

# Chicano Studies

## An Overview of the Past, Present and the Future

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### Activism of the Sixties and Seventies: The Chicano Renaissance

While activism is not new to the Spanish-Speaking of the Southwest, the Chicano movement properly belongs to the general framework of what Phillip Ortego called “The Chicano Renaissance.”<sup>i</sup> Social economic and political struggle date to 1848 but in the sixties a natural consciousness began to sweep the nation. With the anti-war movement, a number of cultural/political resistance movements within the Mexicano/Chicano/Latino community. Among the more visible fronts were (1) the Farm Workers Rights Movement led by César Chávez, (2) The Spanish Land Grant Movement in New Mexico by Reies López Tijerina and (3) The Chicano/Latino Student Movement in colleges and universities as well as Chicano communities throughout the United States.<sup>ii</sup> In addition to the issues of income disparity, reform and peaceful marches, César Chávez brought into the *movimiento* the concept and image of *Lucha*, the *Campeño* as the exploited underdog, *unidad* and *protesta*. Reies López Tijerina (el Tigre) via the *Alianza Federal de Mercedes*, placed into question the American denial of Land Grant titles of *Manitos* and as such established a breach of contract and denial of justice by the government as guaranteed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Unlike Chávez, Tijerina brings in to the *Movimiento* the concept of *lucha armada* or militancy as he and his followers occupy a campground of the Kit Carson National Forest asserting *ejido* rights of the *Pueblo de Joaquín de Chalma*. State police, Sheriff’s deputies and Rangers were taken into custody by *Alianza* members and tried for trespassing, fined, handcuffed and handed down a suspended sentence of eleven months and twenty one days in jail.<sup>3</sup> Tijerina also brings to the forefront the term of *Indo-Hispano* adding to the diversity of names and group identity within the movement.

Following these events was the official formation of the Chicano Student Movement. Heretofore, Mexican-Americans as well as other minorities had faced a lack of social mobility, institutions that fostered discrimination and racism and an economic system that provided inequities to women and the ethnic poor. A new consciousness was sweeping the Nation: The rise of Black Power with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, the Anti-War Movement, the development of the New Left, the rise of an International Student Movement and the struggles for liberation of the Third World populations. Shortly after the inception of the Farm Workers and Land Grant Movements, the “Crusade for Justice” initiates a series of anti-poverty protests giving birth to the Urban/Civic Chicano community protests. A few years later in 1969, Chicano Student Nationalism will be born via “The Chicano Student Youth Conference” where *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* will declare its manifesto.<sup>4</sup> “The Chicano Student Youth Conference” will meet for two years formulating the foundation for the Chicano Student Movement. Central to the cultural understanding of the Chicano/a is his heritage as

exemplified by the poem *I am Joaquin* written, according to Chicano poet Ricardo Sánchez, by the Jewish wife of Denver attorney Jesse Saucedo.<sup>5</sup> Alurista, as an early Chicano poet and leader impacts the proceedings with his knowledge and images of the pre-Columbian ancestors of Chicanos. The image of the Aztec warrior and his birthplace of Aztlan becomes a symbol of cultural pride as the *Raza de bronce* of a “Bronze Continent.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Chicano Nation is declared a *Mestizo Nation*. Thus, learning about the autochthonous past, particularly information left out of traditional histories became an objective for the Movement and Chicano Studies. It was not meant just for the awareness and education of the Chicano/a, but also for mainstream society. Cultural pride contributed to solidarity and Brotherhood/Sisterhood within the Movement. It gave rise to student organizations such as *Mayo, Mecha, Umas, Masa*, a proliferation of newspapers and publications (*El Grito del Norte, El Gallo, el Papel, El Grito, El Chicano, El Degüello*), artistic organizations like *Mala Efe* from Oakland, Ca., *Con Safos* from Sacramento, Ca., and *Artesanos Guadalupeños* from Albuquerque, N.M., community cultural centers like *the Toltecas de Aztlan* from San Diego, Ca., *The Royal Chicano Air Force* in Sacramento, Ca. and *Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center* in San Antonio, Texas.<sup>7</sup>

During this period of intense mobilization and nationalism it is not surprising it would be followed by the creation of a political party entitled *La Raza Unida* in 1972. A year later, *Flor y Canto*, a national gathering of artists, writers, poets is born in the fall of 1973. After four years of successful cultural/literary festivals, it continued with the new name of *Canto al Pueblo* in 1977. The difference now was the attempt to return to the focus of the socio/political arena as opposed to the purely aesthetic art for art’s sake orientation.<sup>8</sup> It moreover, added Muralism, Theatre, Musical Groups and Puerto Rican, Black, White, and Native-American representatives. The *Canto al Pueblo* festivals were successfully held in different locations nationally until the end of the decade of the seventies.<sup>9</sup>

What are the cultural and educational implications to these Chicano/manifestations? It called for a new orientation toward awareness of the Chicano’s past, the history, the amerigenous roots, the philosophy of the *raza*, and its artistic achievements. It inspired young Chicanos/as to write poetry, become muralists and write short stories and novels. It is important to note that heretofore, Chicanos/as did not have a vehicle for expression and publication. It was the creation of minority presses that opened the doors for what was to become a “Chicano Renaissance.”<sup>10</sup> The prose fiction of Tomás Rivera, Rodolfo Anaya and Rolando Hinojosa Smith et. al. is testimony to a new Ethnic-American Literature that will continue to flourish through the end of the twentieth century. The poetry of Ricardo Sánchez, Alurista, Tino Villanueva, Ablelardo among others, as well as the theatre of Luis Valdez et.al. are among the contributions that will provide material for the new developing Chicano Studies programs across the nation. Additionally, Chicano dialects are no longer seen in a pejorative manner but as *barrio* expressions to be noted and studied. This will lead to the creation of Chicano Sociolinguistics.<sup>11</sup> In terms of Chicano Studies programmatic structures in the early seventies, Chicano student and faculty protests pressured university administration into the allocation of monies for the purpose of creating cultural historical and political courses. It was the formulation of the *Plan de Santa Barbara* that formally structured the Chicano study programs citing examples of

Chicano curriculum, core areas of study, majors/minors etc.<sup>12</sup> The ideal was to go beyond the program status to a departmental level. The latter was received as a threat by traditional administration in view that once formed, it became a permanent fixture and it would, moreover, take money away from traditional departments. Exemplary of early departments are: Merritt College in Oakland, Cal State-Northridge and Berkely.<sup>13</sup> The advantage to this model is the obvious independent budget that allows for curricular and faculty development. Another model is the Center or Area Studies Model. The Center for Mexican-American Studies at the University of Texas-Austin, Texas was established as a Center for the study of Chicano culture and literature that would contribute not only to the student's understanding of Chicano but one that would enrich the curriculum of other departments. A third model is the Ethnic Studies Department. One example is at Washington State University at Pullman, Washington that combines Asian Studies, Chicano Studies and Native-American Studies. While it enjoys a Departmental status, Chicano Studies stands to lose in the areas of faculty recruitment, the student connection and identity. In 1980 when the Reagan conservatives ascended to the White House, monies for *Canto al Pueblo*, Chicano Studies and other non-traditional areas were eliminated. Scores of programs both at the college as well as the community level disappeared. Only those programs that were institutionalized or well entrenched within the university survived.

## II. Chicano Studies in the Nineties: Current State and Concerns.

After almost two decades of Conservative administrations, opportunities for development in the area of Chicano Studies and other minority programs have been steadily decreasing. Since 1980, there has been a shift from funding minority concerns to a new realignment in terms of economics and priorities at the university level. The cultural content and awareness of the seventies, while important no longer was a priority. Today research and publications is more important than teaching. While the nation

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<sup>i</sup> Arnoldo Carlos Vento, *Identities and Issues in Literature*, David Peck ed. (Pasadena: Salem Press, 1977), I, 238-239.

<sup>ii</sup> Arnoldo Carlos Vento, *Mestizo: The History, Culture and Politics of the Mexican and Chicano* (Lanham: University Press of America), VI, 205-229.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* 12.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Castro, *Chicano Power: The Emergence of Mexican America* (New York: Saturday Revue Press, 1974), 133. See also *Grito del Norte*, V2, n.9 (July 6, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Ricardo Sánchez, "The Clarion Sounded" in *SA*, Summer, 1992. Also in *The Ricardo Sánchez Reader: Critical Essays and Poetry*, (unpublished by Arnoldo Carlos Vento and Luis Leal)

<sup>6</sup> Arnoldo Carlos Vento, *Mestizo ...* 22.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* 235.

<sup>8</sup> Tomás Ibarra-Frausto, "The Chicano Movement and the Emergence of a Chicano Poetic Consciousness" in *New Directions in Chicano Scholarship*, Ricardo Romo and Raymond Paredes ed. (San Diego: Chicano Monograph Series, 1975) 87-96.

<sup>9</sup> Arnoldo Carlos Vento, *Mestizo ...* 239-240. See also Ricardo Sánchez, "Interview" in *Caracol*, April 1978, 7.

<sup>10</sup> The term was first coined by Phillip Ortego in his analysis of Tomás Rivera's *Y no se lo tragó la tierra*.

<sup>11</sup> One of the earliest studies done on what was to become Chicano Sociolinguistics was by Aurelio Espinosa, "Studies in New Mexican Spanish", *Revue de Dialectologie Romance, 1900-1915*. See also Arnoldo Carlos Vento, "Estudio etimológico: una perspectiva sociolingüística e histórica del habla Chicano

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in *Work, Family, Sex Roles, Language* (Berkeley: Quinto Sol/Tonatiuh, 1980), 196-207. See also the excellent work of Fernando Peñalosa entitled *Chicano Sociolinguistics*.

<sup>12</sup> See *El Plan de Santa Bárbara: A Chicano Plan for Higher Education* (Oakland: La Causa Publications, 1969).

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion on Chicano Studies, Art and Literature, see Chapter VII of *Mestizo ...* 231-258.

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