dixon-Arnett Law, which threatens to deport both legal and illegal aliens.

The growth of Raza Unida parties is without doubt the most significant development of the Chicano Movement, for not only is it clearly the vehicle that can unite the Chicano community in our struggle for what is rightfully ours, but it, also, cuts at the stronghold the Capitalist parties have on our communities. That this significance is, likewise, apparent to both the Democrats and Republicans can be seen in their efforts to "woo" the Chicano vote in 1972. Nixon is trying to do this by appointing "front-store Mexicans," like Senora Banuelas to federal positions. The Democrats are trying by creating a Spanish-Speaking Caucus to direct Chicano

political energies back to the Democratic Party, or by going around saying the Raza Unida cannot win, and, therefore, we should support Chicano Democrats or Liberal Democrats like Muskie and McGovern.

These pressures by both parties are increasing, and will continue to increase, as November nears. The challenge to the Raza Unida parties, and to Chicano young people who are in support of an independent Chicano party, will be whether that independence can be maintained. I believe it can. I believe, certainly for Chicano youth, there is no turning back to the Democrats; the lies, distortions, hypocrisy, etc., of this party over the period of the 1960's is too blatantly obvious, for our young people to ever believe in it again. Much work, however, remains to be done in the development of the Raza Unida, but the first giant steps have been taken, and in the future we will see its continued growth, especially among the vanguard of the Chicano Movement--"nuestro juventud!"