



TESTIMONIO DE BERT CORONA:
STRUGGLE IS THE ULTIMATE TEACHER

by Jesús Mena

I first met Bert Corona at a rally in downtown Los Angeles in February of 1971. A coalition of Chicano activists, spearheaded by CASA (Centro de Acción Social Autónoma), had organized the rally to protest the harassment that the Latino population in East Los Angeles was suffering at the hands of the Immigration and Naturalization Authorities. This demonstration marked the first time anyone had tried to mobilize undocumented people in a million street protest. Even the organizers were uncertain as to how massive the turnout would be. Much to everyone's surprise, more than 5,000 East Los Angeles residents gathered at the corner of Olympic and Broadway on that sunny Saturday morning. Bert Corona, founder of CASA, spoke angrily to the gathering at the steps of City Hall where he documented the abuses of civil rights that the INS was guilty of. A motivating orator, Corona received a thunderous applause when he proclaimed that the Spanish-speaking population would not sit idly by as their rights were trampled upon.

Corona has been a public spokesperson for the Latino social movements in this city since the days of the infamous Zoot Suit Riots. His persistence in the struggle for equality for the Latino population has earned him a massive following in the barrios of East Los Angeles. His influence, however, extends beyond the Spanish-speaking community, having been a union organizer since he was a teenager. Despite the broad base of support he enjoys, Corona has never run for public office, choosing instead to

influence local politics through periodic shows of force on the streets. Undoubtedly, he has been one of the most prominent men in L.A. politics over the decades.

Getting an interview with Bert Corona requires a great deal of patience. While the man is 63 years old, he keeps a schedule that would tire a man thirty years his junior. Only when I combined the interview with a social gathering was I able to spend the time with him necessary in learning about his complex life's story.

As I sat across from him at the dinner table, I was struck by his relatively short stature. Undoubtedly, his eloquence as a public speaker gives one the illusion that he is a much larger man. Yet, the strength of presence that he projects as an orator is apparent in his hand gestures which he uses skillfully to emphasize his comments. His bushy white hair helps to dramatize his emphatic voice that never falters, flowing smoothly from English into Spanish and back again.

Corona was an inspiration to those of us who were active in the Chicano movement in the seventies when his charismatic personality consistently motivated both his followers and his opponents into action. While most of my activist contemporaries have dropped out of the movement altogether since that time, Corona seems to have found the secret of longevity in the politics of protest. Understandably, my first question concerned the reason behind his consistency in struggling for justice for the Latino population.

Corona insists that to understand the motivation behind his activities, one has to know the Corona family history. Bert Corona was born in 1918 in El Paso, Texas into a recently immigrated family that had a rich history as political activists in Mexico.

who had fought with Benito Juárez in the war against the French came to settle in this state where they just stole whatever land they wanted. That's how my family lost their land. The hierarchy that these generals formed was very powerful and they succeeded in forcing most of the small settlers from the foothills into the higher Sierras. Some of the people wound up in land that was rocky. It was very difficult to survive on this type of land.

But the poorer families began to fight back. They organized guerrilla bands that raided the large landowners. These bands were led by such figures as Enrique Parra and the original Pancho Villa—not the more commonly known Villa from the Mexican Revolution. The federal troops were helpless against these indigenous fighters because the fighters knew the terrain so well. It was their land to begin with. Whenever the troops dared to pursue a raiding party into the Sierras, they were usually ambushed.

In 1892, after many years of violence, that government proposed that a peace 'mass' be held so that some settlement could be arrived at. The mass was convened at the village of Temochic by a priest who had the confidence of the mountain people. And so many of the resistance leaders came down to bargain in good faith. While the peace mass was in progress, federal troops surrounded the village and set fire to the church. Hundreds of people were killed. From that point on, my family was on the run.

My family went to hide in the Cañón del Cobre in Chihuahua where the Tarahumara Indians lived. My grandmother talked very vividly about those times. My clan lived there for 5 or 6 years and my grandmother came to speak their language fluently. Until the day she died, she insisted that we were Tarahumara.

The fighting against the hacendados continued into this century, leading up to the Mexican Revolution. My father joined Pancho Villa's forces at a young age—about 13 or 14. He fought with him for many years and was finally killed when some of Villa's forces were ambushed in Chapingo in 1924.

In many ways my family was victimized by the Mexican Revolution. They lost their land, their cattle and were finally forced to seek refuge in the United States. Yet, my family never took it as a defeat. They always spoke of the principles that we fought for and continued to believe in the cause, confident that it would eventually triumph.

Though we fled from Mexico, we actually carried the Revolution with us. There were many refugee families in El Paso other than ourselves. They were either friends or foes—they either fought on the same side as my father or fought against him. And we related to these people in this fashion. So, as you can see, politics has always been an important influence in my life.

Corona's concern with politics as a youngster led him to choose law as his career. He came to Los Angeles in 1936 at the age of 18, to attend the University of Southern California.

I had a so-called scholarship. They didn't give you money in those days. They just gave you a job so you could work while you were attending school. I was assigned to the Brunswig Drug company, a large laboratory of some thirteen or fourteen hundred workers. As a matter of fact, the building we worked in is still there at La Plazita, near the Pico House. I hadn't worked there three or four months when some organizers from the International Longshoremen's Association of the A.F. of L. came to our workplace. They wanted to organize us into a local. So I became active and we began the long process of convincing our fellow workers to join the union.

The dockworkers were on strike at the time. It was a very violent struggle in which the bosses were trying to destroy the Longshoremen's union altogether. The newspapers never mentioned the violence, except once, I think.

Sporadic disorders flared along the Los Angeles Harbor waterfront yesterday and last night in advance of the threatened strike due at midnight tonight.

—Los Angeles Times, October 28, 1936.

The Longshoremen badly needed the support of inland warehouses in order to win the strike. Since the union was short on organizers, those of us active at the Brunswig plant decided to help out in recruiting new locals inland. We formed what were known as flying squads. Our responsi-



National officers of the Spanish-speaking People's Congress founded May, 1938 in Los Angeles.

bility was to visit workers at other warehouses early in the morning before our own shift began. Then, after work and on the weekends, we would join the picket lines on the docks. Young people nowadays don't understand how united the workers were in those days. We didn't go because we had to. We went because it mattered to us even if it was dangerous business. The police attacked us on several occasions, swinging their clubs as they attacked the picket line. They tried to destroy our spirit. But we held out and after 99 days of fighting, we won. We did it.

In the spring of 1937, the Brunswig Drug Company was successfully unionized. Corona was elected Recording Secretary for the new local, only to become its president two years later at the age of 21. Corona quickly came to realize that union politics could be fraught with danger.

The national leadership of the International Longshoremen Association was very corrupt. They had not had an election since 1922. All of the important decisions were made in New York and imposed on the membership in the locals. Understandably, we often had heated debates in our local meetings that turned into brawls. It was madness. The way the local leadership settled the arguments was by the issuing of the union books. You see, the union had a hiring hall on the docks. In order to be assigned to a job, you had to report to the hall and present your union book, showing that you were a member in good standing. Well, whenever you disagreed with the leadership in those local meetings, you were not issued a book and therefore could not get a job. You can imagine how frustrating it was.

In 1937, we decided to deal with the situation by running a democratic and progressive slate in our local. Since the leadership in New York was backed by mafia elements like Frank Scalise and Joseph Anastacia, they saw our slate as a threat to their power. They sent in goons to intimidate our people. When the elections took place, our slate won but the national union refused to recognize us.

We had pitched warfare with the national leadership for about a year after the election. Even though they did not recognize our elected officials, they still sent in gangster types to try to collect our dues and to relay orders from the national headquarters. When we refused to comply unless they recognized us, the goons would try to physically evict us from our headquarters. Vicious fistfights broke out. We were forced to post armed guards at our office on Second Street and Los Angeles, twenty-four hours a day. The harassment continued for almost a year. The thugs would often wait in their cars outside our union meetings or around the plant and, whenever they saw any of our people by themselves, they would jump out of their cars, strike the person with a sap and run from the scene. You know what a sap is? It's a rubber bag filled with sand. They preferred those to sticks because they made less noise but caused serious injuries. Many of our members were beaten up.

After a year of this violence, we couldn't take it anymore. We decided to withdraw from the I.L.A. altogether. We had a convention in 1938 and formed the International Longshoreman and Warehouse Union Independent, affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.). We elected Harry Bridges as our West Coast Regional Director. We were finally able to get to the business of organizing workers rather than just fighting the goons.

Corona's union activities took him away from his studies and he dropped out of college altogether. He went on to become a prominent organizer in the CIO, helping to organize the Spanish-speaking workers in low paying jobs such as scrap iron junk yards, canneries and warehouses through the end of the 30's and early 40's. His work with the lowest paid workers gave Corona an insight into the social conditions that Latinos lived in. Corona was saddened when he related how little things have changed.



Even though things have improved for our people over the years, the social problems remain the same. Racism has always existed in this area. There was racism on the docks. The Black and Mexican workers formed gangs and were forced to segregate themselves from the rest of the crew.

The population as a whole was segregated. The barrios were like islets in Los Angeles. There were places like Glendale where Mexicans were not tolerated. There were no barbed wire fences keeping us out of those areas but Blacks and Mexicans who were not servants were escorted by the police out of Glendale if they were found on the streets after dark. We got similar treatment in Santa Monica as well as in other places.

There was also segregation in the theaters and the motion picture houses. The large Paramount Ballroom, for example, was set up so that Friday was Mexican night and Saturday was Anglo night. It was a popular place where the big band sounds performed—like Glen Miller and performers like that.

We experienced a great deal of discrimination on a daily basis. I remember an incident when a friend of mine and I went to the Bimini Swimming Pool on Third and Vermont. As a matter of fact, I went with Henry Nava, brother of the former Ambassador to Mexico, Julian Nava. We got in line to pick up our towels, locks, etc. I was ahead of Henry and went on in, thinking that he was right behind me. When I got into the gym, I noticed that Henry was missing. I went back to the line and found the attendant asking him for his birth certificate. They were threatening to detain him if he could not show proof of citizenship. Well, he was so outraged, he was almost in tears.

Perturbed by the memories, Corona stroked his bushy hair as he leaned forward to the edge of his seat. The wrinkles on his forehead became more pronounced as his recall continued to paint vivid pictures of the injustices he has spent more than forty years of his life trying to eradicate.

There were many cases of police brutality, many

documented cases of beatings in jail. The maladministration of justice was certainly a key social problem. There was brutality in the schools with many cases of severe beatings of the Mexican kids by the coaches and the principals. But I guess the biggest problem for Mexicans was the economic problem. The economic conditions for Mexicans in this city were deplorable.

We represented a smaller portion of the city's population than we do today, about 18% or 19% of the total. Since a large sector of the Mexican population was employed in agriculture, the population fluctuated with the seasons. In the summer our percentage would go down as low as 15% when the people left for the harvest, only to rise to as high as 23-24% in the wintertime. The wages these workers got on the road were barely enough to keep body and soul together. The wages for the Mexicans employed in the city were about as bad. Mexicans worked as janitors, busboys, railroad workers. The ditchdiggers were Mexican as were the cannery workers and the food processors. In general, all of the dirty, seasonal and unsafe jobs were left to the Mexican population. We could be found in the lumber, the chemical mixing rooms, flour and cement mills, the hearths in the steel industry, in the foundries and in the scrap iron industry. The scrap iron industry was especially big in those times because Japan was buying all our scrap iron. That country was at war with China but did not have the steel to build the weapons essential to conduct its offensive. Mexicans have always played a vital role in this city's economy but our economic and political needs have never been fulfilled.

Corona pointed out that the injustices prompted concern in the Catholic Church, the radical groupings, and the Mexican nationalist circles. Yet, because of their disparate interests, it was often difficult to build united protest actions from these forces.

The Citizens Committee for the Defense of Mexican-American Youth, better known as the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee was a classic example of how a united action could be formed to defend our rights. It was the first effort organized by Mexicans themselves to resist the police attack that had been launched against our community.

Throughout the year of 1942, the press had been reporting that East Los Angeles had been experiencing a crime wave involving juvenile gangs. Those of us who lived in the area knew that was not the case. The death of Jose Diaz at the Sleepy Lagoon Ranch was used by the media to prove that Los Angeles was being overrun by Zoot Suit gangs. Jose Diaz was a youngster who had been found dead on a road in the ranch one particular night. He had been run over by a car and was apparently intoxicated when he died. There had been a gang related incident that night in the area but there wasn't any evidence that the death was gang related. Of course, the newspapers reported the death as another gang casualty.

**ONE KILLED AND 10 HURT IN
BOY WAR: BOY GANGS OPERATING
WITHIN THE CITY**

One person dead...another believed dead
...10 others beaten and injured was
the grisly toll early yesterday as juvenile gang
warfare flared anew in Los Angeles County.

—Los Angeles Times, August 3, 1942
(article reporting Jose Diaz's death)

The reporting was terrible. The hysteria the newspapers whipped up was so bad that the soldiers stationed in the area decided it was time to take matters into their own hands. These enlisted men would form caravans that would invade the barrios on weekends and would beat up any kid that they saw on the streets wearing a zoot suit.

Corona recalls the assaults by the soldiers and sailors on the Latino community with a degree of bitterness, contending that they represented the most brutal treatment that any minority has ever received in this country. Time Magazine would concur as it reported in its issue of June 21, 1942:

The police practice was to accompany the caravans (of soldiers and sailors) in police cars, watch the beatings and arrest the victims. The press, with the exception of the *Daily News* and the *Hollywood Citizen News*, helped whip up the mob spirit. And Los Angeles, apparently unaware that it was spawning the ugliest brand of mob action since the coolie race riots of 1870, gave its tacit approval.

Josefina Fierro, a long time agricultural trade union organizer and Secretary of the National Congress of Spanish-speaking People, was the one who called and asked me to help her organize the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee. Even though I did help her in the initial stages of the work, the credit for organizing the committee belongs to Josefina.

Josefina Fierro was a marvelous organizer with a dramatic family history. She was married to a Hollywood writer by the name of John Bright who became one of the Hollywood 10 during the McCarthy inquisitions. Her mother participated in the Mexican Revolution and she was related to the Flores Magon brothers. At the same time, however, she was related to the Amador family, one of the most prominent Mexican families in Los Angeles. They owned the biggest restaurant in Olvera Street—the Amador that was behind the Pico House. But Josefina was a rebel at heart. She remembered her early childhood when her mother had driven a cart from labor camp to labor camp. Her mother would serve food to the farmworkers, would wash clothes for a fee, and would write letters home for those workers who could not write. Inspired by her mother's concern for other people, Josefina dedicated her life to union and political organizing.

The respect that this woman had acquired over the years because of her work became apparent when she undertook the organization of the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee. She was able to put together a coalition that included prominent church leaders as well as Hollywood personalities like Anthony Quinn and Orson Welles in support of the Zoot Suit victims. She gained the endorsement of the Mexican Consulate as well as of the Mexican Chamber of Commerce. She was also able to involve communists, radicals and Blacks in the work of the Committee. With such a broad base of support, the Committee was able to mount a good legal defense and successfully stage demonstrations in support of the defendants. During the trial, for example, the Committee organized a rally at La Plazita that was four blocks long and was one of the largest political gatherings of Mexicans up to that time in Los Angeles.

The Sleepy Lagoon Case had a great deal of impact in Latin America. Most people are not aware of this. At the time of the Zoot Suit Riots, the Allies were already at war with the Nazis. The Axis Powers were trying to win over the allegiance of the Latin American countries. When the riots took place, the Nazis transmitted the news throughout Latin America, broadcasting editorials to whip up resentment towards the United States.



Josefina Fierro, Vice President Wallace, after reaching a settlement concerning Zoot Suit Riots.

In Los Angeles, California, the so-called "City of the Angels," twelve Mexican boys were found guilty today of a single murder and five others were convicted of assault growing out of the same case. The 360,000 Mexicans of Los Angeles are reported up in arms over this Yankee persecution. The concentration camps of Los Angeles are said to be overflowing with members of this persecuted minority. This is justice for you, as practiced by the "Good Neighbor," Uncle Sam, a justice that demands seventeen victims for one crime." (Radio statement broadcast by the Axis powers all over Latin America on January 13, 1943.)

Their tactics were effective. The students in Mexico City, for example, staged a strike in support of the Zoot Suit victims and wound up setting fire to the U.S. Embassy.

The Allies were upset to see such hostility towards the U.S. since they needed the support of the Latin American countries. The European Allies pressured the White House to intervene in the Zoot Suit affair so that some settlement could be reached whereby the Latin American countries would feel that justice had been carried out. Under the international pressure, Vice President Wallace appointed a committee to come to Los Angeles to investigate the matter. By this time the Mexican Consulate was actively involved in the case. They insisted that negotiations had to be carried out with the Mexican government before the matter could be cleared to their satisfaction. Since Josefina had done such a good job on the Defense Committee, she was called on to mediate the negotiations that took place in Mexico City and in Washington. When the mediations were completed, the White House and the War Department sent orders to the Naval Commander and to the Air Force Commander, informing them that they were to keep all soldiers out of the Mexican community or they would face a courtmartial. Now, this is the *real* story of the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee. It's the story of the Mexican community organizing itself and successfully fighting for its rights. It is a far cry from the story that emerges from Luis Valdez's play, *Zoot Suit*.



I must admit that I was very disappointed with Luis Valdez's play. The play implied that it was the Jewish woman, Alice Greenfield McGrath, and not Josefina Fierro, who was the main organizer for the Defense Committee. Alice did work on the Committee but all she did was the secretarial work and she'll be the first to admit it. Instead of concentrating on the community organizing that went into the Defense Committee, Luis chose to present the story of the case as a romance. What's worse is that the romance between Henry Leyvas and Alice Greenfield McGrath never even took place. His portrayal of this romance offended some of the original defendants in the case. Now, there is plenty of room in literature for works that are strictly the product of a writer's imagination, but when one pretends to base a work on historical fact, he has to remain true to the facts. As far as I'm concerned, the case is still open for some decent literary and dramatic treatment.

The intervention of the federal government finally put an end to the racial strife that was blatant in the East Los Angeles barrios throughout the early forties. While locally there was peace, the rest of the world was at war. Incensed by the atrocities that the Nazis were committing in Europe, Corona volunteered for the Air Force in 1941, hoping to be sent to combat duty. Although he graduated from the Santa Anna Air Force Base with honors, he never received his commission.

My history as a political activist followed me into the service. Just weeks before I was to graduate, I was interrogated by Intelligence. They wanted to know my views on Russia, communism and on the labor movement. I answered them the best I could and told them that my biggest concern in life was fighting for democracy. I told them that was why I had volunteered and why I wanted to fight the Nazis. Well, by the time they were finished interrogating me, I was blacklisted. It's the kind of thing that follows you all your life. When I got out of the service, I was surprised to find that even some of my old union co-workers thought I was a political militant. The Merchant and Manufacturer's Association had my name on the blacklist that they kept and so I was unable to find a job.

Blacklisted in the southern California job market, Corona moved to San Francisco where he went to work for his father-in-law, Abraham Taff, who had a small jewelry business.

I have been very fortunate in having both a wife and a father-in-law who sympathized with my activities. I met Blanche on a picket line in 1941. We were married after a brief romance. Her father, Abraham, had been a political activist in the Jewish Bund in Russia that was fighting for freedom against the Russian czar. When I was unable to find employment, Abraham hired me as a traveling salesman. He kept me on payroll, off and on until 1957, even though I never really earned my keep.

I say that I never earned my keep because I was regional organizer at the time for ANMA (National Association of Mexican-Americans) and most of my time on the road was spent organizing local chapters instead of selling like I was supposed to. ANMA was a very significant organization that came into existence in 1948. It was the first group to consciously call itself Mexican, choosing to fight for the right for Mexicans to speak our native language, struggling to preserve our culture. Since I was traveling through the smaller towns in the southwest, most of my work was with migrant workers. We had a broad base of support among the braceros whom we often represented in

negotiations whenever the growers would try to cheat them out of their wages. ANMA was especially significant because it was an organization that flourished during the reactionary McCarthy period. It was one of the few organizations to actually grow in those conditions.

The fifties was a very difficult period for political activists in this country. The prosperity that this country enjoyed after the war made the white workers very content with the status quo, very receptive to the anti-communism of Senator Joseph McCarthy. McCarthy's House on Un-American Activities tried to purge this country of all political dissidents. Anyone who disagreed with the government, no matter how mild his criticism, was subject to persecution. Many of the most prominent Mexican leaders were deported. Josefina Fierro, Refugio Martinez, Armando Davila, all were militant leaders who were deported. And these were people whose documents were in perfectly good order.

I was a little more fortunate. The worst that happened to me was that I was bullied by the FBI. Between 1948 and 1953, I received several letters asking that I present myself before various committees that were investigating subversive activities in the state of California. Since they were not subpoenas, I just ignored them and never bothered to show.

Then in 1953, two FBI agents came to my house. They had been there before but they had never found me home because I was always on the road. So when they came to the door, I let them in. They asked me to give them the names of the leaders in the Mexican community who had communist ties. I told them that I would never give them any names and that they were gravely mistaken in thinking that the communists had an important influence in the Mexican community. They asked me if I was refusing to cooperate. I repeated my statement. They threatened me, telling me they had ways of making people talk and then they left. They continued to make calls for a couple of years but I was never subpoenaed.

Corona found it difficult to survive as a political organizer in this period of political reaction. In 1956 the tough-minded organizer was forced to go into business for himself, opening an emporium of import goods that stocked a variety of exquisite merchandise, from Phillipine carved ivory to Mexican lacquered cabinets.

My business did very well so long as I made it my main concern. When I began my business, the country was in a period of reaction so there was little that a political activist could do. In 1960, however, I became involved with MAPA (Mexican American Political Association).

MAPA evolved out of the Minorities Coordinating Committee that was a part of the Democratic Party. While the Blacks were getting some concessions from the Democrats, we, the Mexicans, were being defeated on every resolution we put forward. So we decided to form an independent organization. After several unsuccessful attempts, we were finally able to put together a regional convention in Fresno in 1961 where we elected now-Congressman Edward Roybal as president of the newly formed MAPA. In 1961 I was the Regional Organizer for northern California which meant that I again had to travel from town to town. Needless to say, it became especially difficult to run my enterprise when I was elected President of MAPA in 1965.

By 1965, I had pretty much closed my business. I had suffered some terrible economic losses. I had been forced to sell a house I had built in Contra Costa County because I was unable to make the payments. I then built another house in the Oakland Hills on some land I had acquired when my business was doing well. The bank foreclosed on this house as well because my financial situation was so bad that I was unable to keep up with the payments. My wife had to get a job in 1962 as a legal secretary to keep us going. I would say that my wife supported us from '62 to '70. As I've already said, I've been very fortunate to have married such an understanding woman.

In 1966 MAPA became involved with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers. Chavez had initiated an aggressive organizing drive that year and we took it upon ourselves to support his movement, especially in the urban areas where he had no base and we did. But as we began to work more closely with Cesar, we found that we had some principled differences. The main point of disagreement centered on the undocumented worker issue. It was a difficult problem because the undocumented people were very much a part of the workforce that wanted a union but, at the same time, whenever there was a strike, they were the ones who were used to break the strike. The issue came to a head in the 1968 Coachella grape strike. Even though that particular strike had been well organized, it lost a great deal of strength when the INS permitted the growers to openly bring scabs in from Mexico. The reaction of the UFW was very primitive. They decided that the best way to deal with the undocumented scabs was to intimidate them. So they rented some airplanes and they would fly over the fields about 200 feet from the ground and they would scream at the people through loudspeakers:

*SALGANSE DE AQUI!! HAY VIENE LA MIGRA!!
GET OUT OF THE FIELDS!! THE MIGRA IS COMING!!*

Well, some of us could not stomach this. How could we go around threatening our own people as if we were the very authorities who persecuted the Mexican population? It was the kind of mistreatment that we had been fighting against for years and yet here we were doing exactly the same thing.

So in the fall of 1968, those of us who were unhappy with the UFW policy on the undocumented workers had a series of meetings in Los Angeles. Most of the people who participated in these meetings were primarily labor organizers who understood the complicated nature of the problem. It didn't take long to come to an agreement. The only practical solution was to organize rather than intimidate the workers without legal papers. We tried to sell the idea to the union movement but were met with a lot of skepticism. You see, it was an accepted myth that the undocumented workers were not organizable. In fact, most professional union organizers contended that Los Angeles County would never be strongly unionized because there are too many wetbacks in the area. After some initial rejections, we finally got the National Maritime Union to support us.

With the limited funding from the National Maritime Union, Corona opened up el Centro de Ayuda on Whittier Boulevard near Atlantic. The small office was staffed on a volunteer basis and Corona was able to get the legal assistance that he needed for his fledgling organization from the law firm of Raul Magaña.

When people heard that we could help them with their immigration problems, they literally flocked to our office. While we did help people to file their papers, our center was not simply a social service organization. Anyone who wanted help from us had to commit themselves to helping with the everyday work at the office. They also had to be ready to recruit other members. We were trying to get people to organize themselves. Our operation became large enough that we were forced to move to a larger place in 1970. When we moved to the building on Vermont near Pico, we also changed our name to CASA, el Centro de Accion Social Autonomo (Autonomous Social Action Center). In spite of the fact that we were having such a success, many of the professional organizers continued to be pessimistic about our ability to organize the undocumented. 'You may be able to get them together to get their papers,' they said, 'but you'll never be able to get them to go to picket lines and demonstrations.' But we proved them wrong.

The National Chicano Moratorium of August 29, 1970 provided CASA with its first opportunity to mobilize its membership in a militant action. The Moratorium was to have been a peaceful antiwar demonstration but it terminated in a violent confrontation with the police.

An East Los Angeles parade and rally that attracted about 20,000 persons to demonstrate Mexican-American opposition to the war in Southeast Asia erupted into a riot Saturday, claiming the life of one of the city's leading spokesmen for Chicano rights.

The dead man was Ruben Salazar, 42, award-winning *Times* columnist and news director for the television station KMEX (Channel 34).

—Los Angeles Times, Sunday, August 30, 1970

At the peak of the turmoil, a dozen fires burned out of control along Whittier Boulevard and about 500 police and sheriff's deputies were involved.

—Ando Sangrando by Dr. Armando Morales

It started innocently enough with almost a festive atmosphere to the march and rally. Many of the CASA members came to the demonstration with their entire families. The children were ecstatic as they helped to carry the banners on the way to the park. It was really a touching scene of solidarity. At the rally we sat at the edge of the park to listen to the speakers and musicians who were to perform that day. Then, the next thing we know, many of the people sitting in front of us started standing up and staring in our direction. A squad of riot-armed police was lining up in military formation right behind us. They were preparing to attack the crowd. Our first concern was for the women and children. We tried to safeguard them but the area we were standing in soon became the main battleground. Chaos broke out when the police shot tear gas into the crowd. Our people ran frantically from the park grounds. We regrouped in an adjacent residential area away from the stinging gas fumes. Then a few of us—myself, Ruben Salazar, the Reverend Father Casso and Rudy Acuña—went up to the police lineup and tried to reason with the Deputy in charge. We asked him to hold off until people were given a chance to disperse peacefully. But he wouldn't listen. They were declaring war just like that. Well, after the initial shock, the youngsters began to fight back, throwing bottles, rocks, even returning tear gas canisters. Even though the police were prepared for combat, the kids forced them to retreat several times.

I certainly regret the loss of lives on that day, especially that of Ruben Salazar who was a good friend of mine. Still, I can't help but feel a certain pride at the tremendous courage that our youth showed that day when facing a well armed opponent. It was obvious that the police were intent on crushing this protest movement. It represented an organized defiance to the injustices that the Mexican people had suffered in this country. Our youth showed the police that they could, on the spur of the moment, fight back and take control of their barrios if need be.

If the intent of the police was to defuse the Chicano protest movement, their brutal attack had exactly the opposite effect. According to Corona, the confrontation taught the participants how unjust this country could be to the Mexican population. It also reinforced the need for self organization. Committees of all types sprang up all over East Los Angeles, focusing on all types of social issues.

I know that our group really grew after the Moratorium. With our renewed forces we stepped up our campaign against the Dixon-Arnett Bill that had just been passed by the state legislature. It was a law that was similar to President Reagan's Employer's Sanction Bill that made it illegal to knowingly hire undocumented workers. Well, we saw this as a slap in the face because any employer could then justify not hiring Mexicans out of fear of breaking the law. We had tried pressuring then-Governor Reagan into vetoing the Bill but he had turned a deaf ear.

You know, there was an interesting meeting between us and Reagan just before the Dixon-Arnett Bill got passed. As a part of our campaign CASA was picketing the Marina Hotel where a banquet was being held in honor of then-Governor Reagan. The fact that we had some three or four thousand people surrounding the hotel really shook up Mr. Reagan. He sent Judge Alarcon out to the picket line to tell me that Governor Reagan wanted to talk to me. Now Judge Alarcon was an old friend of mine and he was really upset when I told him that I didn't want to talk to Mr. Reagan. But the other people on the picket line thought it was important to keep the channels of communication open, so we chose a delegation to meet with him.

Stepping into that banquet room from a picket line was a very strange experience. The banquet was organized with the center of the hall being left for the dance that was to follow the dinner. And everybody was the guest of honor, I guess, because there was nothing but head tables—four tables, all generously decorated with small American flags. So they took us to the table where Mr. Reagan sat in his tuxedo with large flags hanging on either side of him. He was friendly enough, telling me that he wanted to work out some kind of agreement with my people. I told him that the only thing we wanted was for him to veto the Dixon-Arnett Bill. And he said, 'Well, Bert, you know that I couldn't do that. Those illegals are stealing the jobs from the American worker.' I argued with him on the issue and it really upset him that I did not stand in awe of him. After all, I'm sure he thought, I was talking to the governor. Needless to say, we came to no agreement so we went back outside to join the picket line. Three or four weeks later, he signed the damned bill.

We decided it was time to take more aggressive action. We called for a march and rally through downtown Los Angeles for February of 1971. Since it was the first protest we were to organize by ourselves, we were not quite sure how big it was going to be. We worked feverishly for a whole month, setting up committees in the Harbor area, the Valley, Orange County as well as in Los Angeles proper. I guess the myth that undocumented people would not participate in street protests out of fear of being apprehended was beginning to affect even us. We were cautiously hoping to bring out at least 1,000 marchers. But, lo and behold, we wound up with a march that was massive. Since we did not have a parade permit, we marched on the sidewalk down Broadway. A lot of people joined us spontaneously from the streets. The spirit was fantastic and when the head of the march reached First and Broadway, the end was still leaving Olympic. Well, after this experience, we made demonstrations a routine part of our activities. We called even larger actions in 1972 and 1973 when the INS was harrasing the Mexican population in East Los Angeles.

Our movement became so successful that we got calls from all over the country from community centers that were trying to deal with the problems of the undocumented workers. By 1974 we had centers in New York, San Antonio and Oakland.

We were not the only ones who were building successful movements in that period. The seventies was an exciting period for Mexican activists. La Raza Unida Party,

the Welfare Rights Movements, the nationalists like the Brown Berets—all were finding popular support in the barrios. The Mexican population in this country had become openly proud of being Mexican. Whereas in the 40's and 50's the activists had argued vehemently over whether to call ourselves Mexican-American or Latin American, the generation of the 70's was expressing a pride that bordered on chauvinism. The tremendous strength that this rediscovery of our identity created really bolstered our movement.

The movement of the 70's was a youth movement. That was the secret of its strength, its vibrance and vitality. Unfortunately, it was also the reason for its decline. Youth is very transitory. We were not dealing with a class but with an age, a chronological period in people's lives. It had very valid roots and reasons for being but, so long as it did not recruit the workers as a class, it was bound to burn itself out. I was very aware that this was going to happen.

Don't misunderstand me. I regret its decline as much as everyone else. Certainly it is much harder to fight injustices when the forces at our disposal are so diminished. But other forces will rise up to play similar roles in the near future. I see that young people who participated in this movement are workers today who are more politically aware than their white counterparts. I am encouraged by the strong rank and file movement in the United Auto Workers, the United Steel Workers and even in the Teamsters where the Latinos are playing such an important role. It is these elements who are responsible for the mobilizations of September 19th where the unions rallied tens of thousands of people against Reagan's policies. For myself, I am very optimistic for the future and I will continue to fight for justice whenever wrongs are done.

And Corona remains true to his words. He is currently facing termination of his teaching position at the California State University at Los Angeles where he has been teaching Chicano Studies for the last ten years. While the administration claims he is not qualified to teach the course, Corona insists that the threatened dismissal is politically motivated.

I have been teaching there for more than ten years and they had never questioned my credentials. It is only when I publicly denounced the administration's policy towards the Iranian students that I was brought up on charges.

The current administration is very racist. They had adopted a policy of encouraging the deportation of Iranian students. A few weeks ago the campus police went so far as to direct the Immigration Authorities to a classroom where they apprehended an Iranian student. The INS went to his desk, handcuffed him and dragged him away. Well, we organized a picket line around the Vice President's office and she called the police. Fourteen of the participants were arrested. A few days after that, I was informed by the Dean of my termination.

At the age of 63, Corona continues with his zeal for the struggle. He has gotten the Chicano Studies Department to file a Departmental complaint protesting his termination. The Campus Defense committee, which he helped to organize, has just filed a lawsuit against the University. One can only marvel at the enthusiasm he maintains at his age. When asked his secret for his zest for life, he replies with a chuckle,

Well, it never ceases to amaze me. I guess if I don't know by now, I never will know. Seriously though, I guess I've always seen life as a challenge. It never ceases to amaze me how most people can take such a simplistic attitude towards life. They feel that they can learn about life from a few textbooks. As far as I'm concerned, formal education is but the beginning of an education. The sooner the youth of this country understand this, the better off they will be in their understanding of life. For Latinos in this nation, life is filled with struggle, and struggle is the ultimate teacher. If the majority of Latino youth can take this attitude, then we will be well on our way to bettering the lot of our people as a whole. □

MEXICAN-AMERICANS *Continued*

would not have been had this not been true.

The desire of these Americans to participate in their government is not only for the purpose of attaining political patronage, although it would be naive to insist this does not happen. Rather, there is a sincere movement to raise the economic status of a people, to destroy the attitudes leading to inequities as well as the inequities themselves.

Knowledge of these inequities instigated the rebellion at the Equal Opportunities Commission Conference at Albuquerque last March, when 50 delegates from six Southwestern states walked out in protest, vowing not to return until a Mexican-American is named to the Commission. Specifically, the ECO was charged with indifference to, and ignorance of, the needs of Mexican-Americans, and with practicing discrimination against Mexican-Americans in its own hiring practices.

The White House Conference on Civil Rights fanned a growing Mexican re-

sentment toward the emphasis being placed on the needs of the Negro at all levels of government. This ploy has been an expedient for Mexican leaders scrambling for anti-poverty funds, but now the rank and file has picked up the chant, with unfortunate results. This illustrates a shortsighted flaw in the Mexican political activist for not recognizing that advancement for any American minority is advancement to him as an American. More unfortunate is the fact that this insular philosophy widens the breach between the leadership in both minorities.

These leaders have been asked why—since their causes are fundamentally similar—the Negro and the Mexican in California do not coordinate their efforts in their struggle against the power structure. The most important factor (of many) which precludes such an alliance is that, because their cultures are different, their goals are different. The method of attack is also different.

Whereas the oppressed Negro can

spontaneously erupt in violence, the oppressed Mexican is not actively concerned with the fight. It is improbable that the Mexican community will ever break into riot, although it is possible and some zealous militants wish that it would happen. Further, the Mexican community is fragmented. The Mexican leaders do not lead anything but their local chapters and their state organizations. There are no Martin Luther Kings among the Mexicans, although the press would like to make one of Cesar Chavez, who is quite the opposite.

One other important consideration, one that is unpleasant and which we do not wish to speak aloud, is that the Mexican feels he is superior to the Negro and will not admit that he shares with him a common plight. Collectively, the Mexican-American has no rapport with the Negro. There is prejudice here. It can be illustrated in the low incidence of Mexican-Negro marriages. It is also worthwhile to note that the Negro plays an extremely small role in the agricultural

work force in California.

The Mexican, as Bert Corona stated, "wants identity—but as a Mexican." This may deter the evolution of an effective mutual voting bloc.

That the Negro is receiving more consideration from government agencies is, of course, true. But so is it true that his situation is more critical. The Mexican enjoys greater acceptance than the Negro, and his rights are less impinged by Anglo society. But such comparisons are irrelevant; the point is, not enough has yet been done for either disadvantaged group.

There are, nevertheless, notable beginnings. The reaction to the White House Conference on Civil Rights has ensured the convening of a Conference for Latin-Americans in the near future. The Office of Economic Opportunity has provided \$3,044,158 for a summer program in Operation Headstart. Over \$600,000 has been allotted for education of 9,600 culturally disadvantaged children through Elementary and Secondary

Continued

"...a Mexican-American voting bloc has many obstacles to overcome..."

MEXICAN-AMERICANS *Continued*

Education Act funds. This includes medical and dental examination services. California State College at Los Angeles has received \$64,000 in Federal Anti-Poverty funds under the Educational Participation in Communities (EPIC) organization in which 500 students will work six hours a week in Negro and Mexican areas.

On the national level, the Department of Labor and the Office of Economic Opportunity have instituted a program called Services, Employment and Redevelopment (SER), designed to raise social and economic standards, provide vocational guidance, remedial education, recruitment for government and industry, and maintain an inventory of skilled and unskilled workers in the Mexican community.

What the future holds for the Mexican-American political activist is unclear. The effects of political inexperience and growing pains are evident, e.g., the lack of organization evident during the primary elections, when as many as four Mexicans ran in one senatorial district on the same ticket, and Mexicans from the same political organization ran against each other in Assembly, Senate and Congressional races. Further compounding the problem was the fact that many of these candidates were grossly unqualified to run for public office. The appointment of Mexican-Americans to judgeships and other state jobs was made possible in large part by the efforts of these activists. Still, the development of a Mexican-American voting bloc has many obstacles to overcome.

The first and greatest of these is the fact that the Mexican community in California is in a state of flux. There are more immigrants coming into the United States from Mexico than from any other country. Add to this the number of illegal entries who will remain, especially in rural areas, and who will eventually marry and have children who will be American citizens. As long as this continues, it is implicit that literacy will never be achieved. But more important is the fact that these people deepen their isolation because most of them cannot—or will not—vote. Cesar Chavez' rural legions have been neglected by political leaders and elected officials precisely for this reason.

Lost also to the Mexican political

activist is the urban person who has broken into the Anglo society. He now rejects every part of his background and accepts the values and attitudes of his new social class. He is tragically unaware that assimilation does not depend on cultural genocide. And so these votes are lost.

Then there is the Mexican (man or woman) who has married into the Anglo group and become apathetic and apolitical. Through the attrition brought about by the Mexican social flux, therefore, the potential 700,000 votes are cut to a discouragingly low number. Control of this vote is virtually impossible.

Yet, the static nature of the Mexican political revolution is not so disheartening, considering the progress in the social revolution.

There is a new and growing development in Mexican-American affairs that will have great effect on the future growth of organizations like MAPA. This development, centered principally in San Francisco, repudiates the Mexican aspect of political action and insists on a united drive for the progress of all Americans with Spanish surnames. MAPA President Quevedo has shown in his recent conferences with Puerto Rican leaders his awareness of the movement aimed at forming a national alliance. There are strong reactions on both sides. The Mexican, may, in theory at least, ally himself with Latin Americans, but does not wish to lose his identity as a Mexican-American by becoming identified as a Latin-American. Further, autonomous political organizations fear a union on a national scale, which would reduce their status to that of local chapters. Finally, the provincial attitude of the California Mexican makes him anxious to keep the action within California.

To date, the Latin-American alliance has tried to hold the Spanish-speaking groups together without threatening their autonomy. Recently, the Political Unity of Mexican-Americans (PUMA) was organized to develop a "white paper" to provide guidelines for the solution of problems of the Mexican-American community, including relations between Negroes and Mexicans. This, of course, will meet opposition from those who favor a Pan-Latin approach.

In San Francisco, immigrants from

Continued on Page 50

A group of farm workers, of Mexican descent, bend over furrows in a field in Ventura County.

Delano grape strike galvanized people like these into action, gave them political strength.



MEXICAN-AMERICANS *Continued*

South America, Puerto Rico and Cuba have made the Mexican a minority within a minority, less than 30% of the Spanish-surnamed population. Here, the drive to amalgamate action for all Spanish-surnamed Americans is making its best progress. Ricardo Callejo, an attorney and MAPA member who was born in New York of Puerto Rican parents, is leading this drive. Callejo, who lived in Mexico for a number of years, is an angry man, and impressively articulate. He is appalled by the fact that MAPA is working for the Mexican with utter disregard for Spanish-speaking Californians from 21 countries. These people, he contends, have as fierce a legacy of national pride and Spanish institutions as the Mexicans. As far as he is concerned, all minorities comprise one group, and that discrimination and poverty, even when most isolated, have universal implications. This sophistication is beyond the ken of the typical Mexican political activist.

Of MAPA, Callejo says: "In the three years MAPA has been the leading political influence for the Mexican masses, it has accomplished nothing significant, other than bringing the Spanish surname to the surface. They will not even include the Latin-American in their fight for reform."

Callejo, who spends much time in Washington, Spain and Latin America, is now formulating plans for what will be called the Spanish Speaking Surnamed Political Association. This organization will cover 10 states, with local chapters in the five major cities of each state. Its mission will be the advancement of all Spanish-speaking Americans, from the Puerto Rican or Cuban black man to the Filipino, Mexican, or blue-eyed Spaniard. Callejo contends that these groups offer a unique contribution to the nation and to the world.

"The Anglo, in his great ignorance of our people and of our problems, and thus of our country, is sending workers into Latin America who cannot speak a word of Spanish," he says. "Communication is essential. So is the solution of the problems of Americans with Spanish surnames. We'll never convince Latin America until we can show we're aware of the shortcomings in our social structure. Money alone will never convince them."

Callejo has already met with Puerto Rican leaders in New York, Cubans in Florida, and Mexicans and Spanish-speaking citizens in every state in the Southwest. In addition, he had the endorsement of a number of officials, including Ryan of New York, Henry Gonzalez of Texas, Dyal and Brown of California, Evans and Rogers of Colorado, and Fernandez of New Mexico. (He has not yet gotten together with Roybal.) In addition, U.S. Senators Thomas Kuchel, Montoya and Schmidhauser have pledged their help.

The resentment from the Mexican political groups to such Pan-Latinism is attributable to a number of factors, including the importance the government placed upon the welfare of the Cuban refugee and the Negro. The idea that the Mexican situation in California is but a part of a greater problem will not be easy for them to accept.

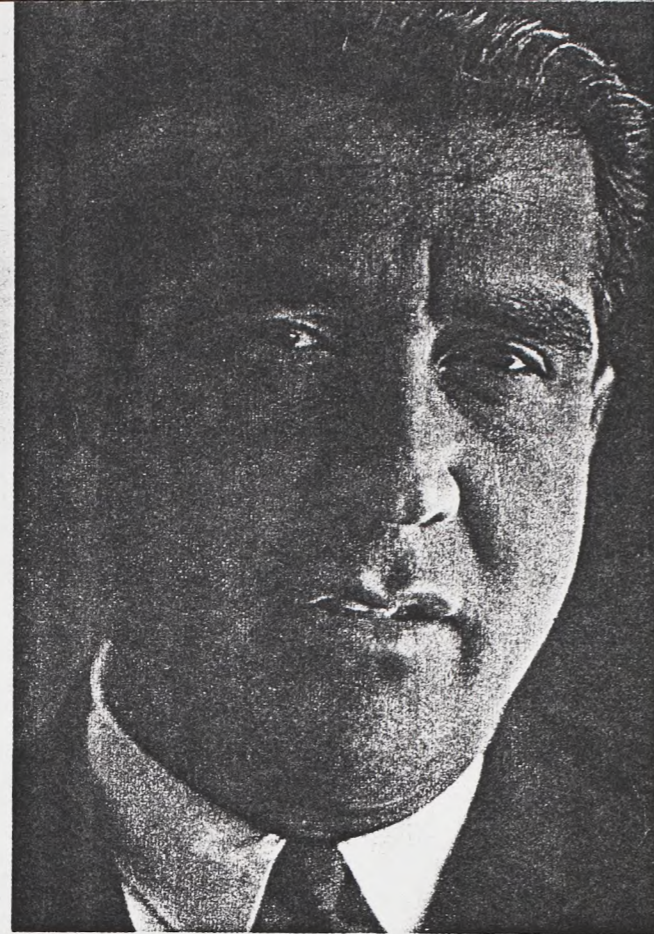
The future for the Mexican political man can be one of great promise and achievement. It will never be accomplished with publicity releases, however, but at the polls. There will come a time when he will come of age and realize, as the Mexican and American governments realized in 1943, that the "Mexican cause" in California is an "American cause," that the non-Mexican masses need be made as aware as the politician. Since he relies so much on political expediency, the Mexican-American should realize that the Negro and the Cuban are receiving attention because that truth has been recognized in their case.

When that day comes we will see what is being called the "Cactus Curtain" come up from the surrounded Mexican, when illiteracy and poverty can be successfully overcome, and prejudice is obsolete.

Continued



Cesar Chavez, Delano grape strike leader, addresses MAPA



Richard Callejo, San Francisco, is planning Spanish surname group.



Bert Corona, described as one of MAPA's more aggressive leaders, was elected state president.



Eduardo Quevedo, stepped down from the MAPA leadership at its August meeting.

MEXICAN-AMERICANS and the Leadership Crisis

by Jose Antonio Villarreal

Photographs by Bill Bridges

cisco convention, but it may be significant that he spoke as a guest and not as a nominee for office in the Mexican-American Political Association.

The Mexican community, with a history of *caciques*, or chieftains, reaching back to pre-Columbian times, has always had plenty of leaders. The problem is that these leaders have too frequently lacked followers. There is no such thing as a Mexican political boss in California, and it is inconceivable that there can ever be one. The Mexican-American Political Association is at once a victim and a perpetrator of this.

At Fresno during MAPA's endorsing convention, then-president Eduardo Quevedo said more than once that MAPA had now evolved into a power, with the control of 700,000 Mexican votes, and the candidates behaved as if they believed it. But Bert Corona of Oakland told me when I challenged this claim:

"We are more practical than rational in these things. We do not control votes—we cannot even control the vote within our own organization. All we do is influence. MAPA is out to help eradicate poverty, illiteracy, discrimination and exploitation by constantly expressing our identity as Mexican-Americans, not as Latin-Americans. By providing a definition of the issues for the people. Through political orientation of our people, focusing the attention of the politicians to our needs."

Mexican political organization has been a flop at the place where it counts most: the polls. This was graphically illustrated during the primary elections this year, when in only one race—the 41st Assembly District—did Mexican-American votes directly influence the outcome. Here, a concerted voter registration drive in the tradition of the early Community Service Organization (CSO) elected David Negri of Granada Hills the Democratic candidate for the seat and the only candidate with a Spanish surname. Ironically, Negri is not a Mexican but a Spanish Jew.

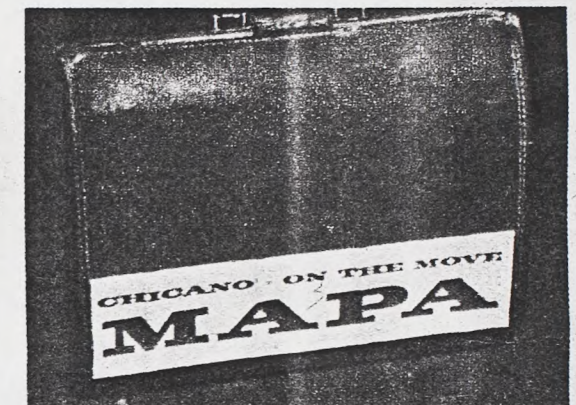
Another Mexican trait that frequently hinders success was described aptly by another MAPA member. "The Anglo," he said, "has the remarkable ability to work intimately with someone for whom he has no respect, even despises to the point of illness, when they have a common cause. We cannot do that. We go off and pout, or form our own group, or cause unpleasantness which would disrupt everything. Regardless of differences, we must learn to work together for the cause."

On the other side of the ledger is the mutuality of cultures and of language, the capacity for strong emotion. The *mariachi* that breaks out when the governor of California appears at a lunch is meant not only for show. The surge of emotion that goes through a Mexican at the opening strains of a *mariachi* defies expression. Even the tasteless creamed chicken which is always served at these affairs does not taste bad. By the same token there was the religiosity expressed by the pilgrims of Cesar Chavez who carried the banner of the Dark Virgin all the way to Sacramento. Even though the effect was calculated and somehow made the workers seem even more oppressed, yet it filled them with quite a different sort of emotion.

It is also interesting that in seconding the

nomination for endorsement of Governor Brown, Cruz Reynoso emphasized an implicit relationship between the Governor and God. This was *not* a calculated thing, but a very Mexican pattern of expression harking back to medieval Catholicism, when heads of state were considered closer to the deity. Reynoso also employed the emotional Mexican appeal that Governor Brown *tiene corazon*—he has heart.

Then there is the loyalty of this big, filial Mexican community. The influence that Corona spoke about exists and will find expression in the coming election. By word of mouth, a most powerful informal influence, the Mexican will hear of the indifference—real or imagined—Reagan showed for him when he spoke platitudinously to the MAPA convention by telephone. In that, he bestowed a greater insult than if he had not talked to them at all. The fact that he would not an-



swer questions from the floor (as he had promised) could be understood as a political expediency. The other—the platitude—was considered by many people at the convention an aspersion on their intelligence. They all have known this attitude, and, collectively, they remembered.

Pride is one more attribute that enhances the indestructibility of the Mexican spirit. This pride comes, ironically, from the fierce nationalism the church and state instilled in the peon at the time of the *encomiendas* to keep him loyal while suppressed. Discrimination, prejudice and poverty have not made him feel inferior. He can be traumatized by these things, but he is not broken by them. The Anglo may lull himself by believing the opposite, but the boy who was forced to drop out of the eighth grade because he was ignored, discouraged, or misdirected does not feel inferior. He faces his lot stoically, as his forefathers did, and he accepts the fact that he was not born to the ruling class, that this is the natural order of things. While this also is not good, it is not so bad as the other. At least he believes himself a man. The enlightened Mexican recognizes the tragic fact that such a boy is one of the *desgraciados* (a person born without grace). The educated Mexican knows *he* is not inferior because he has read the books that tell him so, and because he has been taught by his father (who yet retains a part of his Mexican nature) that the reverse is true. And every Mexican who still lives within a part of the old culture feels this deeply. The Chavez strike and pilgrimage

CORRIDO DE BERT CORONA
Padre del Movimiento Chicano

**Fronteras del Paso Tejas
Ciudad que tienes la fama
alli nacio Bert Corona
una bonita manana.**

**Mil novecientos diez y ocho
fecha de mayo fue el dia
patente esta en la memoria**

**Fue comandante tu padre
de un regimiento de Villa
ya lo traías en tu sangre
tu valor y valentia**

CORO;
VIVA, VIVA, BERT CORONA
voy gritando en mi cancion
desde California envio
un saludo a mi nacion

**Hombre de gran talentos
donde quiera sobresales
siempre tu te distingues
que bonitos esos detalles.**

**En el colejio estabas
las leyes no eran iguales
alli empezo tu denuncia
para remediar esos males.**

**Tu Madre gran profesora
ella fue la inspiracion
de que salieras triunfante
en toda tu-educacion.**

CORO;

**Mas cuando estallo la guerra
muy pronto te presentates
a defender a tu patria
como tu lo anelastes.**

**El Gobierno Americano
jamás te-extendio la mano
ni aprovecho los servicios
de este valiente Chicano.**

**Mientras que te preparabas
pa combatir el sistema
un movimiento formabas
"VIVA LA UNION"
es tu lema.**

**Con tu ayuda se formaron
union y organizaciones
MAPA,CASA, Y HERMANDAD
mejorando situaciones.**

CORO;

**Eres un amigo leal, siempre con toda
la jente, y dedicas en total tu vida
resplandeciente.**

**Tu vida tu narrativa
hazanas de tu memoria
muy grabadas quedaron
en este libro de historia.**

**Mechistas y profesores
a todos concientizastes
aqui los tienes presentes
vienen a felicitarte**

**Con mucho orgullo y carnino
porque tanto has trabajado
para defender tu raza
a la que te has entregado.**

VIVA, VIVA BERT CORONA
voy gritando en mi cancion
desde California envio
un saludo a mi nacion.

-----Original Message-----

From: henry collins <homicidehank@hotmail.com>

To: Alex <gameace09@hotmail.com>; Danny & Kris Hubbard <dkhub@home.com>; Mike Farmer <Painthop@pacbell.net>; greg <GKNORO@cs.com>; Glenda <Glenda_Recinos@notes.fh.com>; daryl gpdgms <gpdgms@gateway.net>; Grandpa Collins <Dalegas@pacbell.net>; Patty Bailey <hecares4me@hotmail.com>; Jessica Barron <Pinkgirl51@hotmail.com>; Kelvin Godfrey <kelvingod@aol.com>; Larry2 <greenslate@jps.net>; Vanessa <geberragirl@hotmail.com>; mike brewer <tiptap40@cs.com>; steve <irishsa@communityonline.net>; Raquel Renteria <raquelr99@earthlink.net>; Marissa Collins <romans_322@hotmail.com>; ralph and rosie ligid <RXR2D2@aol.com>; Tom Kelly <TKelly2@entergy.com>

Date: Wednesday, December 20, 2000 11:28 PM

Subject: Fw: paul harvey

> Paul Harvey writes...

> We tried so hard to make things better for our kids that we made them
> worse. For my grandchildren, I'd like better. I'd really like for them
> to know about hand-me-down clothes and homemade ice cream and leftover
> meatloaf sandwiches. I really would.

>

> I hope you learn humility by being humiliated, and that you learn honesty
> by being cheated. I hope you learn to make your own bed and mow the
> lawn and wash the car.

> And I really hope nobody gives you a brand new car when you are sixteen.

> It will be good if at least one time you can see puppies born and your dog
> put to sleep. I hope you get a black eye fighting for something you

believe

> in.

>

> I hope you have to share a bedroom with your younger brother. And it's all
> right if you have to draw a line down the middle of the room, but when he
> wants to crawl under the covers with you because he's scared, I hope you
> let him. When you want to see a movie and your little brother wants to tag
> along,

> I hope you'll let him. I hope you have to walk uphill to school with your
> friends and that you live in a town where you can do it safely.

>

> On rainy days when you have to catch a ride, I hope you don't ask your
> driver to drop you two blocks away so you won't be seen riding with
> someone as uncool as your Mom. If you want a slingshot, I hope your Dad
> teaches you how to make one instead of buying one. I hope you learn to
> dig in the dirt and read books.

>

> When you learn to use computers, I hope you also learn to add and
> subtract in your head. I hope you get teased by your friends when you have
> your first crush on

> a girl, and when you talk back to your mother that you learn what Ivory
> soap tastes like. May you skin your knee climbing a mountain, burn your
> hand on a stove and stick your tongue on a frozen flagpole. I don't care

if

> you try a beer once, but I hope you don't like it. And if a friend

> offers you dope or a joint, I hope you realize he is not your friend.

>

> I sure hope you make time to sit on a porch with your Grandpa and go
> fishing with your Uncle. May you feel sorrow at a funeral and joy
> during the holidays. I hope your mother punishes you when you throw a
> baseball
> through your neighbor's window and that she hugs you and kisses you at
> Christmastime when you give her a plaster mold of your hand.
> These things I wish for you -- tough times and hard work, disappointment
> and happiness. To me, it's the only way to appreciate life. Written
> with a pen.
>
> Send this to all of your friends who mean the most to you. We secure
> our friends not by accepting favors but by doing them.
>
> Paul Harvey
>
>

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From: XColumn@aol.com
To: Aztlanahuac@aol.com
Date: Fri, 12 Jan 2001 08:41:30 EST
Subject: The Fifth Pillar

**FROM UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE
FOR RELEASE: WEEK OF JANUARY 12, 2001
COLUMN OF THE AMERICAS by Patrisia Gonzales and Roberto Rodriguez
THE FIFTH PILLAR**

Conventional wisdom holds that there are four pillars to the liberal community: labor, environment, civil rights and women's rights. With the release of the 2000 census statistics, which show that the bureau category of "Latinos/Hispanics" now numbers 32 million, the question is whether there's now room for a fifth pillar in the form of defending the rights of this virtually unwanted population? More important, the question is whether this society is ready to fully embrace them as legitimate and dignified members of the larger community called the United States?

Both propositions are loaded and complex because this population is not homogeneous (most populations aren't) and has historically been treated as inconsequential at best and illegitimate at worst. Part of answering both

questions requires knowledge of who this population is. In the United States, it actually comprises several peoples: Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Central Americans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Caribbeans and South Americans -- all very heterogeneous, especially in the realm of ideas. That aside, Mexicans/Mexican Americans, who are mostly indigenous or indigenous-based

mestizo populations, constitute two-thirds of this category. Add Central Americans to the mix (who are generally similar to Mexicans) and that's three-fourths of the category. In that sense, these are not wildly disparate peoples.

Relative to social positioning, outside of Cuban Americans, it can be argued that most Mexicans, Central and South Americans generally fall into the sociopolitical liberal camp or community. Some analysts argue that because

they're morally conservative, this translates into political conservatism.

However, voting patterns do not bear this out. If the past election had been solely among these groups, it would have been a Gore landslide.

Although the Cuban community is diverse, the Elian Gonzales saga and this past election revealed that, politically, this community (which constitutes but 5 percent of that Latino/Hispanic category) is generally still in the arch-conservative column.

Demographers project that "Latinos/Hispanics" will grow to 100 million by 2050. Based on demographics and political/electoral behavior, these populations can definitely claim the fifth pillar. Their challenge will be to understand that numbers alone -- Guatemala is the best example of this --

mean little. An additional challenge is to prevent being remanded to where they are now, invisibly subsumed within the other four pillars -- as evidenced by the battle over the Linda Chavez nomination, in which virtually no Latinos were quoted in the national media. Yet, to create an effective alliance, this claim should never come at the expense of those other four pillars.

Their invisibility is due to the media, the liberal community and government having grown accustomed to behaving as though politics is a black-white, liberal-conservative affair. Perhaps not understood is that this liberal community is actually not synonymous with the Democratic Party, but rather, generally, its progressive wing, magnifying the importance of that 30 million figure.

Whereas the mainstream appears to be fleeing from the liberal camp in droves, some might wonder why these groups would want to be part of that liberal community? It may not be a matter of choice. People vote their interests.

Most from these communities have an extraordinary work ethic and

entrepreneurial spirit, but no country club credentials. Most are working or middle class (with generally larger families), face lots of hardships, challenges and, yes, outright societal discrimination. Undeniably, these populations this past decade were continually subjected to unprecedented hostility from the conservative/Republican sector. In reaction to being treated as a fifth column, tens of thousands of new citizens from these populations are becoming Democrats at unprecedented rates.

Demographics aside, the actual question is, What would this pillar add to

this community? Principally, an expanded view of human rights, which includes

the right to live and exist in this country as full human beings. This directly addresses the xenophobic (anti-bilingual education and anti-immigrant) movements, which challenge the legitimacy of human beings

--
on the basis of race, color, language, culture and origin, or in other words, the fear of indigenous brown people.

This proposition actually goes beyond the four pillars. It flips the mainstream view of the country by asserting that America's foundation, as

well as the descendants of its original inhabitants, is indigenous to this

continent, not alien. It should be clear that these populations actually seek

not to be accepted merely as an ethnic group, as liberals or as Americans,

but as full human beings within the broader community called humanity.

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* Gonzales is the author of the forthcoming "The Mud People: Anonymous Heroes

of Mexico" and co-author of "Gonzales/Rodriguez: Uncut & Uncensored" (ISBN:

0-918520-22-3 -- Ethnic Studies Library Publications Unit, UC Berkeley.

Rodriguez is the author of Justice: A Question of Race (Cloth- ISBN 0-927534-69-X paper ISBN 0-927534-68-1 -- Bilingual Review Press).

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under "Opinion" at www.uexpress.com Also, the Aztlanahuac project's new

e-address is: Aztlanahuac@aol.com... The other contact info for Aztlanahuac is the same as above.

***** Permit us to pass this most important information regardng one of the nation's leadeing civil, labor and human rights leaders: Bert Corona.**

Friends of Bert Corona: Thank you for your letters, calls, and inquiries regarding the health of longtime civil rights and labor activist Bert Corona.

This is a brief update regarding his present status. Corona returned to Los Angeles the evening of Saturday, January 6, 2001, by medical transport from Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico, and taken immediately to Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Los Angeles. He continues in critical and intensive care, and under his personal physician's care. He continues to recuperate from the three operations he endured over a nine-day period, and still suffers from an inflammation of the liver. He is in a very weakened and precarious state.

Due to his present condition, Corona's physician and family have requested that he not receive visitors. Those that wish to forward letters or GET WELL CARDS, may do so at the following address:

**Hermandad Mexicana Nacional
Bert Corona
634 S. Spring, Fifth Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90014**

Once again, thank you for your prayers, great sympathy, and concern for someone special who has touched too many lives and generations to even imagine, in the classroom as a professor, in the shops as a labor organizer, in the neighborhoods as a community organizer, in the politlcal movements as a political activist and founder and leader of local, state, and national organizations and coalitions, in the Democratic Party as a campaign director and organizer, in Sacramento and Washington, DC as a people's lobbyist, and many other circles of life where he influenced currents of opinion,

ideological orientations, and political perspectives both within the Mexican and Latino communities, and within the majority community of this country, and Mexico. Please continue to spread the news to your respective networks.

Share the news. Gracias y Animo.

Nativo Lopez (nativolopez@aol.com).

11/17/01
S.D. - 0721

BERT CORONA

Civil rights activist and labor leader; 82

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — Civil rights activist and labor leader Bert Corona has died, nine days after returning from Mexico where he had gone for treatment of several ailments. He was 82.

He died Monday at Kaiser Permanente Hospital, where he had been unconscious since his return from Mexico, Hermandad Mexicana Nacional spokesman Nativo Vigil Lopez said yesterday.

Mr. Corona served as both

national and executive director of the nonprofit organization of Spanish-speaking immigrants based in Los Angeles.

In Mr. Corona's nearly 30 years with the advocacy and service group, he increased its membership to more than 50,000 families nationwide, said Juan Garcia, a Hermandad board member.

"He was a tireless and dedicated individual," Garcia said.

The University of California Press published Mr. Corona's

autobiography, "Memories of Chicano History," in 1993.

"Bert Corona was born (on May 29,) 1918, in El Paso, Texas, a child of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Through his family, Corona symbolizes the thousands of Mexican immigrants and refugees who crossed the U.S.-Mexican border — a border created by 19th-century U.S. expansion — seeking jobs and safety," said Mario T. Garcia, a University of California Santa Barbara professor who helped Mr. Corona prepare his autobiography.

Obituary

Bert Corona; Labor Activist Backed Rights for Undocumented Workers

By GEORGE RAMOS
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Bert Corona, a sometimes fiery labor organizer, community activist and educator who championed the rights of undocumented workers, Mexicans and other Latinos in the United States for more than seven decades, has died from complications of kidney failure. He was 82.

Corona died Monday night at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Hollywood, where he was transferred after being stricken Dec. 26 during a trip to Mexico to visit relatives, said *Nativo Lopez*, executive director of *Hermanad Mexicana Nacional*, the immigrant rights organization that Corona helped establish.

Hospitalized with an acute gallbladder inflammation, Corona underwent three operations within nine days at Hospital Aranda de la Parra in Leon, Guanajuato. He was stabilized and transferred more than a week ago to the Kaiser facility but never regained conscious-

ness, Lopez said.

Corona was remembered as a significant figure in civil rights and labor circles whose accomplishments were sometimes compared with those of Cesar Chavez. He defended the rights of undocumented workers during a time when no one else—not even Chavez—would speak for them.

In addition to *Hermanad Mexicana Nacional*, Corona helped found the Mexican American Political Assn., one of the state's oldest Latino political organizations.

"He is a giant in the history of Latinos in the United States," said UC Santa Barbara history professor Mario T. Garcia, "but he was a lesser-known figure than Cesar Chavez. He was, however, equally as important. He did what no one had successfully done—organize undocumented workers. He is the urban counterpart to Chavez, who organized farm workers."

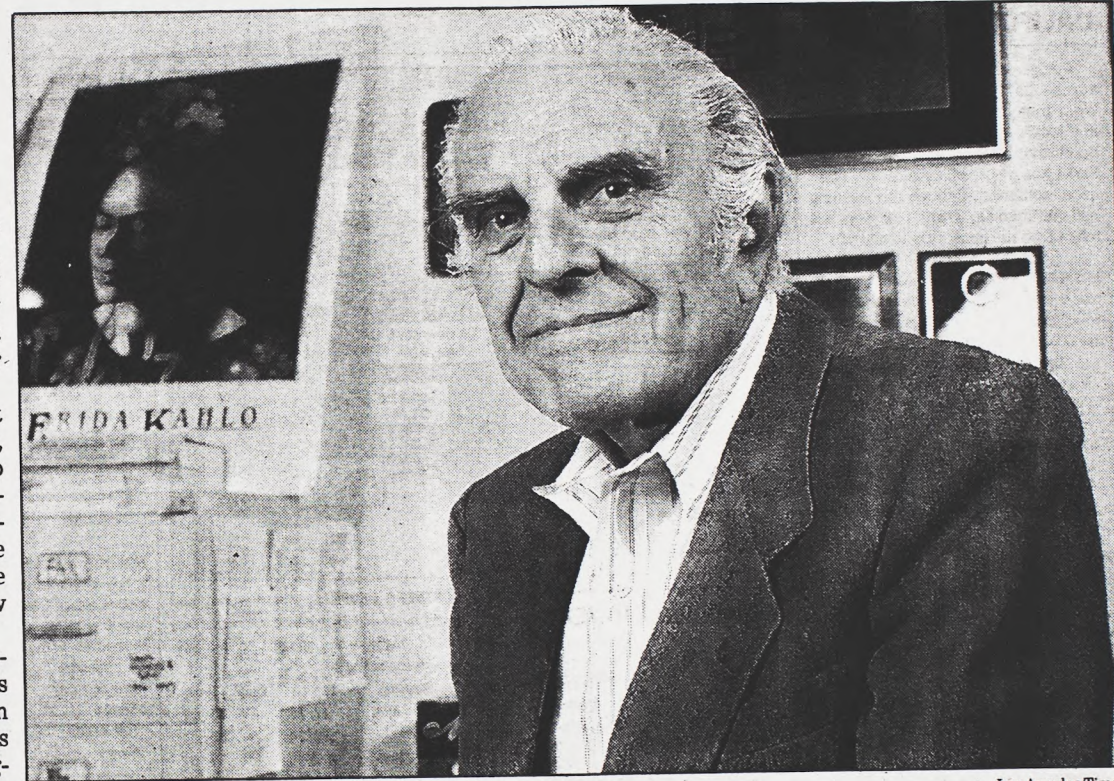
Former Democratic Rep. Edward R. Roybal, who in 1949 became the first Mexican American

to be elected to the Los Angeles City Council in the 20th century, hailed Corona as "a real fighter for civil rights. In the years I was away in Washington [in Congress], Bert was here all the time, fighting for things."

Corona, whose father had fought in the Mexican Revolution of 1910, was born in El Paso. He came to Los Angeles in 1936 to play basketball at USC but did not finish college, choosing instead to immerse himself in campaigns to improve conditions for workers and fellow Mexican Americans.

In his 1993 autobiography, written with Garcia, Corona said his early interest in helping Mexican Americans in Los Angeles stemmed in part from his upbringing in the border town of El Paso, where he learned to be proud of his Mexican roots and the Spanish language.

In Los Angeles, however, he was astonished by an incident that occurred shortly after his arrival in the city. Two Mexican Americans



Los Angeles Times

Bert Corona, whose accomplishments were compared with those of Cesar Chavez, in a 1997 photo.

on a streetcar ignored him when he asked in Spanish for directions to Fairfax Avenue. When they reached the stop, however, the two

admonished Corona in Spanish, telling him they would have answered his question if he had spoken to them in English.

"Here it's best not to speak Spanish," they told him. "It's best if they don't know if you're Mexi-

Please see CORONA, B11

CORONA: Labor Activist Dies at 82

Continued from B10
can. They treat you better.”

“I looked at them,” Corona recalled, “and I couldn’t understand that attitude.”

After dropping out of college, he volunteered at a Roman Catholic Church in Boyle Heights and organized workers for the Congress of Industrial Organizations, a forerunner of today’s AFL-CIO, and the United Cannery, Agriculture, Packing and Allied Workers of America.

In 1938, he joined the charismatic labor organizer Luisa Moreno in building the League of Spanish-Speaking People, one of the first national organizations for Mexican Americans. He also helped form chapters of Saul Alinsky’s Community Service Organization in Los Angeles.

His organizing efforts in the organization often brought him into contact with another up-and-coming Mexican American Community Service Organization organizer from Northern California, Chavez, who would help establish the farm workers union in the 1960s.

While Corona generally supported Chavez and his United Farm Workers, he openly clashed with the farm labor leader over the union’s opposition to undocumented workers. Chavez and the UFW supported Immigration and Naturalization Service actions to deport illegal immigrant workers, whom they regarded as scabs.

Corona argued that undocumented workers should be organized rather than deported. That stance led him to the last great organizing effort of his life, the establishment in 1951 of Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, or National Mexican Brotherhood. By the 1960s, Hermandad began actively organizing illegal immigrants in California to improve their earning power in this country.

“I did have an important difference with Cesar,” Corona wrote in his autobiography. “This involved his, and the union’s position on the need to apprehend and deport undocumented Mexican immigrants who were being used as scabs by the growers. . . . The Hermandad believed that organizing undocumented farm workers was auxiliary to the union’s efforts to organize the fields. We supported an open immigration policy, as far as Mexico was concerned.”

Hermandad soon became a major immigrant services provider, with offices in North Hollywood, Santa Ana and Los Angeles. But by the end of 1992, federal grants, its largest source of income, dried up. In recent years, the organization was dogged by more than \$4 million in debts, but Corona continued to believe in its mission.

In 1959, Corona joined with other Chicanos—U.S.-born citizens of Mexican descent—in Fresno to form the Mexican American Political Assn. As the first statewide Mexican American political group in California, the organization found its endorsement eagerly courted by Democratic and Republican candidates in the 1960s and ’70s.

When he became the organization’s president in the early 1960s, Corona used the position to argue that Mexican American concerns deserved a presidential cabinet-rank position. In 1966, an angry Corona boycotted a White House conference on Mexican American affairs in El Paso because, he said, it was controlled by Anglos.

Corona was long active in liberal politics, working to establish Viva clubs for Democratic candidates, including Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.) and former California Gov. Edmund G. “Pat” Brown Sr. He was also an early supporter of former Los An-

geles Mayor Tom Bradley.

He worked to elect Chicanos to the Los Angeles City Council, beginning in 1938 when he campaigned on behalf of a Mexican American activist named Eduardo Quevedo. Although Quevedo lost, Corona—who vowed never to run for public office—supported another Mexican American a decade later. That candidate was Roybal.

Although he never earned a college degree, Corona lectured at Stanford and taught at Cal State campuses at San Diego, Northridge, Fullerton and Los Angeles.

At Cal State L.A., where he taught for more than a decade in the 1970s and ’80s, Corona led a faction of part-time teachers who wanted to turn the young Chicano Studies Department into an agent of social activism in the large Mexican American community surrounding the campus. Several part-time teachers, including Corona, were fired. During the turmoil, a fire was set outside department head Louis Negrete’s office and his car was set on fire in his garage at home.

When The Times characterized Corona as a Marxist-Leninist and a suspect in the fires, he sued the newspaper and Negrete. The libel suit was settled years later, with all parties agreeing not to disclose its terms.

Corona’s first wife, Blanche Taff, died in 1993. A year later, he married Angelina Castillo, who still works for Hermandad as its director of affordable housing.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by sons David, of San Luis Obispo, and Frank and Ernesto, both of Los Angeles; daughter Margo De Ley of Chicago; and three grandchildren.

Times staff writer Doug Smith contributed to this story.

**PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL SERVICE AND TRIBUTE TO BELOVED BERT CORONA -
APPEAL TO FRIENDS OF BERT CORONA**



Friends of Bert Corona: All of you responded wonderfully to the notices we have sent regarding the health and ultimate death of our beloved brother Bert Corona. Through your help in spreading the word so many people have communicated their condolences and desire to do something that makes lasting meaning to the life and work of Bert. The services this coming Saturday, January 20th, only provide a brief opportunity to express our collective eulogy, tribute, and remembrances. The work of close to seven decades in favor of social justice, common decency to working people and immigrants, and so many other just causes, truly requires a broader participation of the tens of thousands of individuals who were touched by the work of the historic giant that was Bert Corona. I call upon you to express your interest and desire to participate, sponsor, and organize a PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL SERVICE AND TRIBUTE of our beloved Bert Corona. Such a service is being planned for Saturday, February 10th at the East Los Angeles Community College Auditorium from 11:00 a.m. until every last soul that desires to express and share his/her eulogy has an opportunity to do so. Bert Corona was a public figure for over sixty years. He gave and gave himself to the community. No cause was too insignificant for him to raise his voice and encourage others to do the same. On many occasions he was the lone voice on an issue until others gathered the courage to add their voice to the cause. We want to encourage the workers, students, professors, artists, professionals, teachers, politicians, immigrants, cholos, vatos locos, old pachucos, farmworkers, musicians, danzantes, and common simple people to come forward and celebrate the contributions of Bert Corona in a manner befitting his many years of struggle. Bert did not believe in the cult of the personality and did not yearn for awards, accolades, nor did he insist or angle his way forward to receive credit for the collective deeds and successes resulting from a specific struggle. In fact, he became uncomfortable when people insisted on making a fuss over him or pushed too hard that he should be recognized. This was just his way.

Those of you that are interested in adding your name to the list of many that have already committed themselves to making the PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL a success, please reply to this message with your affirmation to sponsor, spread the word, and attend. Bert Corona deserves a collective acclamation, which undoubtedly should have preceded his passing from this earth. However, he would not hear of it. Such was Bert Corona. I await your response. Gracias y Animo. **Nativo López. EMAIL: nativolopez@aol.com or (714) 541-0250**

PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL SERVICE AND TRIBUTE TO BELOVED BERT CORONA

When: Saturday, February, 10th

Where: East Los Angeles Community College Auditorium (Cesar Chavez Blvd., West of Atlantic Blvd. In East Los Angeles)

Time: 11:00 a.m.

Sponsors: Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, Assemblyman Gil Cedillo, Assemblyman Antonio Villaraigosa, Senator Richard Polanco, Herman Gallegos, Jeff Penichet, Alex Nogales, the National Hispanic Media Coalition, Miguel Contreras, Executive Secretary Treasurer, L. A. Federation of Labor, Canon John Luce, Episcopal Church, Audry Kaslow, Soledad "Chole" Alatorre, Juan G. Garcia, Publisher of Union Hispana Newspaper, Susana Arellano, East L.A. Health Task Force, and the list continues to grow. **Add your name today.**

HERMANDAD MEXICANA NACIONAL
825 N. Broadway, Santa Ana, CA 92701, (714) 541-0250
634 S. Spring St., 8th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90014, (213) 244-9580



Civil Rights Group Torn by Leadership Dispute

Politics: Bert Corona's death left his wife in charge of Hermandad Mexicana Nacional. Now his protege claims she hijacked the role. She says the change is legal.

By DANIEL YI, Times Staff Writer

For nearly two decades they were almost inseparable. The civil rights leader and his protege, the man who would some day carry on the legacy of one of the nation's oldest Latino rights organizations.

When Bert Corona, the fiery and charismatic director of Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, passed away earlier this year at the age of 82, Nativo Lopez, 48, who had long headed the Orange County chapter, seemed poised to succeed him.

But he has been trumped, at least for the time being, by Angelina Casillas, Corona's 48-year-old widow.

Two weeks after Corona's funeral, Casillas, who joined Hermandad as an English instructor before marrying its leader in 1994, announced at a news conference that she would take the helm of the half-century-old organization, and would focus its activities solely in Los Angeles.

After years of financial crises brought on by lingering federal and state probes, Casillas said a national agenda is no longer feasible. Offices in Oakland, Chicago and New York have been closed.

The effective demise of a national organization has implications for the future of the once potent, and at times controversial, Latino organization that claims to have helped more than 100,000 immigrants gain legal status and citizenship in this country.

"We are just working on making our Los Angeles offices self-sufficient," Casillas said. Lopez, she added, should focus on local issues in Orange County.

"She has exaggerated ambitions," Lopez said in a recent interview. "It is truly unfortunate. Mourning should be a period of reflection, but she's not of that mind."

Lopez, who now runs a separate corporation called Hermandad Mexicana Nacional of Santa Ana, claims Casillas hijacked the national organization and is not legally in charge. Casillas denies that, saying she and Corona legally filed all necessary paperwork for her succession.

The organization's 1998 tax documents, filed in late 1999 or early in 2000 and the latest available, listed Corona and Casillas as the sole officers, which she says was Corona's choice. The 1997 tax filing listed Corona, Lopez, Casillas and Corona's daughter as officers.

"My position is that we should maintain things at the local level. Bert agreed with that," said Casillas. "Nativo has no business saying anything about how we run Los Angeles. He wants power. He wants to be a substitute Bert Corona."

Some Latino community leaders in Southern California say Hermandad's struggle cannot help but erode the organization's effectiveness.

"When the father dies, the son feels he has the right to the position. And other members may have other ideas, and the family fights," said Enriqueta Ramos, a Rancho Santiago Community College District board member in Santa Ana, and a friend of

Corona. "It is sad. It will split the political voice. Two small groups is not as strong as one big one."

The internal splintering also comes at a crucial period in its history, as the group continues to be locked in a three-year-old dispute with the state Department of Education over more than \$4 million in adult education funds. The department claims the group cannot account for how it spent the money, meant for English as a second language and citizenship classes, and wants it back.

Hermnadad officials have long maintained that the funds were properly accounted for.

State Demands Documentation

"Until we get complete documentation that corroborates Hermnadad's position, this is still a serious matter," said Doug Stone, a spokesman for the department, which itself is under investigation by the federal government over the management of the funds.

"Unless they can prove otherwise, we expect the state to be reimbursed for the money."

On Friday, the agency sent a letter to Hermnadad saying it now will consider legal action against the group, Stone said.

Templo and Hermnadad were among 10 community organizations that came under scrutiny from the FBI and the U.S. Department of Education's inspector general in 1998 for their handling of millions in federal grants. The state Department of Education ceased funding the groups that year, and has been trying to recover the money since then.

Federal officials would not comment on the continuing probes.

The state Education Department also is facing potentially costly lawsuits from former and demoted employees who say the agency ignored their warnings about problems in the English and citizenship class programs.

For their part, Casillas and Lopez insist that their respective offices in Los Angeles and Orange County properly accounted for their expenditures. But where once the group put forward a united front, today the two camps fall short of vouching for each other.

"We are going to be responsible for the money we received," Lopez said. "Los Angeles is going to have to be responsible the very same way. They are going to have to show how they spent their money."

How Hermnadad changed from an effective champion of immigrant rights to an embattled, feuding group is a tale of fervent idealism hindered by politics, internal and external.

The original group, Hermnadad Mexicana, was founded in San Diego in 1951 to represent Mexican braceros who had come to the United States under a World War II government-sponsored guest worker program to fill in for Americans fighting abroad.

Felipe Usguiano, the founder, and Corona, by then a well-known Mexican American leader with a respectable track record, became friends.

By the early 1970s, Hermnadad began to falter, and Corona took the reins. He renamed it Hermnadad Mexicana Nacional in 1976, and quickly made a name for the organization.

At a time when even some Latino civil rights leaders were reluctant to advocate for undocumented immigrants, Hermnadad took the lead.

"One of the things Hermnadad did was help some of us understand that these people--whether we call them undocumented or illegal--they are foremost human beings," said Mario T. Garcia, a UC Santa Barbara history professor and author of a book on Corona.

"The tendency is to dehumanize and criminalize them. Hermandad has done a lot to empower undocumented immigrants."

It took a decade, but its efforts paid off. In 1986, Congress passed an amnesty bill that legalized the status of nearly 3 million undocumented immigrants in the country. Along with it came millions of dollars in assistance grants to help the newly legalized with civics and English courses.

Bolstered by almost \$25 million in federal funds, Hermandad expanded from two tiny storefronts in Los Angeles and Santa Ana to a nationwide network with offices and chapters up and down California, and in Chicago, New York and Washington, D.C. Its membership skyrocketed from 2,000 to 200,000.

Immigrants lined up outside Hermandad offices, and by the end of 1992, when the federal funding ended, the group said it had helped 100,000 immigrants become legal residents.

Lopez was instrumental in that growth. He had met Corona in 1971. The Boyle Heights native was making his own mark as a student organizer in East Los Angeles when he was awed by Corona.

"I was a 19-year-old punk with a lot of plans, dreams and ideals," Lopez said after Corona's death in January. "It was a moving experience for me, that someone of his age, his stature, was paying heed. . . . After I met him, I decided this is the person I want to follow."

And Lopez did. In 1977, he joined Hermandad and began organizing chapters throughout Southern California. In 1982, Lopez opened Hermandad's second office in Santa Ana. Two years later, he was named Hermandad's co-director and second in command.

But when federal amnesty funds dried up, it became difficult to maintain its size. As revenues plummeted, the group struggled to keep its doors open, accumulating hundreds of thousands in debt.

Casillas joined Hermandad as an English as a second language instructor during those difficult times. She weathered the storm with Corona and eventually married him, a year after Corona's first wife died.

Still, Hermandad showed a unified front. The group had prided itself in its ability to organize entire families in the struggle for immigrant rights.

"They would bring in the whole family, not just the breadwinners," said Garcia. The strategy was effective in putting a face on the issue of illegal immigrants, and "Hermandad turned the undocumented into a political force."

Even as Hermandad lobbied for families, its own core was beginning to crack. Lopez says the group's leadership became concerned about nepotism in their ranks. In recent years, Lopez says, Casillas' brother and two sisters took over the management of a number of Hermandad's offices in Los Angeles, and began to dictate the direction of the organization.

"Unfortunately, Bert did not respond to the criticisms," Lopez said. "It was hard to criticize someone who was my teacher, my elder."

Casillas counters that family members always have been a part of Hermandad's leadership, including Lopez's own wife, Maria Rosa Ibarra, who held a seat on Hermandad's governing board.

Corona's daughter from his first marriage, Margo De Ley, was also once a board

member.

As internal politics brewed, Hermandad was faced with fierce critics on the outside.

Then-Republican Rep. Robert K. Dornan accused Hermandad of illegally registering noncitizens to vote and tipping a closely contested 1996 race for his Orange County seat in favor of Loretta Sanchez, a Democrat.

900 Purged From Voter Rolls

After a lengthy investigation by the district attorney's office, a grand jury declined to indict Hermandad or its officers. Last year, a state investigation ended with about 900 noncitizens being purged from the county's voter rolls, far below the thousands Dornan had claimed.

Many other immigrants had been registered to vote after passing their citizenship tests but before taking the oath that officially made them citizens.

"We admitted to [mistakes]," Lopez said in an interview. "But there was no intent to commit fraud. . . . People were registered before the gun went off."

Today, the organization continues to offer immigration services in Los Angeles, but its major focus is two federally funded affordable housing programs.

Lopez's for-profit corporation, Hermandad Mexicana Nacional of Santa Ana, also offers immigration services and is politically active in Orange County. Most recently, he has led a campaign demanding an end to collaboration between the Anaheim Police Department and the Immigration and Nationalization Service.

Despite the specter of a costly battle against the state Education Department, Lopez says he remains hopeful for Hermandad's future.

"We will come out much stronger, and live up to and even exceed the dreams of Bert Corona," he said. "It is not me as a person. The organization is much larger than myself."

Casillas, however, contends that Corona wanted a smaller, stronger organization based in Los Angeles. With his death, a national operation no longer is possible.

"Bert," she said, "is irreplaceable."

Search the archives of the Los Angeles Times for similar stories about: [Hermandad Mexicana Nacional](#), [Civil Rights Movements](#), [Hispanics](#), [Leadership](#), [Bert Corona](#), [Angelina Casillas](#), [Nativo Lopez](#).

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Date: January 15, 2001

BERT CORONA, NATIONAL LATINO LEADER, FIGHTS TO THE LAST BREATH

Los Angeles, California - Bert Corona, national Latino civil rights and labor leader and activist, fought to the last breath finally succumbing to a series of health ailments at 9:15 p.m., Monday, January 15, 2001, at the Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Los Angeles. He was 82 years of age. Corona had returned from Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico on Saturday, January 6, 2001 after enduring three operations within a nine-day period. He had been hospitalized first on December 26, 2000 for an acute gall bladder inflammation. The gall bladder was removed, but resulted in kidney failure. Several days later he endured another operation for renal failure and infection, which required a blood transfusion, and a third operation three days later was to replace his pacemaker. Corona left the Aranda de la Parra Hospital in the city of Leon to return to Los Angeles in medical transport and was immediately taken to Kaiser Permanente to receive medical attention by his personal physician.

However, he never regained consciousness since his return, and his health continued to deteriorate over the past week.

In 1993 the University of California Press published Corona's autobiography, *Memories of Chicano History*. Professor Mario T. Garcia, who collaborated with Corona in the preparation of the narrative of his *Memories*, stated, "Bert Corona was born in (May 29) 1918 in El Paso, Texas, a child of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Through his family, Corona symbolizes the thousands of Mexican immigrants and refugees who crossed the U.S.-Mexican

border-a border created by nineteenth-century U.S. expansion-seeking jobs and safety."

He currently served as National Director and Executive Director of the *Hermandad Mexicana Nacional*, a national nonprofit membership community based

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ssamiento@superior.co.orange.ca.us, rsmith@asands.com,
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kids4sal@hotmail.com, avargas@naleo.org, Elxaime@aol.com,
peter.villegas@wamu.net

Date: Tue, 16 Jan 2001 02:48:02 EST

Subject: National Latino Leader, Bert Corona, Fights to Last Breath

HERMANDAD MEXICANA NACIONAL
825 N. Broadway, Santa Ana, CA 92701
(714) 541-0250 FAX: (714) 541-4597

email: nativolopez@aol.com

NEWS RELEASE

To: News Agencies

From: Nativo Vigil Lopez

**organization of Spanish-speaking immigrants headquartered in Los Angeles,
California.**

**Corona is survived by his wife, Angelina Corona, his daughter, Margo De
Ley,
and sons, David, Frank, and Ernesto Corona, and three grandchildren,
Baltie,
Liza and Clare. The family is presently arranging services and will
advise
friends and the public in the coming days.**

**Correspondence can be forward to: Hermandad Mexicana Nacional 634 S.
Spring
Street, 8th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90014**

From: <AZTECPRINT@juno.com>
To: Nativolopez@aol.com
Subject: Re: Passing of Humberto "Bert" Corona

1/19/01

**Hermandad Mexicana
Nativo Lopez:**

With the passing of Humberto "Bert" Corona, the Mexicano/Chicano people in the U.S. and Mexico, have lost a warrior. An epoca has passed and a good man, that I had the privilege of knowing and working with, is gone. With Humberto "Bert" Corona's passing, the Mexicano/Chicano people, today are poorer. History will record, that before there was a Cesar Chavez, Corky Gonzales, Reis Tijerina, Jose Angel Gutierrez, and many others, that first there was Humberto "Bert" Corona. History will also record that Humberto "Bert" Corona, "THE FATHER OF THE MODERN DAY CHICANO MOVEMENT," fought and struggled for decades, up to his final breath to bring justice, organization, and political power to the Mexicano/Chicano people in the U.S. All of us, whether activist, immigrants, campesinos, students, young people, politicians, union leaders and every day working people, owe Humberto "Bert" Corona, a great historical debt. A debt that can only be repaid by continuing the unfinished historical struggle that Humberto "Bert" Corona lived and died for. Bert's philosophical, ideological, political perspectives, and leadership will be sorely missed by all who walked, marched, protested, fought, organized and struggled in the Chicano Movement with him. QUE DESCANSA EN PAZ!

Sinceramente,

**Herman Baca
President
Committee on Chicano Rights**

P.S. Please do me a favor and forward my personal, my families', and the Committee on Chicano Rights condolence to Bert's family. Also, please inform me as to the funeral arrangements.

From: Nativolopez@aol.com

To: coacuauhtli@yahoo.com, racuna@csun.edu, michael.aldaco@ucop.edu,
amigos@latinola.com, JessAraujo@aol.com,
laraajo-cook@sausd.k12.ca.us, rcaarmendariz@netzero.net,
hola_5@hotmail.com, elahtf@earthlink.net,
fascencio@corp.quepasa.com, lista@www.azteca.net,
fascencio@quepasa.com, LaVoz@aztlan.net,
abelardo@latinola.com, LatinoBeat@aol.com,
aztecprint@juno.com, hmmeditor@lycos.com, Laborpne@aol.com,
Ebustill@aol.com, calacapress@home.com,
mrcastaneda@west.raytheon.com, hacastillo@earthlink.net,
Hectorchavanajr@aol.com, ChicanismoNews@aol.com,
LClaveran@aol.com, Norma.Cobb@sen.ca.gov, NadSab@aol.com,
margo@cct.org, fernando.denecochea@sce.com,
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senator.dunn@sen.ca.gov, rnina2000@hotmail.com,
Dandurazo@aol.com, Zapoteco@aol.com, EvelinaFernandez@aol.com,
alfredo.figuero@ucr.edu, eflores@carbon.cudenver.edu,
gilberto.flores@worldnet.att.net (Gil Flores), cnagr@cw.com,
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LatinoVote@egroups.com, uhnews@yahoo.com,
garcia@humanitas.ucsb.edu, sggarcia@csusm.edu,
pgarza@speed.net, FGOMEZ@atty.lacity.org, mngomez@uci.edu,
XColumn@aol.com, Guillermo_Gonzalez@feinstein.senate.gov,
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cpulliam@lacooperativa.org, Frank.Quevedo@sce.com,
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Elxaime@aol.com, peter.villegas@wamu.net,
angela@carecen-la.org

Date: Fri, 19 Jan 2001 00:34:08 EST

Subject: PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL SERVICE AND TRIBUTE TO BERT CORONA

Friends of Bert Corona: All of you have responded wonderfully to the notices we have sent regarding the health and ultimate death of our beloved brother Bert Corona. Through your help in spreading the word so many people have communicated their condolences and desire to do something that makes lasting meaning to the life and work of Bert. The services this coming Saturday,

January 20th, only provide a brief opportunity to express our collective eulogy, tribute, and remembrances. The work of close to seven decades in favor of social justice, common decency to working people and immigrants, and so many other just causes, truly requires a broader participation of the tens of thousands of individuals who were touched by the work of the historic giant that was Bert Corona. I call upon you to express your interest and

desire to participate, sponsor, and organize a PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL SERVICE AND TRIBUTE of our beloved Bert Corona. Such a service is being planned for

Saturday, February 10th at the East Los Angeles Community College Auditorium from 11:00 a.m. until every last soul that desires to express and share his/her eulogy has an opportunity to do so. Bert Corona was a public figure for over sixty years. He gave and gave himself to the community. No cause was too insignificant for him to raise his voice and encourage others to do the same. On many occasions he was the lone voice on an issue until others gathered the courage to add their voice to the cause. We want to encourage the workers, students, professors, artists, professionals, teachers, politicians, immigrants, cholos, vatos locos, old pachucos, farmworkers, and common simple people to come forward and celebrate the contributions of Bert Corona in a manner befitting his many years of struggle. Bert did not believe in the cult of the personality and did not yearn for awards,

accolades, nor did he insist or angle his way forward to receive credit for the collective deeds and successes resulting from a specific struggle. In fact, he became uncomfortable when people insisted on making a fuss over him or pushed too hard that he should be recognized. This was just his way.

Those of you that are interested in adding your name to the list of many that have already committed themselves to making the PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL a success, please reply to this message with your affirmation to sponsor, spread the word, and attend. Bert Corona deserves a collective acclamation, which undoubtedly should have preceded his passing from this earth. However, he would not hear of it. Such was Bert Corona. I await your response. Gracias y Animo. Nativo López

PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL SERVICE AND TRIBUTE TO BELOVED BERT CORONA

**When: Saturday, February, 10th
Where: East Los Angeles Community College Auditorium (Cesar Chavez Blvd., West of Atlantic Blvd. in East Los Angeles)
Time: 11:00 a.m.**

Sponsors: Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, Assemblyman Gil Cedillo, Assemblyman Antonio Villaraigosa, Senator Richard Polanco, Herman Gallegos, Jeff Penichet, Alex Nogales, the National Hispanic Media Coalition, Miguel Contreras, Executive Secretary Treasurer, Los Angeles Federation of Labor, Canon John Luce, Episcopal Church, Audry Kaslow, Soledad "Chole" Alatorre, Juan Garcia, Publisher of Union Hispana Newspaper, Susana Arellano, East L.A. Health Task Force, and the list continues to grow. Add your name today.

From: Nativolopez@aol.com
To: aztecprint@juno.com
Date: Fri, 19 Jan 2001 00:53:16 EST
Subject: PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL

Herman: What do you think about this idea, or doing something similar in San Diego? I believe this would be a way for many people to truly share and participate in the experience of eulogizing and paying tribute to our beloved brother, Bert. And you know Bert, a way to motivate people to continue the struggle to its next phase and next issues. Think about it, and let's talk this weekend. Nativo

From: "Andres Baca" <chew_baca20@hotmail.com>

To: AzWilcatz@aol.com, LMercado@trammellcrow.com,
LaffertyCM@SUPSHIP.NAVY.MIL, mikety1@home.com,
angela619@hotmail.com, amg01@u.washington.edu,
RVAL916@aol.com, VDemara@aol.com, vanessa.contreras@usa.net,
jrt_princess19@hotmail.com, BMarti7024@aol.com,
deedles_01@excite.com, aztecprint@juno.com,
sgutierr@u.washington.edu

Date: Fri, 19 Jan 2001 14:55:47 -0000

Subject: Facts of Life.

Facts of life

>>>

>>> 1. At least 5 people in this world, love you so much they
>>> would die for you.

>>> 2. At least 15 people in this world love you, in some
>>> way.

>>> 3. The only reason anyone would ever hate you, is because
>>> they want to be
>>> just like you.

>>> 4. A smile from you, can bring happiness to anyone, even
>>> if they don't like
>>> you.

>>> 5. Everynight, SOMEONE thinks about you before they go to
>>> sleep.

>>> 6. You mean the world to someone.

>>> 7. Without you, someone may not be living.

>>> 8. You are special and unique, in your own way.

>>> 9. Someone that you don't know even exists, loves you.

>>> 10.. When you make the biggest mistake ever, something
>>> good comes from
>>> it.(so

>>> true)

>>> 11. When you think the world has turned it's back on you,
>>> take a look,you

>>> most likely turned your back on the world.

>>> 12. When you think you have no chance at getting what you
>>> want, you probably

>>> won't get it, but if you believe in yourself, you
>>> probably sooner or later

>>> will get it.

>>> 13. Always remember complements you recieved, forget about
>>> the rude remarks.

>>> 14. Always tell someone how you feel about them, you will
>>> feel much better

>>> when they know.

>>> 15. If you have a great friend, take the time to let them
>>> know that they are

>> > great.

>> >

Get your FREE download of MSN Explorer at <http://explorer.msn.com>

From: Nativolopez@aol.com

To: coacuauhtli@yahoo.com, racuna@csun.edu, michael.aldaco@ucop.edu,
amigos@latinola.com, JessAraujo@aol.com,
laraujo-cook@sausd.k12.ca.us, rcaarmendariz@netzero.net,
hola_5@hotmail.com, elahtf@earthlink.net,
fascencio@corp.quepasa.com, aztecprint@juno.com,
hmmeditor@lycos.com, Laborpne@aol.com, Ebustill@aol.com,
calacapress@home.com

Date: Thu, 18 Jan 2001 02:43:13 EST

Subject: Amended News Release Re Bert Corona Funeral Services

HERMANDAD MEXICANA NACIONAL

825 N. Broadway, Santa Ana, CA 92701

(714) 541-0250 FAX: (714) 541-4597

email: nativolopez@aol.com

AMENDED NEWS RELEASE

To: News Agencies

From: Nativo Vigil Lopez

Date: January 17, 2001

**CELEBRATE THE LIFE, STRUGGLE AND VISION OF OUR BELOVED LEADER AND
TEACHER,
BERT CORONA**

Los Angeles, California - The Hermandad Mexicana Nacional and family of
our
beloved leader and teacher, Bert Corona, invite you to celebrate his
life,
struggle, and vision at the following services:

MEMORIAL SERVICE: Saturday, Jan 20th from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at
Cesar
Chavez Health Center - 2501 So. Hill Street, Los Angeles (corner of
25th
and Hill Streets);

PROCESSION AND MASS: Saturday, Jan. 20th from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
departing from 2501 So. Hill Street, Los Angeles and conclude at St.
Vincent
Catholic Church - 621 West Adams, Los Angeles (corner of Adams and
Figueroa
Blvd.);

COMMUNITY MEMORIAL SERVICE AND TRIBUTE: Eulogies, remembrances, tributes

Saturday, February 10th from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at East Los Angeles Community College Auditorium on Cesar Chavez Blvd. (West of Atlantic Blvd.)

in East Los Angeles. COME AND SHARE YOUR MEMORIES AND STORIES OF BERT CORONA.

Let us mourn and celebrate together the tremendous contributions of a great working class hero and leader of the Mexican, Mexican-American, and Latino communities in the United States. There is no other Mexican, Mexican-American or Latino leader in the history of the United States with a longer and more versatile trajectory of social struggle in favor of workers and immigrants for social justice, dignity, and fairness than our beloved

leader, brother, and teacher, Bert Corona. The full history of this great leader has yet to be written. His greatest legacy to all immigrants, workers, and youth was his perennial optimism and faith in the capability of the working people to organize themselves, forge their own leaders, understand the complexity of their oppression, and struggle for social change. His energy was boundless. His hostility to discrimination and injustice was recalcitrant. His stubbornness and persistence before seemingly insurmountable odds and challenges were recognized by both friend and foe.

We are left to accept and pickup the baton he has handed us and modestly attempt to emulate his example. He will be sorely missed.

Bert Corona, national Latino civil rights and labor leader and activist, fought to the last breath finally surcumbing to a series of health ailments at 9:00 p.m., Monday, January 15, 2001, at the Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Los Angeles. He was 82 years of age. Corona had returned from Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico on Saturday, January 6, 2001 after enduring three operations within a nine-day period. He had been hospitalized first on December 26, 2000 for an acute gall bladder inflammation when he arrived in Leon, Guanajuato to visit relatives while on Christmas vacation. The gall bladder was removed, and he additionally suffered kidney failure. Several days later he endured another operation to replace his heart pacemaker,

and a third operation three days later was due to renal failure and serious abdominal infection which required a blood transfusion. Corona left the Aranda de la Parra Hospital in the city of Leon to return to Los Angeles in medical transport and was immediately taken to Kaiser Permanente to receive medical attention by his personal physician. Although, he never regained

full consciousness after his return to Los Angeles, it was apparent to family and close friends who visited him during his final week that he was aware of their presence and their love for him.

In 1993 the University of California Press published Corona's autobiography, Memories of Chicano History. Professor Mario T. Garcia, who collaborated with Corona in the preparaton of the narrative of his Memories, stated, "Bert Corona was born in (May 29) 1918 in El Paso, Texas, a child of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Through his family, Corona symbolizes the thousands of mexican immigrants and refugees who crossed the U.S.-Mexican border-a border created by nineteenth-century U.S. expansion-seeking jobs and safety."

Most recently Corona served as National Director and Executive Director of the Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, a nonprofit community-based membership organization of Spanish-speaking immigrants headquartered in Los Angeles,

California.

Bert Corona is survived by his wife, Angelina and adopted son, Ernesto, who reside in Los Angeles. He is also survived by his daughter, Margo De Ley, who resides in Chicago, Illinois, and his two adult sons, David and Frank, from his first wife Blanche Corona who is deceased, and three grandchildren, Baltie, Liza, and Clarity.

The family has requested that in lieu of floral arrangements that contributions to made to the BERT CORONA MEMORIAL FUND and sent to the Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, 634 So. Spring Street, 8th Floor, Los

Juno e-mail printed Fri, 19 Jan 2001 19:56:16 , page 4

**Angeles,
CA 90014.**

**Please forward all correspondence to: Hermandad Mexicana Nacional 634
So.
Spring Street, 8th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90014.**

PLEASE SPREAD THE WORD TO YOUR RESPECTIVE NETWORKS

HERMANDAD MEXICANA NACIONAL
825 N. Broadway, Santa Ana, CA 92701
(714) 541-0250 FAX: (714) 541-4597
email: nativolopez@aol.com

NEWS RELEASE

To: News Agencies
From: Nativo Vigil Lopez
Date: January 15, 2001

BERT CORONA, NATIONAL LATINO LEADER, FIGHTS TO THE LAST BREATH

Los Angeles, California - Bert Corona, national Latino civil rights and labor leader and activist, fought to the last breath finally succumbing to a series of health ailments at 9:15 p.m., Monday, January 15, 2001, at the Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Los Angeles. He was 82 years of age.

Corona had returned from Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico on Saturday, January 6, 2001 after enduring three operations within a nine-day period. He had been hospitalized first on December 26, 2000 for an acute gall bladder inflammation. The gall bladder was removed, but resulted in kidney failure. Several days later he endured another operation for renal failure and infection, which required a blood transfusion, and a third operation three days later was to replace his pacemaker. Corona left the Aranda de la Parra Hospital in the city of Leon to return to Los Angeles in medical transport and was immediately taken to Kaiser Permanente to receive medical attention by his personal physician. However, he never regained consciousness since his return, and his health continued to deteriorate over the past week.

In 1993 the University of California Press published Corona's autobiography, *Memories of Chicano History*. Professor Mario T. Garcia, who collaborated with Corona in the preparation of the narrative of his *Memories*, stated, "Bert Corona was born in (May 29) 1918 in El Paso, Texas, a child of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Through his family, Corona symbolizes the thousands of Mexican immigrants and refugees who crossed the U.S.-Mexican border-a border created by nineteenth-century U.S. expansion-seeking jobs and safety."

He currently served as National Director and Executive Director of the Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, a national nonprofit membership community based organization of Spanish-speaking immigrants headquartered in Los Angeles, California.

Corona is survived by his wife, Angelina Corona, his daughter, Margo De Ley, and sons, David, Frank, and Ernesto Corona, and three grandchildren, Baltie, Liza and Clare. The family is presently arranging services and will advise friends and the public in the coming days.

Correspondence can be forward to: Hermandad Mexicana Nacional 634 S.
Spring
Street, 8th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90014

CELEBRATE THE LIFE, STRUGGLE AND VISION OF OUR BELOVED
LEADER AND TEACHER,
BERT CORONA

Los Angeles, California - The Hermandad Mexicana Nacional and family of our beloved leader and teacher, Bert Corona, invite you to celebrate his life, struggle, and vision at the following services:

Viewing and Pay Respect to Family: Saturday, Jan 20th from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Cesar Chavez Health Center - 2501 So. Hill Street, Los Angeles (corner of 25th and Hill Streets);

March and Mass: Saturday, Jan. 20th from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at St. Vincent Catholic Church - 621 West Adams, Los Angeles (corner of Adams and Figueroa Blvd.);

Community Memorial Service - Eulogies, remembrances, tributes - Saturday, Jan. 20th from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at East Los Angeles Community College Auditorium on Cesar Chavez Blvd. (West of Atlantic Blvd.) in East Los Angeles

Let us mourn and celebrate together the tremendous contributions of a great working class hero and leader of the Mexican, Mexican-American, and Latino communities in the United States. There is no other Mexican, Mexican-American or Latino leader in the history of the United States with a longer and more versatile trajectory of social struggle in favor of workers and immigrants for social justice, dignity, and fairness than our beloved leader, brother, and teacher, Bert Corona. The full history of this great leader has yet to be written. His greatest legacy to all immigrants, workers, and youth, was his perennial optimism and faith in the capability of the working masses to organize themselves, forge their own leaders, understand the complexity of their oppression, and struggle for social change. His energy was boundless. His hostility to discrimination and injustice was recalcitrant. His stubbornness and persistence before seemingly insurmountable odds and challenges were recognized by both friend and foe. We are left to accept and pickup the baton he has handed us and modestly attempt to emulate his example. He will be solely missed.

In 1993 the University of California Press published Corona's autobiography, *Memories of Chicano History*. Professor Mario T. Garcia, who collaborated with Corona in the preparation of the narrative of his *Memories*, stated, "Bert Corona was born in (May 29) 1918 in El Paso, Texas, a child of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Through his family, Corona symbolizes the thousands of Mexican immigrants and refugees who crossed the U.S.-Mexican border-a border created by nineteenth-century U.S. expansion-seeking jobs and safety."

He currently served as National Director and Executive Director of the Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, a national non-profit membership community

based
organization of Spanish-speaking immigrants headquartered in Los Angeles,
California.

Juno e-mail printed Fri, 19 Jan 2001 19:48:22 , page 1

From: George.Ramos@latimes.com

To: aztecprint@juno.com

Date: Fri, 19 Jan 2001 16:04:51 -0800

Subject: Re:

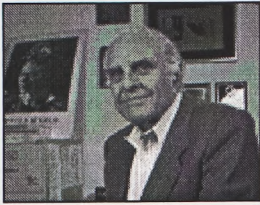
thanks, herman. when i first heard bert was ill, i wrote most of the obituary on the chance he might not survive in mexico. when he was transferred here, then i thought, 'well, he'll pull through.' but i continued to get messages that indicated his condition was still very delicate. so i wasn't surprised when i walked in tuesday morning and found

out that he was dead.

so, how you doing these days?

i'm still working here, slugging it out on a variety of issues.

Bert Corona; Labor Activist Backed Rights for Undocumented Workers By GEORGE RAMOS, Times Staff Writer



Bert Corona, a sometimes fiery labor organizer, community activist and educator who championed the rights of undocumented workers, Mexicans and other Latinos in the United States for more than seven decades, has died from complications of kidney failure. He was 82.

Corona died Monday night at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Hollywood, where he was transferred after being stricken Dec. 26 during a trip to Mexico to visit relatives, said Nativo Lopez, executive director of Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, the immigrant rights organization that Corona helped establish.

Hospitalized with an acute gallbladder inflammation, Corona underwent three operations within nine days at Hospital Aranda de la Parra in Leon, Guanajuato. He was stabilized and transferred more than a week ago to the Kaiser facility but never regained consciousness, Lopez said.

Corona was remembered as a significant figure in civil rights and labor circles whose accomplishments were sometimes compared with those of Cesar Chavez. He defended the rights of undocumented workers during a time when no

one else--not even Chavez--would speak for them.

In addition to Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, Corona helped found the Mexican American Political Assn., one of the state's oldest Latino political organizations.

"He is a giant in the history of Latinos in the United States," said UC Santa Barbara history professor Mario T. Garcia, "but he was a lesser-known figure than Cesar Chavez. He was, however, equally as important. He did what no one had successfully done--organize undocumented workers. He is the urban counterpart to Chavez, who organized farm workers."

Former Democratic Rep. Edward R. Roybal, who in 1949 became the first Mexican American to be elected to the Los Angeles City Council in the 20th century, hailed Corona as "a real fighter for civil rights. In the years I was away in Washington [in Congress], Bert was here all the time, fighting for things."

Corona, whose father had fought in the Mexican Revolution of 1910, was born in El Paso. He came to Los Angeles in 1936 to play basketball at USC but did not finish college, choosing instead to immerse himself in campaigns to improve conditions for workers and fellow Mexican Americans.

In his 1993 autobiography, written with Garcia, Corona said his early interest in helping Mexican Americans in Los Angeles stemmed in part from his upbringing in the border town of El Paso, where he learned to be proud of his Mexican roots and the Spanish language.

In Los Angeles, however, he was astonished by an incident that occurred shortly after his arrival in the city. Two Mexican Americans on a streetcar ignored him when he asked in Spanish for directions to Fairfax Avenue. When they reached the stop, however, the two admonished Corona in Spanish, telling him they would have answered his question if he had spoken to them in English.

"Here it's best not to speak Spanish," they told him. "It's best if they don't know if you're Mexican. They treat you better."

"I looked at them," Corona recalled, "and I couldn't understand that attitude."

After dropping out of college, he volunteered at a Roman Catholic Church in Boyle Heights and organized workers for the Congress of Industrial Organizations, a forerunner of today's AFL-CIO, and the United Cannery, Agriculture, Packing and Allied Workers of America.

In 1938, he joined the charismatic labor organizer Luisa Moreno in building the League of Spanish-Speaking People, one of the first national organizations for Mexican Americans. He also helped form chapters of Saul Alinsky's Community Service Organization in Los Angeles.

His organizing efforts in the organization often brought him into contact with another up-and-coming Mexican American Community Service Organization organizer from Northern California, Chavez, who would help establish the farm workers union in the 1960s.

While Corona generally supported Chavez and his United Farm Workers, he openly clashed with the farm labor leader over the union's opposition to undocumented workers. Chavez and the UFW supported Immigration and Naturalization Service actions to deport illegal immigrant workers, whom they regarded as scabs.

Corona argued that undocumented workers should be organized rather than deported. That stance led him to the last great organizing effort of his life, the establishment in 1951 of Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, or National Mexican Brotherhood. By the 1960s, Hermandad began actively organizing illegal immigrants in California to improve their earning power in this country.

"I did have an important difference with Cesar," Corona wrote in his autobiography. "This involved his, and the union's position on the need to apprehend and deport undocumented Mexican immigrants who were being used as scabs by the growers. . . . The Hermandad believed that organizing undocumented farm workers was auxiliary to the union's efforts to organize the fields. We supported an open immigration policy, as far as Mexico was concerned."

Hermandad soon became a major immigrant services provider, with offices in North Hollywood, Santa Ana and Los Angeles. But by the end of 1992, federal grants, its largest source of income, dried up. In recent years, the organization was dogged by more than \$4 million in debts, but Corona continued to believe in its mission.

In 1959, Corona joined with other Chicanos--U.S.-born citizens of Mexican descent--in Fresno to form the Mexican American Political Assn. As the first statewide Mexican American political group in California, the organization found its endorsement eagerly courted by Democratic and

Republican candidates in the 1960s and '70s.

When he became the organization's president in the early 1960s, Corona used the position to argue that Mexican American concerns deserved a presidential cabinet-rank position. In 1966, an angry Corona boycotted a White House conference on Mexican American affairs in El Paso because, he said, it was controlled by Anglos.

Corona was long active in liberal politics, working to establish Viva clubs for Democratic candidates, including Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.) and former California Gov.

Edmund G. "Pat" Brown Sr. He was also an early supporter of former Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley.

He worked to elect Chicanos to the Los Angeles City Council, beginning in 1938 when he campaigned on behalf of a Mexican American activist named Eduardo Quevedo. Although Quevedo lost, Corona--who vowed never to run for public office--supported another Mexican American a decade later. That candidate was Roybal.

Although he never earned a college degree, Corona lectured at Stanford and taught at Cal State campuses at San Diego, Northridge, Fullerton and Los Angeles.

At Cal State L.A., where he taught for more than a decade in the 1970s and '80s, Corona led a faction of part-time teachers who wanted to turn the young Chicano Studies Department into an agent of social activism in the large Mexican American community surrounding the campus. Several part-time teachers, including Corona, were fired. During the turmoil, a fire was set outside department head Louis Negrete's office and his car was set on fire in his garage at home.

When The Times characterized Corona as a Marxist-Leninist and a suspect in the fires, he sued the newspaper and Negrete. The libel suit was settled years later, with all parties agreeing not to disclose its terms.

Corona's first wife, Blanche Taff, died in 1993. A year later, he married Angelina Castillo, who still works for Hermandad as its director of affordable housing.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by sons David, of San Luis Obispo, and Frank and Ernesto, both of Los Angeles; daughter Margo De Ley of Chicago; and three grandchildren.

Juno e-mail printed Mon, 22 Jan 2001 09:45:45 , page 1

From: XColumn@aol.com

To: aztecprint@juno.com

Date: Tue, 16 Jan 2001 17:45:52 EST

Subject: Re: The "fifth pillar," good for Chicanos?

Herman:

Thanks for both your views...

I actually agree with your critique of our column... the only thing I would note is that at the conclusion of the column, we wrote that we are going beyond the four or five pillars. We are more interested in the foundation... and who defines that foundation? That's the challenge.

Sinceramente

Roberto

From: Calaca Press <calacapress@home.com>
To: Undisclosed-recipients;;
Date: Tue, 16 Jan 2001 08:39:37 -0800
Subject: RIP: Bert Corona

The country has lost one of more important figures for the Mexican/Chicano Community. If you have not read the biography of Bert Corona, put it on your list of books to read!

FOR BERT CORONA

**Te oigo mi hermano,
te acompaño en tu canto
formando comunidad
buscando la justicia.
Bien que lo sabes--
it will take more than the river
to divide our brown canela colors
which give us strength,
it will take more than the mountains
to separate nuestra sangre
which gives us life,
it will take more than the desert's heat
to dry our thirst for justice,
it will take more than link fences
to fragment los sueños
de tanta raza nueva!
It will take more than English
for us to forget who we are!
Somos de la misma tierra
el mismo sol nos quema
la misma lluvia da la vida
al maiz/frijole sembrada.
Te oigo mi hermano--
as long as there is breath
cantamos las canci3ns nuevas,
con el arco iris a nuestra espalda,
siguimos organizando
a un futuro liberado!**

**Trinidad Sánchez, Jr.
1991 San Antonio, Texas**

--

calacapress@home.com <http://www.calacapress.com>

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Raza Spoken Here 2 (CD-\$12)

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as our barrio turns...who the yoke b on? by alurista (book-\$15)

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Raza Spoken Here 1 (CD-\$12)

Bus Stops and Other Poems by Manuel J. Velez (Book-\$8)

HERMANDAD MEXICANA NACIONAL
825 N. Broadway, Santa Ana, CA 92701
(714) 541-0250 FAX: (714) 541-4597
email: nativolopez@aol.com

NEWS RELEASE

To: News Agencies
From: Nativo Vigil Lopez
Date: January 15, 2001

BERT CORONA, NATIONAL LATINO LEADER, FIGHTS TO THE LAST BREATH

Los Angeles, California - Bert Corona, national Latino civil rights and labor leader and activist, fought to the last breath finally succumbing to a series of health ailments at 9:15 p.m., Monday, January 15, 2001, at the Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Los Angeles. He was 82 years of age.

Corona had returned from Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico on Saturday, January 6, 2001 after enduring three operations within a nine-day period. He had been hospitalized first on December 26, 2000 for an acute gall bladder inflammation. The gall bladder was removed, but resulted in kidney failure. Several days later he endured another operation for renal failure and infection, which required a blood transfusion, and a third operation three days later was to replace his pacemaker. Corona left the Aranda de la Parra Hospital in the city of Leon to return to Los Angeles in medical transport and was immediately taken to Kaiser Permanente to receive medical attention by his personal physician. However, he never regained consciousness since his return, and his health continued to deteriorate over the past week.

In 1993 the University of California Press published Corona's autobiography, *Memories of Chicano History*. Professor Mario T. Garcia, who collaborated with Corona in the preparation of the narrative of his *Memories*, stated, "Bert Corona was born in (May 29) 1918 in El Paso, Texas, a child of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Through his family, Corona symbolizes the thousands of Mexican immigrants and refugees who crossed the U.S.-Mexican border-a border created by nineteenth-century U.S. expansion-seeking jobs and safety."

He currently served as National Director and Executive Director of the Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, a national nonprofit membership community based organization of Spanish-speaking immigrants headquartered in Los Angeles, California.

Corona is survived by his wife, Angelina Corona, his daughter, Margo De Ley, and sons, David, Frank, and Ernesto Corona, and three grandchildren, Baltie, Liza and Clare. The family is presently arranging services and will advise friends and the public in the coming days.

Correspondence can be forward to: Hermandad Mexicana Nacional 634 S.
Spring
Street, 8th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90014

From: Nativolopez@aol.com

To: racuna@csun.edu, michael.aldaco@ucop.edu, amigos@latinola.com,
JessAraujo@aol.com, rcaarmendariz@netzero.net,
elahtf@earthlink.net, aztecprint@juno.com,
hmmeditor@lycos.com, senator.polanco@sen.ca.gov,
senator.moreno-ducheny@sen.ca.gov,
senator.figuroa@sen.ca.gov, senator.alarcon@sen.ca.gov,
senator.escutia@sen.ca.gov, senator.soto@sen.ca.gov,
senator.ortiz@sen.ca.gov, Dennis.Cardoza@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Florez@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Cardenas@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Frommer@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Diaz@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Salinas@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Cedillo@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Romero@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Firebaugh@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Oropeza@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Havice@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Chavez@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Calderon@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.McLeod@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Correa@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Vargas@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Gallegos@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Villaraigosa@assembly.ca.gov,
Assemblymember.Reyes@assembly.ca.gov, Norma.Cobb@sen.ca.gov,
NadSab@aol.com, margo@cct.org, fernando.denecochea@sce.com,
senator.dunn@sen.ca.gov, Zapoteco@aol.com,
EvelinaFernandez@aol.com,
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aguzman@kpcc.org, henry.montes@apha.org, Zekeher@aol.com,
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rrjaurequi@earthlink.net, keefeaj@yahoo.com, rlara@csulb.edu,
Chris.Leo@asm.ca.gov, toluco13@juno.com, magu4u@hotmail.com,
LULACCalYouth-owner@egroups.com, RMelendez9@cs.com,
webmaster@upi.com, ombudsman@washpost.com,
letters@washpost.com, editor@usatoday.com,
letters@nytimes.com, redaccion@laopinion.com,
letters@latimes.com, news@hispanicpress.com,
lamextex@ix.netcom.com, jpalacio@pacbell.net,
Filmdoer@aol.com, aperez@ci.pasadena.ca.us,
cpulliam@lacooperativa.org, Frank.Quevedo@sce.com,
mramirez@libertyhill.org, ramonramirez@pcun.org,
george.ramos@latimes.com, jregalado@cslanet.calst,
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rsmith@asands.com, bishopjsoto@rcbo.org, avargas@naleo.org,
Elxaime@aol.com

Date: Thu, 11 Jan 2001 02:29:50 EST

Subject: Update Re: Health Status of Bert Corona

Friends of Bert Corona: Thank you for your letters, calls, and inquiries

regarding the health of longtime civil rights and labor activist Bert Corona.

This is a brief update regarding his present status. Corona returned to Los

Angeles the evening of Saturday, January 6, 2001, by medical transport from

Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico, and taken immediately to Kaiser Permanente Hospital

in Los Angeles. He continues in critical and intensive care, and under his

personal physician's care. He continues to recuperate from the three operations he endured over a nine-day period, and still suffers from an inflammation of the liver. He is in a very weakened and precarious state.

Due to his present condition, Corona's physician and family have requested

that he not receive visitors. Those that wish to forward letters or GET WELL

CARDS, may do so at the following address:

Hermanidad Mexicana Nacional

Bert Corona

634 S. Spring, Fifth Floor

Los Angeles, CA 90014

Once again, thank you for your prayers, great sympathy, and concern for someone special who has touched too many lives and generations to even imagine, in the classroom as a professor, in the shops as a labor organizer,

in the neighborhoods as a community organizer, in the political movements as a

political activist and founder and leader of local, state, and national organizations and coalitions, in the Democratic Party as a campaign director

and organizer, in Sacramento and Washington, DC as a people's lobbyist, and

many other circles of life where he influenced currents of opinion, ideological orientations, and political perspectives both within the Mexican

and Latino communities, and within the majority community of this country,

Juno e-mail printed Mon, 22 Jan 2001 09:54:11 , page 3

and Mexico. Please continue to spread the news to your respective networks.

Share the news. Gracias y Animo.

Nativo Lopez (nativolopez@aol.com).

From: Nativolopez@aol.com
To: aztecprint@juno.com
Date: Sat, 6 Jan 2001 13:29:01 EST
Subject: Re: Bert Corona

Herman: I just received word this morning that Bert will be returning this afternoon (Saturday) by medical transport to Los Angeles, and will probably be taken directly to Kaiser Permanente in Los Angeles (Sunset facility). He is still in intensive care and will require continued attention and observation. The news you last received probably did not include information regarding the third operation he underwent on Thursday. This last operation was to replace his pacemaker. He is recovering, is conscious, and personally made the decision to return to Los Angeles. I will pass on your regards as soon as I see him, if not before. You might want to inquire personally with Kaiser Permanente on Sunday regard the status. You are the first to receive this information in that I just received it about ten minutes ago. I will spread the word. Thank God for the internet. Please spread the word through your own networks. Thanks. Nativo



January 19, 2001

In Memoriam

Bert Corona

Born: May 29, 1918
El Paso Texas
Died: January 15, 2001
Los Angeles, Ca.

"A Successful Leader must respect himself and set an example for others.

God help us in our long struggle"

Bert Corona
1970

One of our great warriors Bert Corona has finally gone to his final resting place in AZTLAN CALIFAS. *He brought to a close his life as only a true warrior of the Chicano movement could 'fighting to the last moment to survive'.*

Bert was visiting his ancestral homeland in Leon Guanajuato when he suffered an acute gall bladder attack January 6, 2001. He was operated on and had his gall bladder removed. His kidney then began to fail. He suffered another emergency operation, but his weakened body was now in dire straits. He suffered renal failure and serious infections. His heart became weak and his pacemaker was replaced. Sensing that he was dying, he was transported to Los Angeles where he was attended to by his personal physician. He never regained consciousness and died, in the ancient land of our people... Aztlan.

The Corona family lived *during Mexico's defining Revolution*. His Grandmother served as the physician to President Francisco Madero. His father died in that struggle. In 1936 Bert moved to Los Angeles from Tejas where he entered college but was unable to complete his studies.

The Bert Corona legacy included his participation in the 1942 mysterious "Sleepy Lagoon" murders. He was instrumental in forming the Sleepy Lagoon defense Committee and helped to develop the evidence that proved that the accused Chicanos were innocent.

In 1948, Corona helped organize the Community Service Organization, in Oakland, California to fight for the Civil Rights of Chicano Urban dwellers. Strangely one of its members was Cesar

Chavez. In 1951, Corona was involved in forming the National Association of Mexican Americans (NAMA) to mobilize Mexican Americans of the Southwest to fight against the abuses of the Border Patrol.

He fought against the Walter- McCarran Act, which was supported by Joseph McCarthy an ultra - conservative. It fell upon Bert Corona and a host of other Chicanos to fight to defend our people against harassment, imprisonment, and deportation.

One of his greatest achievements came in 1958 when he formed MAPA (Mexican American Political Association) in Phoenix, Arizona. He went throughout the Southwest organizing MAPA groups. Corona quickly moved MAPA into the Democratic Party and helped John Kennedy win the election with his "Viva Kennedy Clubs!" In 1962 he served as co-chair of the "Viva Pat Brown " campaign. Then came the "Viva Johnson" campaigns. Corona was instrumental in moving the growing Chicano community into mainstream political action that would eventually bring them into power and becoming part of mainstream America.

Chicanos, though, will remember him for his formation of CASA (Hermandad General de Trabajadores) to correct labor abuses. CASA formed branches in Los Angeles, San Diego and wherever there were Mexican Americans and Mexican migrants.

He worked for the exploited workers that were abused by the exploitive American system that saw Mexican workers as throwaway workers.

In a move that still draws inspiration from Bert Corona, La Hermandad Mexicana Nacional was conceived in San Diego by Labor, Chicano groups, and to this day continues to fight for the rights of the exploited workers of America.

Bert was a giant of a man during his life. It will take volumes to write about his contributions to his people, his country, and for the betterment of mankind. He was a Mestizo way beyond his times.

Rest in Peace Bert Corona.

You will be missed but you will never die in our hearts.

"What moves us is our hunger for justice, respect & equality,

We have been since the Spanish conquest hijos of

La Malinche And Cortez.

We are citizens of the Americas. And by birth and choice

Americanos del Norte"

D. L. Muñoz .



[Return to the Frontpage](#)

From: Nativolopez@aol.com

To: coacuauhtli@yahoo.com, racuna@csun.edu, michael.aldaco@ucop.edu,
JessAraujo@aol.com, laraujo-cook@sausd.k12.ca.us,
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elahtf@earthlink.net, fascencio@corp.quepasa.com,
aztecprint@juno.com, hmmeditor@lycos.com, Laborpne@aol.com,
Ebustill@aol.com, bertcam@netzero.net, LaVoz@aztlan.net

Date: Mon, 22 Jan 2001 00:46:08 EST

Subject: Tribute to Bert Corona

TRIBUTE TO BERT CORONA

by Nativo V. Lopez, National Co-Director of Hermandad Mexicana Nacional

January 20, 2001

Los Angles, California

I would like to first express my heartfelt thank you, on behalf of
the
Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, its membership and leadership, for the great

sympathy and condolence you have demonstrated by your presence here
today.

Bert Corona did not believe in the cult of the personality and did not
yearn

for awards, accolades, nor did he insist or angle his way forward to
receive

credit for the collective deeds and successes resulting from a specific
struggle. In fact, he became uncomfortable when people insisted on
making a

fuss over him or pushed too hard that he should be recognized. This was
just

his way. Bert Corona deserves a collective acclamation from our
community,

which undoubtedly should have preceded his passing from this earth.

However,

he would not hear of it. Such was Bert Corona.

There exist a number of eerie ironies worth mentioning in this solemn

occasion. Today we gather to pay tribute and offer eulogies to our
fallen

beloved brother, teacher, comrade, and one whom many viewed as a father -

more than a political father - Bert Corona. Brother Bert, as many of his
old

trade union cohorts referred to him, was the consummate organizer. Even
in

his passing from this earth, Corona is still bringing us together, moving
us

to share our experiences, confront our fears, reaffirm our convictions, strengthen our resolve through united action - in other words, he is still organizing us. He is still moving us to do something that we were initially reluctant to do. I find tremendous irony in this.

Bert did not finally succumb to the scurrilous and persistent attacks by his political foes, pressures or investigations of the government that began with his union activities in 1938-39 and continued throughout his life. His passing, in effect, was his last defiant act of protest, picket, sit-in, and fiery speech of mobilization and challenge to the authorities that sought his demise. God help Saint Peter! Yes, I find a perverse sort of irony in this.

Bert Corona stands with giants, men of history, men of courage, men of change and moral authority for the education of future generations. He was born the same day, May 29th, but one year later, as President John F. Kennedy, 1918, and he left us, January 15th, the same day of the birth of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Finally, this truly is a historical irony.

Let us mourn and celebrate together the tremendous contributions of a great working class hero and leader of the Mexican, Mexican-American, and Latino communities in the United States. Bert Corona was one of a kind in our community - student/youth leader and organizer in the 30s, labor organizer and union official in the 30s and 40s, World War II paratrooper and veteran to defeat fascism in the 40s, political organizer in defense of farmworker "braceros" in the 50s and 60s, political party campaigner and organizer in the 60s, university and college professor of Chicano Studies in the 70s and 80s, community organizer of undocumented immigrants in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, among the founders of the Community Service Organization (CSO),

the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), the Center for Autonomous Social Action - International Brotherhood of Workers (CASA-IBW), the Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, and too numerous other local, state, and national coalitions to mention.

Bert Corona's place in history is well established. He will be considered as the father of the modern movement to defend the rights of immigrants, but especially the undocumented immigrants. In 1970, with the close collaboration of former Catholic priest, Mark Day, Bert Corona crafted and designed what came to be known as the Immigrant's Bill of Rights. Such was not even contemplated prior to the sweeping, bold, and courageous initiatives of Bert Corona. He was an implacable opponent to the term illegal alien as offensive and psychologically damaging to the self-esteem and personal identity to our youth. No human being is illegal was Corona's invoking appeal prior to the recent popularization of the slogan.

There is no other Mexican, Mexican-American or Latino leader in the history of the United States with a longer and more versatile trajectory of social struggle in favor of workers and immigrants for social justice, dignity, fairness, and common decency than our beloved leader, Bert Corona. The full history of this great teacher has yet to be written. His greatest legacy to all immigrants, workers, and youth, was his perennial optimism and faith in the capability of the working people to organize themselves, forge their own leaders, understand the complexity of their oppression, and struggle for social change, and prevail. His energy was boundless. His hostility to discrimination and injustice was recalcitrant. His stubbornness and persistence before seemingly insurmountable odds and challenges were recognized by both friend and foe. We are left to accept and pickup the baton he has handed us and modestly attempt to emulate his example in the respective fields of endeavor that we individually pursue. He will be sorely missed.

Bertolt Brecht wrote that, "the weak don't struggle. The stronger ones perhaps struggle for an hour. Those that are even stronger struggle for some years. But the strongest of the strong struggle all of their life. Those are the indispensable ones." The strongest of the strong is a fitting description of Bert Corona.

Bert Corona was a public figure for over sixty years. He gave and gave of himself to the community. No cause was too insignificant for him to raise his voice and encourage others to do the same. On many occasions he was the lone voice on an issue until others gathered the courage to add their voice to the cause. We want to encourage the workers, students, professors, artists, professionals, teachers, politicians, immigrants, cholos, vatos locos, old pachucos and zootsuiters, gays, feminists, farmworkers, danzantes, and common humble people to come forward and celebrate the contributions of Bert Corona in a manner befitting his many years of struggle.

I won't tell you good-bye brother Corona, only that I will see you soon. We love you brother Corona, leader Corona, teacher Corona, organizer Corona, father Corona. I love you.

*Eulogy given at the mass celebrated on Jan. 20, 2001 at St. Vincent of Paul Catholic Church in Los Angeles

469-7509

Obituary

Bert Corona; Labor Activist Backed Rights for Undocumented Workers

By **GEORGE RAMOS**
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Bert Corona, a sometimes fiery labor organizer, community activist and educator who championed the rights of undocumented workers, Mexicans and other Latinos in the United States for more than seven decades, has died from complications of kidney failure. He was 82.

Corona died Monday night at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Hollywood, where he was transferred after being stricken Dec. 26 during a trip to Mexico to visit relatives, said Nativio Lopez, executive director of Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, the immigrant rights organization that Corona helped establish.

Hospitalized with an acute gallbladder inflammation, Corona underwent three operations within nine days at Hospital Aranda de la Parra in Leon, Guanajuato. He was stabilized and transferred more than a week ago to the Kaiser facility but never regained conscious-

ness, Lopez said.

Corona was remembered as a significant figure in civil rights and labor circles whose accomplishments were sometimes compared with those of Cesar Chavez. He defended the rights of undocumented workers during a time when no one else—not even Chavez—would speak for them.

In addition to Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, Corona helped found the Mexican American Political Assn., one of the state's oldest Latino political organizations.

"He is a giant in the history of Latinos in the United States," said UC Santa Barbara history professor Mario T. Garcia, "but he was a lesser-known figure than Cesar Chavez. He was, however, equally as important. He did what no one had successfully done—organize undocumented workers. He is the urban counterpart to Chavez, who organized farm workers."

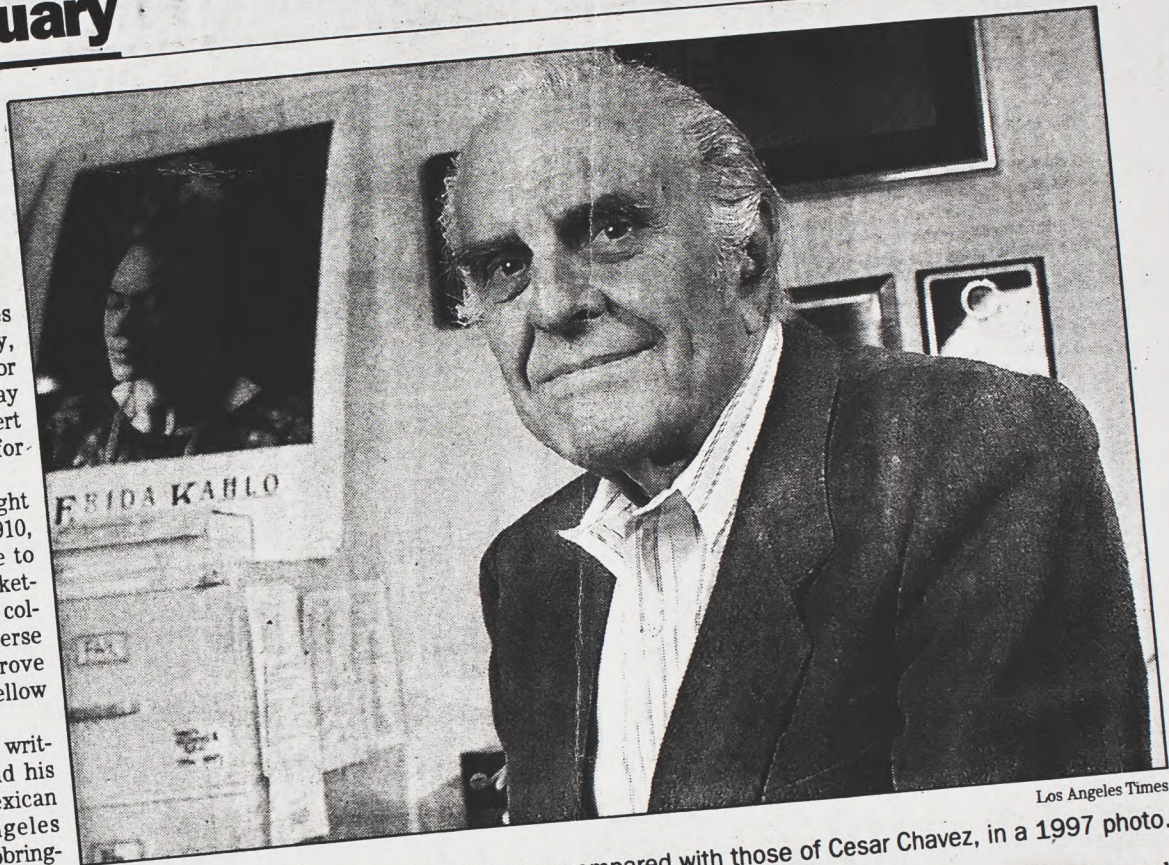
Former Democratic Rep. Edward R. Roybal, who in 1949 became the first Mexican American

to be elected to the Los Angeles City Council in the 20th century, hailed Corona as "a real fighter for civil rights. In the years I was away in Washington [in Congress], Bert was here all the time, fighting for things."

Corona, whose father had fought in the Mexican Revolution of 1910, was born in El Paso. He came to Los Angeles in 1936 to play basketball at USC but did not finish college, choosing instead to immerse himself in campaigns to improve conditions for workers and fellow Mexican Americans.

In his 1993 autobiography, written with Garcia, Corona said his early interest in helping Mexican Americans in Los Angeles stemmed in part from his upbringing in the border town of El Paso, where he learned to be proud of his Mexican roots and the Spanish language.

In Los Angeles, however, he was astonished by an incident that occurred shortly after his arrival in the city. Two Mexican Americans



Los Angeles Times

Bert Corona, whose accomplishments were compared with those of Cesar Chavez, in a 1997 photo.

on a streetcar ignored him when he asked in Spanish for directions to Fairfax Avenue. When they reached the stop, however, the two

admonished Corona in Spanish, telling him they would have answered his question if he had spoken to them in English.

"Here it's best not to speak Spanish," they told him. "It's best if they don't know if you're Mexican." Please see **CORONA, B11**

OBITUARIES/FUNERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

ARREDONDO, Jose
Holy Cross Mortuary (310) 670-7097
BARINGER, Jason M.
Jan 15, 1981 to Jack

CAHILL, Jean O'Brien (87)
Of Agoura Hills, passed away on Sunday, January 14, 2001 in Newbury Park.
Jean was born on July 6, 1913 in

FOX, Byron L.
Byron L. Fox was born on September 1, 1939 in Maywood, California and passed away on January 13, 2001 in Glendora, California at the age of 61. Byron grew up in

Arredondo, Jose
Baringer, Jason M.
Barrios, Kyla M.
Barsky, Martin
Booth, Isabelle B.

Obituaries
Gonos, James W.
Haverfield, Theresa A.
Ishida, Itaru
Jones, Clarence E., Jr.
Kaufman, Natalie
Lazerson, Samuel

Roberts, DeForrest E.
Robinson, Vee
Romero, Ramon
Ross, Virginia D.
Sand, Adolf
Shulman, Ruth
Sinder, Ruth

103 PINE, Carrie Verna
Born October 6, 1897, went to be with her Lord January 13. Faithful wife, beloved mother, adored grandmother.
Predeceased by her husband, Paul R.; daughter, Evelyn; and son, Marvin. Survived by daughter, Doris Hatch; son, Ben (Rue); daughter-in-law, Mary Jo Haendle.

VIDAL, Leo T.
VIDAL, Adele T.
Married nearly 65 years, this devoted couple continues their journey together. Adele Tabet Vidal was born on December 18, 1913 in Punta de Agua, New Mexico and died January 4, 2001 at her home in Irvine, California. Leo Trabnell Vidal was born on December 24, 1913 in San Antonio, Texas and died January 13, 2001 at home in Irvine.

Funeral Directors
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Then they should have bought more tickets!" he retorted.

Within the motion picture industry, Mann was considered a shrewd visionary who in tough times not only helped save the theater business but also made it flourish, building multiscreen complexes and finding material that would attract increasingly young audiences.

"All our samplings show an audience that ranges from 15 to 35. And they want to go out; they want to

one of the largest independent chains in the upper Midwest. Mann sold his group to General Cinema Corp. in 1970 and headed west.

Lured from production back to theaters three years later, he built Mann Theatres from its original 276 screens to 360 by 1986, when he sold his company to Gulf & Western for \$220 million. Mann stayed on as chairman, retiring in 1991 when Mann Theatres boasted about 500 screens.

two daughters, Victoria Mann Simms and Roberta Mann Benson; a sister, Edythe; two grandsons; and two granddaughters.

A memorial service is scheduled for today at 2 p.m. at Hillside Mortuary.

The family has asked that memorial contributions be sent to UCLA's Rhonda Fleming Mann Resource Center for Women with Cancer, or to the Boys & Girls Club of Minneapolis.

Source: City clerk's office

LOCAL ELECTIONS

9 File for Pair Get F

By DUKE HELFAND
TIMES EDUCATION WRITER

Nine candidates filed Tuesday to run for three of the Los Angeles Board of Education, with two of the office clinching endorsement Mayor Richard Riordan.

The mayor is backing business owner Tom Riley San Fernando Valley inc Julie Korenstein. Riordan supporting land-use attorney Huizar for the seat being by board member Victoria C

The mayor has not decided to endorse for the third school seat, held by incumbent Fields. The uncertainty spurs mini drama Tuesday.

Fields, who won Riordaning four years ago, was surprised to learn that the mayor was w this time. She said that Riordorsed her last summer and a fund-raiser on her behalf.

"He's a man of honor. If changed his position, he would have called me," she said.

A Riordan aide said that conversations with Fields did not constitute an official endorsement.

Riordan's support is key to of the funds he can raise and political muscle he can bring to a campaign. Two years ago, dates supported by Riordan and three school board incumbents while a fourth board member Tokofsky, won reelection with mayor's backing.

Riordan apparently is waffling Fields because of what he can offer her strong support for the union as it engages in negotiations for a new contract. Although the mayor supports a pay raise for teachers, he believes that in salary and benefits of subproportions—possibly 16%—drain funds from other necessities such as textbooks, art program maintenance.

CORONA: Labor Activist Dies at 82

Continued from B10

can. They treat you better."

"I looked at them," Corona recalled, "and I couldn't understand that attitude."

After dropping out of college, he volunteered at a Roman Catholic Church in Boyle Heights and organized workers for the Congress of Industrial Organizations, a forerunner of today's AFL-CIO, and the United Cannery, Agriculture, Packing and Allied Workers of America.

In 1938, he joined the charismatic labor organizer Luisa Moreno in building the League of Spanish-Speaking People, one of the first national organizations for Mexican Americans. He also helped form chapters of Saul Alinsky's Community Service Organization in Los Angeles.

His organizing efforts in the organization often brought him into contact with another up-and-coming Mexican American Community Service Organization organizer from Northern California, Chavez, who would help establish the farm workers union in the 1960s.

While Corona generally supported Chavez and his United Farm Workers, he openly clashed with the farm labor leader over the union's opposition to undocumented workers. Chavez and the UFW supported Immigration and Naturalization Service actions to deport illegal immigrant workers, whom they regarded as scabs.

Corona argued that undocumented workers should be organized rather than deported. That stance led him to the last great organizing effort of his life, the establishment in 1951 of Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, or National Mexican Brotherhood. By the 1960s, Hermandad began actively organizing illegal immigrants in California to improve their earning power in this country.

"I did have an important difference with Cesar," Corona wrote in his autobiography. "This involved his, and the union's position on the need to apprehend and deport undocumented Mexican immigrants who were being used as scabs by the growers. . . . The Hermandad believed that organizing undocumented farm workers was auxiliary to the union's efforts to organize the fields. We supported an open immigration policy, as far as Mexico was concerned."

Hermandad soon became a major immigrant services provider, with offices in North Hollywood, Santa Ana and Los Angeles. But by the end of 1992, federal grants, its largest source of income, dried up. In recent years, the organization was dogged by more than \$4 million in debts, but Corona continued to believe in its mission.

In 1959, Corona joined with other Chicanos—U.S.-born citizens of Mexican descent—in Fresno to form the Mexican American Political Assn. As the first statewide Mexican American political group in California, the organization found its endorsement eagerly courted by Democratic and Republican candidates in the 1960s and '70s.

When he became the organization's president in the early 1960s, Corona used the position to argue that Mexican American concerns deserved a presidential cabinet-rank position. In 1966, an angry Corona boycotted a White House conference on Mexican American affairs in El Paso because, he said, it was controlled by Anglos.

Corona was long active in liberal politics, working to establish Viva clubs for Democratic candidates, including Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.) and former California Gov. Edmund G. "Pat" Brown Sr. He was also an early supporter of former Los An-

geles Mayor Tom Bradley.

He worked to elect Chicanos to the Los Angeles City Council, beginning in 1938 when he campaigned on behalf of a Mexican American activist named Eduardo Quevedo. Although Quevedo lost, Corona—who vowed never to run for public office—supported another Mexican American a decade later. That candidate was Roybal.

Although he never earned a college degree, Corona lectured at Stanford and taught at Cal State campuses at San Diego, Northridge, Fullerton and Los Angeles.

At Cal State L.A., where he taught for more than a decade in the 1970s and '80s, Corona led a faction of part-time teachers who wanted to turn the young Chicano Studies Department into an agent of social activism in the large Mexican American community surrounding the campus. Several part-time teachers, including Corona, were fired. During the turmoil, a fire was set outside department head Louis Negrete's office and his car was set on fire in his garage at home.

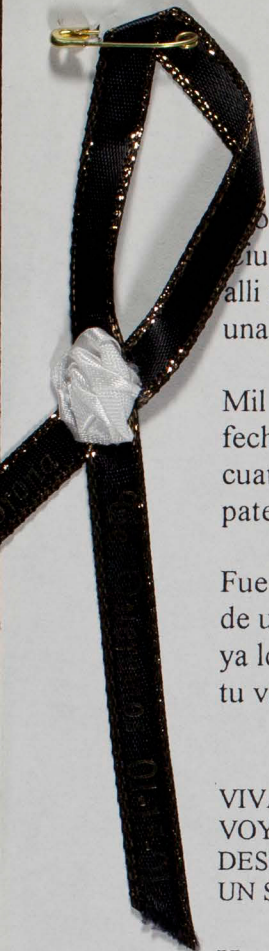
When The Times characterized Corona as a Marxist-Leninist and a suspect in the fires, he sued the newspaper and Negrete. The libel suit was settled years later, with all parties agreeing not to disclose its terms.

Corona's first wife, Blanche Taff, died in 1993. A year later, he married Angelina Castillo, who still works for Hermandad as its director of affordable housing.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by sons David, of San Luis Obispo, and Frank and Ernesto, both of Los Angeles; daughter Margot De Ley of Chicago; and three grandchildren.

Times staff writer Doug Smith contributed to this story.

CORRIDO DE BERT CORONA Padre del Movimiento Chicano



Conteras del Paso Tejas
ciudad que tiene la fama
alli nacio Bert Corona
una bonita manana.

Mil novecientos diez-y-ocho
fecha que paso a la historia
cuatro de Mayo fue el dia
patente esta en la memoria

Fue comendante tu padre
de un regimiento de Villa
ya lo traias en tu sangre
tu valor y valentia

(CORO)

VIVA, VIVA, BERT CORONA
VOY GRITANDO EN MI CANCION
DESDE CALIFORNIA ENVIO
UN SALUDO A MI NACION.

Hombre de gran talentos
donde quiera sobresales
siempre tu te distinguiste
ay, que bonitos detalles.

En el colejio estabas
las leyes no eran iguales
alli empezo tu denuncia
pa remediar esos males.

Tu Madre gran profesora
ella fue la inspiracion
de que salieras triunfante
en toda tu educacion.

(CORO)

VIVA, VIVA BERT CORONA
VOY GRITANDO EN MI CANCION
DESDE CALIFORNIA ENVIO
UN SALUDO A MI NACION.

Mas cuando estallo la guerra
muy pronto te presentaste
a defender a tu patria
como tu lo anelastes.

El Gobierno Americano
jamás te-extendio la mano
ni aprovecho los servicios
de este valiente Chicano.

Mientras que te preparabas
pa combatir el sistema
un movimiento formabas
"VIVA LA UNION "
fue tu lema.

Con tu ayuda se formaron
Union y Organizaciones
MAPA, CASA Y HERMANDAD
mejorando situaciones.

(CORO)

VIVA, VIVA, BERT CORONA
VOY GRITANDO EN MI CANCION
DESDE CLAIFORNIA ENVIO
UN SALUDO A MI NACION.

Fuistes un amigo leal, siempre con toda
la jente, y dedicaste en total,
tu vida resplandeciente.

Tu vida tu narrativa
hazanas de tu memoria
muy grabadas quedaron
en este libro de historia.

Mechistas y Profesores
aqui los tienes presente
a darte el ultimo adios
juntos con toda tu jente.

Con mucho orgullo y carmino
por tanto que trabajaste
para defender tu Raza
a la que tu te entregastes.

ADIOS ,ADIOS BERT CORONA
ADIOS MUY QUERIDO HERMANO
ADIOS AL QUERIDO PADRE.....

DEL MOVIMIENTO CHICANO.