

The following interview made in the seventies by a Chicano journal on Ricardo Sánchez is reproduced here by the Arnaldo Carlos Vento, author of *The Ricardo Sánchez Reader: Critical Essays and Anthology*.

INTERVIEW OF RICARDO SÁNCHEZ

with *Caracol**

LIVING COLORS: Why did you choose to be a writer?

SÁNCHEZ: I joke about it. I didn't want to be a fire engineer, a squad car. I wanted to be a writer, even when I was a child. In school the teachers tried to limit me. I mentioned to one that I wanted to be a writer. She didn't want me to be hurt or to get my hopes up too high. She clearly said, Mexicans should live the way they were meant to. She suggested I be a I couldn't accept that as my place; all my life I would revolt and rebel; and for a long time I wrote secretly.

LIVING COLORS. Did many teachers try to tell you to accept your place as a Mexican?

SÁNCHEZ: Yes, the popular attitude back then was that we Chicanos could not do all the things that others could. We were supposed to be inferior because we spoke Spanish and dressed differently. In a Spanish class once, the teacher asked who planned to go to college. When I raised my hands he said "Tú, La Tuna Tech, Richado?; You're a pachuco, Richado," he made a big joke about it. La Tuna was a federal correctional facility outside of El Paso.

LIVING-COLORS: How did you form a self image under this kind of harassment?

SÁNCHEZ: -It made me angry. I read a lot; I read everything. From the time I was in seventh grade, I read everything I could get my hands on. I began to take on a Chicano Identity. Would you believe that there were books written in El Paso as early as 1930 that talked about Chicano culture Chicano awareness. Chicano is a very old term. It's one we made up ourselves. It's not a novelty, it's not a term like American of Spanish-Surname, ASS? That people like HUD made up as a joke on us. Chicano is a term from our own experience that defines indigenous people like us.

LIVING COLORS: Why were you a high school push out?

SÁNCHEZ: I was bored and frustrated. There wasn't anything in school that reflected my reality yet I was creative, I loved to read, which I did outside of school. I was a good student but I've always been boisterous, the type of person who likes to joke a lot. I

should have been a comedian rather than a poet, I love to joke and sing, if only I had a voice for it.

LIVING COLORS:-How did you get your Ph.D. without going through a B.A. and M.A. process?

SÁNCHEZ: I thought about getting them. I have a G.E.D.as you know, but because I was doing so much work for so many groups across the country. I was accepted on post graduate level on performance criteria due to publications and programs I created and developed throughout the country, serving migrants and urban people in areas of education, literature, culture and health.

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LIVING COLORS: In terms of culture, literature and education, what were you doing?

SÁNCHEZ: Ah, for a long time we have been denied a segment of our heritage. Our artistic roots go back thousands of years. The Indigenous peoples in the Valley of Mexico, which is now Mexico City have ageless literary and artistic traditions...It is time Raza realizes this, because in essence, this country has striven mightily to destroy us in terms of culture. Remember we did not come here to be Americanized. America came to us and in spite of all the awesome, horrible, horrendous things they've done against us, we have done more than survived, we have continued to create.

LIVING COLORS: Why is it important for the voice and *historia de Raza* to be heard? Why must the children especially hear?

SÁNCHEZ: Every kind-of life experience has meaning for others. Human beings are not bound by time or space. They're transcendental. We can utilize references through kinds of life experiences. It is through the expression of art we better understand the human process, the human condition. The Chicano humancondition is a particularized condition-just like French is, just like any other human condition is particularized through language, culture and sets of experiences. Ours is a unique experience like all others are very unique. It is important to have different kinds of references in different time- spatial processes and moments.

LIVING COLORS: Why did you help form *Canto de Pueblo*?

SÁNCHEZ: I became bored, along with other writers/artistas, with what,was happening in festivals like *Flor y Canto*,where people went and were actually competing with one another so Tigre Pérez, Arnold Vento and I decided to set up a process where we can go and share instead of competing. We wanted to get away from the linear Anglo Saxon ideal, and project something that is ours, our own kind of reality. We said, let's have a song too, for and with our people, *Canto al Pueblo*, where we can deal with one, another humanistically, where art, is a liberating process. We're saying, that art has to be political, ah, but not rhetorically ideological. Political in terms of dealing with the human conditions vis a vis our

humanization/liberation. Political from that perspective, but not as a literature or art of acquiescences. It has to be a broadening experience. Tigre, Arnold and I are poets who are Chicanos. We put this festival together as a song to our people. People came from all over the country, from east, south, north, and west; from all over they came to Milwaukee.

LIVING COLORS: What is *Aztlán*?

SÁNCHEZ: It is a precolumbian concept that was revived in the 60's saying that our roots as a Mestizo people, who are very much indigenous, more so than Hispanic, although we speak Spanish our roots are here, where the fabled tribes migrated south to found the cities of the *Nahuatl Meshica* peoples. What it actually means is we are indigenous to this land that we are of land from us, within us. We are like the mountains, we belong here, like the Great Salt Lake, the deserts the cactus, we are the native people of what is now the U.S We did not come here to become Americans in terms of the U.S. The U.S. came to us and strove mightily to anglocize us.

LIVING COLORS: Why is it important to have a Spiritual National Identity?

SÁNCHEZ: Because otherwise we do exist. Existence is more than a physiological thing. Existence is a realization of who and what one is. With this realization, we begin to do those types of things that determine the types of destinies we create for ourselves with ourselves and by ourselves and in conjunction with other human beings. A human being acts, a slave doesn't strive for liberation, is acted upon and becomes an object. To transcend this objectification, which happens to so many, not only Chicanos, you must realize who you are, then create your own word, the nomenclature, the naming of the self, comes a process of reflection-ideation-analysis. From that will emanate actions which are humanizing.

LIVING COLORS: Many times you have spoken about faculty having to act as resource people.

Sánchez: Yes, we are not out here to teach in the traditional sense of the word teach. We're here to become resourceful, to facilitate a learning process where we ourselves become learners also. This way the student might be able to utilize faculty, staff, and administrative people as resource people, but the students are also resource people so it is a mutual learning process that is creative. It's a much more responsible approach to each other because we must respond unto one another. There is a double responsibility for the faculty and students to treat one another as the human beings. we are, can be and should be. It's the student's responsibility to dream the biggest most fantastic dreams possible for themselves and it is their responsibility to keep those dreams from becoming fantasies. They become realities by acting them out. It's education's responsibility to help create a fountain of know-ledge where students are persons who must be fully integrated and can live saying: I have worth, I have meaning, I can learn anything. I can learn because I want to, but I learn, how you learn and put it into practice.

LIVING COLORS:: Is this part of the liberation movement you often promote?

SÁNCHEZ: Yes. A liberation movement a movement of responsibility, not of wantonness. It's not a hippified idiocy where you go to rip off society. It's building a creative kind of process; the kind that helps to think reflect, and take creative actions, the dignifying of the person and the community.

(For a complete copy of *The Ricardo Sanchez Reader, Critical Essay and Anthology* Search for Ediciones Nuevo Espacio. The Table of Contents is provided for your perusal.)

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