

Note by La Voz de Aztlan:

The following is a response by Irma "Citlalmina" Muniz, wife of Ramsey Muniz, concerning commentary made by Jose Angel Gutierrez during a recent interview by Michelle Melendez of the Star-Telegram of Forth Worth, Texas. Ramsey Muniz was a principal leader of La Raza Unida Party in Texas and its candidate for governor in 1972 and 1974. La Voz de Aztlan believes that Ramsey was a victim of COINTELPRO type operations by the FBI and the DEA, operations that were ultimately successful in destroying La Raza Unida Party as a whole. The "War on Drugs" by the CIA, FBI and DEA has in actuality been a "War on La Raza and Blacks." Ramsey Muniz was framed by the DEA and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. He is presently incarcerated at Leavenworth Federal Prison in Kansas.

Family of Ramiro "Tezcatlipoca" Muniz Respond to Jose Angel Gutierrez



Jose Angel Gutierrez was recently interviewed by the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. In that interview he made malicious accusations about Ramsey Muniz which were without merit or justification. In doing so, he has offended my husband, Ramsey, AND my family.

In the interview, he was asked how he got interested in obtaining counter-intelligence program surveillance reports. He replied, "The interest and scholarship of government surveillance of community groups began in 1976 with the arrest of Ramsey Muniz. We were convinced then that he was a target of surveillance, and he was. We were not convinced that he was guilty of any conspiracy, and unfortunately, we were wrong. But that spurred the interest. I began under the Freedom of Information Act, collecting material on MAYO,

Mexican American Youth Organization, the Raza Unida Party and then every other group that I could think of. And I have the largest collection of any researcher that I know of on almost every group and every leader you can think of."

That statement makes me ask who Jose Angel Gutierrez represents. Does he truly represent the people, or does he represent the government? Why has he never contacted Ramsey or my family for explanations or information? Why is he relying on counter-intelligence program reports and not asking for OUR evidence? Why has he never contacted Dick DeGuerin, the attorney who defended Ramsey? Dick DeGuerin is a renown criminal defense attorney from Houston. He has always respected and defended Ramsey, and has argued before the courts that Ramsey is a government target and political prisoner.

I personally approached Jose Angel during a State Convention of the Mexican American Democrats, telling him that the government had framed Ramsey, and that we were in need of his assistance. His response to me was that he would never help Ramsey. Once again, I ask the question -- WHO does Jose Angel represent?

We have evidence to show that the DEA created a false scenario to entrap Ramsey. We have trial testimony from witnesses (that we did not even know), who stated that what DEA Agent Kimberly Elliott accused Ramsey of was NOT true. I guess that this kind of evidence is not important to Jose Angel Gutierrez.

Whenever you read treacherous remarks that a person makes about another, remember to consider the source and the motive. How easy and heartless it is for someone to incriminate the truthfulness, courage, and sacrifice of someone who is already imprisoned for life without parole.

Though incarcerated, Ramsey Muniz continues with an indigenous historic, cultural and spiritual struggle, assuring his people that the true political concept of the Raza Unida Party has never died or diminished.

Irma "Citlalmina" Muniz



HOME

October 18, 2000

Interview of La Raza Unida Party Founder
Jose Angel Gutierrez

By Michelle Melendez
Star-Telegram

La Raza Unida's founder ruminates on how things -- including his role -- have changed and remained the same

ARLINGTON, TEXAS -- How does an old-school Chicano militant retool himself to operate in a society devoid of large-scale protests, boycotts and third-party political takeovers?

If you are Jose Angel Gutierrez, who founded La Raza Unida Party in 1970 and became one of the chief ideologues of the Chicano Movement, you don't become an assimilation-oriented "Hispanic."

That would be selling out, says Gutierrez, 55, who was born in South Texas, where the Raza Unida Party was strongest.

Instead of calling himself a "Hispanic" and trying to ascend corporate ladders, Gutierrez continues to identify with poor Mexicans and to advocate for their political sovereignty in the United States.

Gutierrez is allying himself with recent Mexican immigrants who he says are culturally and demographically reclaiming parts of the United States that Chicanos call Aztlan.

"I plan to be centrally involved," Gutierrez said. "We can't keep pushing Chicano stuff. It doesn't resound with the Mexicans. I'm having to relearn and retrain myself."

Where xenophobes see brown hordes invading the United States, Gutierrez sees opportunity. In a recent interview at the University of Texas at Arlington, where he is a professor, he talks about the political future of Mexicans living in the United States.

What follows is a transcript of an interview he gave to 'Star-Telegram writer Michelle Melendez last weekend.

Q: What are you doing now?

Gutierrez: I'm a full-time professor at University of Texas at Arlington in the Department of Political Science. I run occasionally, part time, the Greater Dallas Foundation. I oversee and supervise my law office -- the Legal Center of Jose Angel Gutierrez. I'm involved with CIME [the Spanish acronym for International Convention of Mexicans living in the Exterior]. I'm involved with Mexican American Democrats . . . I must give 30 to 40 presentations a year on college campuses and universities, and another 30 to 40 to community groups . . .

Oct. 14 I'll be one of the speakers demanding amnesty in Washington, D.C. I'm a frequent panelist on radio and television programs.

I write a bunch. My last book came out in '98 -- 'The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal.' I just finished a translation of the autobiography of Reies Lopez Tijerina that will be coming out soon. I finished expansion and revision of the 'Gringo Manual on How to Handle Mexicans' that's coming out in the next few months and working on the 'Chicano Manual on How to Handle Gringos.' I'm just finishing right now, almost as we speak, the book on Mexican-American leadership of elected officials in Texas. . . . And I'm starting a book on the federal surveillance of Reies Lopez Tijerina and the land recovery movement in New Mexico, and I'm trying to begin work on narratives or 'testimonios' of women political leaders, Chicanas in Texas . . .

Q: Did the Chicano Movement end completely, or has it evolved into something new?

Gutierrez: As a social protest movement, I think it ended. You don't see much direct action -- any manifestation of that. As an idea, as a process, as an ideology, as a generation, it continues. Of course we're all getting older. It's been supplemented by at least two more generations -- the Hispanic generation and now the ñ or the X generation in English. But I think pretty much people still feel that the issues we addressed have not been remedied. The few remedies we were able to obtain are being taken away without so much as a major protest -- some minor whimpering, but no major protest. I'd say we are retrogressing.

Q: If the main goal then was to reclaim Aztlan and control all the institutions of civil society, what is the main goal now?

Gutierrez: I think it is still the same thing. You hear the Hispanic Republicans talk about the same thing. They want to have a voice in the Republican Party. They want to run for office. They are running for office and getting elected. It's amazing to see that this idea has even been co-opted by the Republicans. They want Chicanos and Chicanas in control of Chicano and Chicana areas, and they want to lead white people, which is the most remarkable thing of all.

The Hispanic Democrats and Mexican-American Democrats and Tejano Democrats, synonymous in Texas, they are doing the same thing, except through the Democratic Party, and they want to continue to accept white leadership of the Democratic Party.

The few Chicanos and Chicanas that are involved in those efforts still talk about Aztlan, but in different words -- taking over where we are the majority, which is basically the same agenda that we had back then, and people are seeking to portray us as being a very vital component in the electoral strategy of the major presidential candidates. We've got people running in statewide offices that we never had before. In Colorado getting elected, in California getting elected, in New Mexico getting elected. In Texas, they were getting elected.

Then we had a fiasco here with [former Attorney General] Dan Morales and [former Supreme Court Justice] Raul Gonzales, Henry Cisneros, although Cisneros, of the three, is trying to rehabilitate himself at the moment. He may come back. But we've lost the major statewide leadership. They've tried, which to me is an affirmation that they are still believing that Chicanos ought to govern in Chicano areas historically and traditionally.

Q: Why and how do you distinguish between Hispanics and Chicano/Mexicanos? Is it a generational difference or more than that?

Gutierrez: Ideology. It happens to be coincidental with generations from my perspective.

. . . Each generation adds something and is known for something and characterized by a certain posture. We were as Chicanos in the late '60s, '70s and into the early '80s, then replaced by our children, who became "Hispanics," who are now being replaced by their children, our grandchildren -- the ñ generation. That's what I think is happening. But it is not a neat compartmentalization. . . . Doesn't happen when you turn 40. I've had students here who've become Chicano as a result of my classes who had been Latino or Hispanic. And vice versa, I've known Chicanos my age who have become Hispanic.

Q: How are Mexican immigrants of today different from Mexican immigrants of decades ago?

Gutierrez: They are different in one salient aspect. That is, they are keeping their Mexicanness. You know, some of the first waves of Mexican migrants -- and I choose to use the word 'migrants' specifically because I think we are just moving within our own homeland -- in the early 1900s were political refugees. They had no thought like the European immigrants of wanting to leave Mexico and come to the U.S. permanently. They only came to the U.S. to avoid the [Mexican] civil war and go back, but they never did.

Other groups came -- for example, the Bracero Program from 1942 to 1964. They were contracted labor. They also didn't plan to stay, but the work conditions and the employment relationship caused them to jump the contract and blend into our community, and a lot of them stayed.

Economics continues to push people out of Mexico. Jobs and the addiction [that] agribusiness and the entire service industry has for cheap labor are pull factors that bring Mexicans here to this very day. Last weekend, Congress [studied] . . . a new guest worker program. The Mexicanos that are coming today, even though they are political refugees and migrants returning to their homeland, are keeping their Mexicanness more so than anybody else. They are recreating Mexico here.

I think they are doing it because of the sheer numbers. They feel comfortable being Mexican among other Mexicans. That is to say, a person can shop at Elrods in Arlington and feel they are in a Mexican grocery store. They can walk the streets in Oak Cliff, Dallas, and think they are in another part of Mexico. And this phenomenon is replicated in Chicago, Denver, LA, certainly certain places in Albuquerque, especially the South Valley. They are comfortable being Mexican, whereas prior generations, we were uncomfortable being Mexican.

And prior to us, it was dangerous being Mexican. You know there was a lot of violence and homicide of innocent Mexicans for years, decades here in Texas at the hands of the Texas Rangers and other individuals, just like there is today. We hear of the violence committed, especially along the Arizona border. We hear of violence on farms and ranches committed by unscrupulous ranchers. And we know that this year alone, upwards of 400 people have died trying to eke out an existence by coming to the U.S. in that migration. So it's still dangerous. But not as much for those who survive.

Q: What is irredentism [ethnic nationalism], and what evidence do you see that it is happening?

Gutierrez: The evidence is their display of their Mexicanness. It's not unusual now to see a pickup truck with the last name splattered across the back windshield. People are dressing just like they dress in Guanajuato, and Jalisco. You go to Kmart and Mexicans are yelling from one aisle to the other in 'Español,' whereas prior generations would shut up. The minute there was an Anglo present, they wouldn't speak Spanish so as not to

offend, or to draw looks or draw attention.

These folks now are engaged in active political activity in the U.S. which is unprecedented. They are truly binational citizens. It's not uncommon to see undocumented Mexicans protesting in front of INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] in downtown Dallas. We've heard of the wonderful success in the labor struggle of undocumented and resident alien janitors in Chicago, LA and Dallas. Currently at UT-Austin campus, that's who is leading the fight . . .

These people also are taking on the Mexican government. We saw them go after Zedillo, President Zedillo's policy of a high tariff on importation of vehicles during Christmas of 1999, and successfully make him retreat on that proposal. That's the first time that I know of that an exterior group has been able to lobby and impact public policy in Mexico.

They also have now gotten the right to vote along the border. They have also now gotten dual citizenship. They have also gotten the right to elect a representative to represent 18 million Mexicans residing in the U.S. in the Mexican Congress in Mexico City as of Sept. 1, 2000. That truly is being a binational person.

Lastly, they are in total opposite position than the Chicano generation, who only wanted to carve out half of [19th-century Mexico] as an entity, a slot. These folks want it all. They want to recreate all of Mexico and join all of Mexico into one. And they are going to do that, even if it's just demographically, or even if it's in conjunction with Hispanic Republicans, Mexican American Democrats or Chicano activists, joining the overwhelming Mexicanos. They are going to have political sovereignty over the Southwest and many parts of the Midwest.

Lastly, their numbers are just overwhelming. There are now more Mexicanos [new immigrants] in many places than there are Chicanos and Hispanics in many places. They outnumber those groups. So their presence is going to be pervasive and hegemonic.

Q: Who are the leaders of the Chicano/Mexicano community today? Why is there a lack of leadership, and what can be done to change that?

Gutierrez: Oh, there is no lack of leadership. In fact, that's where it is coming from. And this is not unlike what has happened in the past. As you may know, I've conducted 157 ethnographic interviews with public figures of Mexican-American background in Texas in the last three years. And one of the most surprising things to me is to find that the majority of the activists were first-generation. The other surprising find is that every 10th one, and this is a rough calculation, is naturalized.

The first one that comes to mind is Victor Treviño, a constable in Houston, who is probably the most well known and at the moment most popular elected official in Harris County, which is the largest concentration of Mexicanos right now in Texas.

Lydia Camarillo (**Editor's note: She goes by Mrs. Lydia Cohen in different circles**) first-generation, and she just became the CEO, or was the CEO, for the National Democratic Convention . . . Our leadership is going to come from these Mexicano groups, not the Hispanic and not the ñ and not the Chicano generations. This is the biggest pool, one.

Second, they are everywhere. . . . The Mexicano population is exceeding the Chicano population in places like Fort Worth, Arlington, Dallas, etc. . . . There are many groups in Dallas alone -- at least 15, 16 groups of immigrants. We've got the Casa Guanajuato,

Casa Zacatecas, Jalisco. The governor-elect of Chiapas was just here . . . reaching out to the Chiapanecos that are here. [Mexican President-elect] Vicente Fox, when he was running, came here to Dallas repeatedly because this is the largest concentration of people from Guanajuato living in the U.S. -- close to a quarter-million or 300,000.

They are organized, and they are pressing their issues. There is a national group called CIME . . . in the U.S. There is also Coordinadora 2000 that is planning a demonstration in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 14 demanding amnesty. And there are many other groups that are Mexican-led. Chicano groups, the first one that comes to mind is Roberto Alonzo, who has been providing leadership from the Mexican American Democrats in coalition with these Mexican groups.

Q: What is keeping the Chicano/Mexicano community from wielding political power?

Gutierrez: The reasons are complex. Groups with higher education, higher age level and more income tend to vote more often. And of course, we're just the opposite. We're poor, less educated and less wealthy than just about anybody else -- with a few exceptions. So we tend to vote less, and the stereotype persists that we don't vote.

The truth of the matter is, we can't vote. Almost half of our population is too young, ineligible to even register. One half of the remaining half is undocumented, maybe resident alien or totally illegal and present. But they are not eligible to become citizens and become eligible to vote, although that is changing as of Proposition 187 in California. Since '94 we've been seeing a large increase, a dramatic increase in the rate of naturalization and seeking citizenship on the part of Mexicans. So the picture is improving.

It takes about 300 persons of Mexican ancestry to equal the voting strength of 100 Anglo- or European-Americans. The 200 is for African-Americans, who are not as young as we are, but younger than whites. They may be about as poor as we are, but they have smaller families and their income goes a little further, and they are better educated than we are. So it takes about 200 African-Americans to equal 100 white Americans. So I just conveniently use: 100 whites is equal to 200 blacks and 300 browns.

Q: Does it take an atmosphere like that which existed in California during Proposition 187 and Proposition 227 and the like to galvanize the Mexicano community to get involved politically? [Prop 187 sought unsuccessfully to deny health care, education and social services to undocumented immigrants. Prop 227 ended bilingual education.]

Gutierrez: I believe so, because look at the love affair between, quote, Hispanics in Texas and Gov. [George W.] Bush. They think he walks on water. And they tend to replicate the vote they gave him in 1998 for the second term, when 47 to 49 percent of all Hispanics voted for Bush. Now, they didn't vote for all the other Republican nominees. But they did vote for Bush. And Bush is no [former California Gov.] Pete Wilson. He's actually gone out and said favorable things to the Hispanic community. And in Texas at least, people are satisfied with that symbolic rhetoric as evidence of compassionate conservatism because his record doesn't show that same caring and affection and love for Hispanic people, particularly in education, that he touts so much as his biggest accomplishment.

Q: When and why did you come to Dallas? Was one of the primary reasons to force the issue of single-member districts?

Gutierrez: No, I wish I could tell you now that I was that visionary. Although I do have a T-shirt given to me when I reached 50 some years back that says, "The older I get, the better I was." No, I came to Dallas to go to law school. I was offered a partial scholarship at Southern Methodist University, and incidentally Southern Methodist is typical of the lack of commitment by institutions. They give half scholarships to Hispanics going to law school and full scholarships to African-Americans, whereas demographically, the future is with Hispanics. Yet both groups are as deserving of getting full scholarships, and SMU can afford even more. So I was given half a scholarship and ran out of money. They increased tuition costs, so I had to go to the University of Houston.

As soon as I finished law school at age 41, I came back to Dallas because I saw the promise. I saw the pictures of the numbers coming, and here is where the powerful white players are -- the Perots, the Hunts, the Hutchisons. Those kinds of individuals are here, and I wanted to be here to address those kinds of issues. This is kind of like a frontier.

And to quote the chamber of commerce rhetoric, Dallas is a world-class city. You meet people coming through here or going from here. The governor-elect of Chiapas, he's not going to San Antonio or Houston. He's coming here. Vicente Fox came here. He didn't go to the Valley or El Paso or Albuquerque . . . This is a world-class city, and leadership was lacking. Most of the leadership at that time in '86 was coming from the federal employees sector, and at that time they were prohibited from political activity by the Hatch Act. That's not the case now, and of course now they have been supplanted by Mexican leadership and the Chicano and Hispanic entrepreneurs who are involved with the Hispanic Chamber.

I did get involved in opening up structurally the system. I was involved with the Greater Dallas Foundation, which used to be known as the Texas Rural Legal Aid Foundation, and we did force the funding and therefore the issue of single-member districts to get representation for persons of Mexican ancestry here in Dallas. Because of that, we got the seat on the community college board, the seat in the Legislature, the additional seat on the City Council, the additional seats on the school board, and JP positions and constable positions. And we will continue that fight in the 2001 redistricting reapportionment discussions that are coming up.

Q: In your opinion, why are there so few Hispanic elected officials in Fort Worth? None on the City Council, a few on the school board and county government, none in the Legislature.

Gutierrez: I don't know why currently that is the case. I do know that [City Councilman] Jim Lane and Rep. Lon Burnam are doing the best they can representing those communities. It would be better to have continued having someone like Luis Zapata on the City Council. But it's this generational thing. The voting public thinks a person has been there too long, as was the case with Luis Zapata. He was the first and most effective in creating change. Then, after he was defeated, his successor didn't do much to carry on that legacy and was voted out.

Zapata has tried to run for state representative, but clearly his time is over. He wasn't elected. I ran in '93 for the U.S. Senate and didn't get much further than sixth place, so clearly my time is over . . .

I also think the Fort Worth Mexicano community didn't realize that they were cannibalizing each other. They did run against each other, and the Anglo who ran became a compromise choice. So Jim Lane was able to get in, and Lon Burnam was able to get in. Once they become incumbents, it's pretty hard to dislodge them.

You look at Manuel Valdez, the JP -- he continues to win re-election, and maybe he ought to consider running for a countywide position. You've got a couple members on the school board. You've got another on the community college board. Clearly, it's available. The coalitions that could be put together, the combinations that could be put together. These others have done it . . .

The other problem is that you've got two major concentrations in Fort Worth, on the north side and the south side. Fort Worth is more segregated than Dallas . . . The districts are not drawn to maximize the north-side and south-side voting strength. It would be pretty hard to draw those kinds of districts unless you drew them as parallelograms running north and south, and maybe that will happen in redistricting coming up. . . .

Third, you really don't have a lot of institutional support for emerging leadership in Fort Worth. . . . But the numbers certainly indicate they will be able to elect their own soon if they get busy, come together collectively to press for those districts in 2001.

Q: What are the challenges of electing Hispanics to represent Mexicanos, which is the group that is amassing? Do they connect? Why or why not?

Gutierrez: That is the gist of the problem. Hispanics tend to run away from their Mexicanness, and these Mexicans today are embracing their Mexicanness. That's a hard bridge to walk across. Leadership in our community, like any other racial and ethnic community, demands that you be rooted firmly in the community you purport to represent and lead. And at the same time be able to advocate and press the host community for the interests of yours. But you can't get too far out there because the minute you are perceived as being more representative of the power structure to the community, you'll stop being effective as a leader. So that is a tension that is there.

The Hispanics need to ride the wave of the Mexicano population, and they are doing it. That's why everybody quotes these figures -- we're going to be No. 1, we're going to be the majority, meaning they [Hispanics] are. But they have to be tied, got to have real nexus, real vital linkages to this Mexicano community, whether it be in business, arts or education and politics and labor. Otherwise, it's going to be empty, and it will catch up with them.

The Mexicanos at this point, excepting the ones becoming naturalized, need to get on the stick, quick, and get more of themselves eligible as citizens or invest in the other nonpolitical kinds of activities of fund raising, issue advocacy, organization and mobilization of resources to help those that are in the electoral arena.

Q: Do you see Mexicans allying with blacks or whites in some cities? Which is better for the Mexicans, and why?

Gutierrez: We've had coalitions at times. I think the Chicano generation is probably the last on the national level on the civil rights agenda. . . . We started breaking ranks on the issue of immigration. Blacks began to withhold that support for immigration, which is our No. 1 civil rights issue and human rights issue. . . . We see it as our right to take care of our families and move as circumstances dictate. . . . There is no history of relations between blacks and browns.

Q: A recent Knight Ridder poll showed that Hispanics have the same concerns as mainstream Anglos but that their participation in politics and elections is relatively low. Why is it so hard to capture the Mexicanohicano vote, or is it? Did La Raza Unida master the art of grassroots campaigning? What lessons could campaigns

learn from LRU?

Gutierrez: The Knight Ridder poll is not surprising. All people want the same things. . . . When you transfer that over to politics, we don't trust them [Democrats]. This has been a one-party state forever until 1998 was the first time we had a really contested ballot across the state. . . . In the '70s with the Raza Unida Party, we contested, but mostly in South Texas. That was the first challenge to the Democratic Party hegemony. So we provided a choice. We trusted ourselves.

The Anglos have never been counted on to do the right thing. They keep segregating. They keep discriminating. They keep putting us at the end of the line.

That's what the battle has been about -- the allocation of resources and making the right policy decisions. We always come last. Why? Because politically, we're not at the table. Why should we keep voting for people who are not Mexican if what counts here is to be at the table? You have to be present, voicing your opinion, demanding your share of bucks on the commissioners court, on the school board, in the city council, in the state legislature, in the U.S. Senate, and we're not there.

So until we get there, we're not going to have our share. Whites will not deliver. They'll deliver to themselves first, or the group that makes the most noise, and historically, in Texas, it's been the African-American. That's been the most favored minority in Texas and nationally, and rightfully so, because they have been organized and they have been at the table, generally.

Now in South Texas and the border, it's a different story, and across the Southwest. And that's why the Raza Unida Party was so successful. We were running for ourselves. We were running with ourselves. We were running our own institution, our own political party to capture control for our own people and deliver, and we did.

The voter registration rates went up; voter turnout was spectacular. And that's why we won in many, many places. . . . And that's why the Democratic Party created the Mexican American Democrats to destroy Raza Unida Party, and they did. We were jailed on bogus drug charges, and we were jailed on legitimate drug charges, particularly [Raza Unida Party gubernatorial candidate] Ramsey Muniz. That was a disastrous blow to the party. . . . And the Democrats co-opted our issues, our leaders. And yet, even though they co-opted those things, they didn't step forward and make them the No. 1 issues.

So we need to run our own candidates to draw the people, to interest them to register and to vote. We've got to give them a purpose, which is what the Mexicanos are doing today.

When they talk about recreating another Mexico by their actions, they are encouraging people to feel comfortable with their Mexicanness. That's why it's the basis of a new ideology. . . . This is making people more bold, creating a sense of community, promoting nationalism on a greater scale than we ever dreamed of. These people are saying, "We're here. We belong here. We're going to stay here," even though they are not citizens. They are truly binational people. Truly a new era, a new dawn is here.

Q: Do you find it ironic that you have become an adviser to the Mexican American Democrats when in the 1970s that organization sought to destroy you and the LRU? Why are you involved with MAD today?

Gutierrez: Yeah, it is an irony, and things do change. If you would have told me that I was going to be doing some of that, I wouldn't have believed you.

But I was a Democrat before I was Raza Unida, and I was a Democrat in Oregon after Raza Unida. I ran for state representative in Oregon as a Democrat. Then I came here and ran as a Democrat for U.S. Senate and joined MAD as early as 1986 . . .

A couple of years ago I was the state treasurer of Mexican American Democrats, because what has happened is that group now is split in two. You've got the Tejano Democrats who are the power brokers, the old-style politicians who want to deliver the Mexican vote to the white candidates running in the Democratic Party.

Then you have the Mexican American Democrats, under the able leadership of Roberto Alonzo, who has tried to represent community interests and reach out to others to increase the number of Mexicano elected officials and to get people to become U.S. citizens to vote and participate. That's why he's involved in the immigration issues. I agree with that, so I joined that and I will continue to do that. Most people who left the Raza Unida Party because they had to back in the '70s became born-again Democrats . . .

So I guess it's the history of the U.S. There's no room here except for the two parties. As Armando Navarro in his latest book on the Raza Unida Party talks about, there's a two-party dictatorship here. Third parties don't succeed. So you have no choice but to join one or the other. So I feel more comfortable with the Democratic Party at the moment because of the context here in Texas and in Dallas . . . Armando Navarro, who just wrote the book about the Raza Unida Party, says his next book is going to be about the possibilities in the future, and he includes a rebirth of the Raza Unida Party as a political party . . . I'm not so sure. I'm reserving judgment, as we say, "Been there, done that." I don't know that in Texas that's viable, because in Texas, we're about to take over the Democratic Party. Why split ourselves in half? . . . In California, that almost has happened . . .

What I really would like to see is a labor party nationally. Maybe we could do that. Because labor is going to be synonymous with Mexican. It's going to be synonymous with poor. It's going to be synonymous with the Southwest and Midwest. We are the new underclass. And that's who needs the advocacy and who needs to be in the front of leading this next civil rights charge.

Q: What role do you see women playing in terms of the political development of the Mexican community?

Gutierrez: For eons, women have never been given credit, and for eons, women have done all the work. In electoral politics, they certainly do all the work. They are the best worker, but it is the male candidate that gets elected and gets all the recognition. . . . All that's changing, and it started changing with the Chicano Movement, where Chicanas got an opportunity. There were structures of opportunity created at that time. Many young Chicanas became leaders, and they got equal footing and equal status with Chicanos . . . We were the first ones to run a woman for lieutenant governor, Alma Canales. We were the first ones to have a woman heading our party. The head of Raza Unida Party at one time was Maria Elena Martinez. The Democrats just did that here in the late '90s with white women leading that party.

As candidates, we've had Chicanas running and getting elected to office way before white women were elected in Texas. In my county was the best example. In Zavala County, when I was county judge, all the other judges of the Raza Unida Party were women.

But today . . . if we look at educational attainment, it is the women, the Chicanas, that are

going to school in greater numbers, and staying in school and finishing school in greater numbers than the Chicano. And this is true also for African-Americans and Anglo-Americans. Asians and Native Americans are not quite there yet. . . . In a decade and a half, two decades at the most, when we reach those majority status numbers, we will be Chicana-led . . . We're going to have a change in leadership. Not only brown over white and black, but female over male. And that subject needs to be explored because just as Anglos have never been taught to be a minority, all males have never been taught to follow the leadership of women. We need a lot of growing in that area.

Q: When and how did you get interested in obtaining counter-intelligence program surveillance reports?

Gutierrez: The interest and scholarship of government surveillance of community groups began in 1976 with the arrest of Ramsey Muniz. We were convinced then that he was a target of surveillance, and he was. We were not convinced that he was guilty of any conspiracy, and unfortunately, we were wrong. But that spurred the interest. I began under the Freedom of Information Act, collecting material on MAYO, Mexican American Youth Organization, the Raza Unida Party and then every other group that I could think of. And I have the largest collection of any researcher that I know of on almost every group and every leader you can think of . . .

Right now, I'm working on the Tijerina documentary. I obtained over the summer a copy for our archives here as well as for the University of New Mexico's Center for Regional Studies, a complete file from the FBI on Cesar Chavez, which has now been made public, and anyone can download that from the FBI Web site. That's 2,012 pages.

I'm going to continue writing in that area, because this is a neglected factor in the political development, organizational development of La Raza in the United States. Sometimes we are too critical and too harsh of our own efforts. We criticize ourselves severely. Some of that is warranted, and some of it is not, because the government has had a big hand in destroying leadership, in disrupting organizations, in discrediting leaders and otherwise destroying all the efforts that people have made to better themselves.

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