



AZTLAN



An Anthology
of Mexican American
Literature

EDITED BY
LUIS VALDEZ
AND STAN STEINER



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INTRODUCTION: "LA PLEBE"

by *Luis Valdez*

Aun cuando el "pelado" mexicano sea completamente desgraciado, se consuela con gritar a todo el mundo que tiene "muchos huevos" (asi llama a los testiculos). Lo importante es advertir que en este organo no hace residir solamente una especie de potencia, la sexual, sino toda clase de potencia humana.

—SAMUEL RAMOS

It is the task of all literature to present illuminating images of mankind. This, as most writers are surely aware, is not easy to do. It takes the clearest, most unassuming effort on the part of the poet to speak for Man. This effort is very often confused and frustrated when the writer is a victim of racism and colonization. His birthright to speak as Man has been forcibly taken from him. To his conqueror he is patently subhuman, uncivilized, backward, or culturally deprived. The poet in him flounders in a morass of lies and distortions about his conquered people. He loses his identity with mankind, and self-consciously struggles to regain his one-to-one relationship with human existence. It is a long way back.

Such is the condition of the Chicano. Our people are a colonized race, and the root of their uniqueness as Man lies buried in the dust of conquest. In order to regain our

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any future conferences involving federal agencies and the Mexican-American community.

4. That regional offices of the EEOC be relocated into areas where employment discrimination is most severe.

5. That the entire program of the EEOC be reoriented, and new procedures be established to reach the Mexican-American community.

6. That the Mexican-American be allowed full participation in the upcoming June White House Conference on Civil Rights, and in all other civil rights programs and activities engaged in or sponsored by the federal government.

7. That the EEOC take immediate steps against some 800 major national companies in the Pacific Southwest which have more than 600,000 employees on their payrolls, yet hire no Mexican-Americans.

8. That the hiring practices of all governmental agencies be reviewed and that affirmative action be taken to rectify present imbalances against Mexican-Americans and all other ethnic minorities.

The delegates added that if a Mexican-American commissioner were hired, they would be willing to meet with the EEOC again, only if all of the commissioners attended such a conference.

VENCEREMOS!: MEXICAN-AMERICAN STATEMENT ON TRAVEL TO CUBA

by Luis Valdez and Roberto Rubalcava

As always it was the youth—the veterans and students—who were among the most outspoken supporters of *La Causa*. In the summer of 1964 two young Chicanos from Delano took advantage of a visit to Cuba to use their experiences as a platform from

which to voice some of the concepts that were to herald the Chicano student movement. ("Mexican-American Statement on Travel to Cuba" by Luis Valdez and Roberto Rubalcava, mimeographed, undated.)

The Mexican in the United States has been, and continues to be, no less a victim of American imperialism than his impoverished brothers in Latin America.

In the words of the Second Declaration of Havana, tell him of "misery, feudal exploitation, illiteracy, starvation wages," and he will tell you that you speak of Texas; tell him of "unemployment, the policy of repression against the workers, discrimination . . . oppression by the obligarchies," and he will tell you that you speak of California; tell him of U.S. domination in Latin America, and he will tell you that he knows that Shark and what he devours, because he has lived in its very entrails.

The history of the American Southwest provides a brutal panorama of nascent imperialism. The uninformed need only look to Fidel Castro's address of July 26, 1964 in Santiago de Cuba, which we had the honor to witness and in which he said, "Mexico is the country robbed of half of its territory by the United States; Mexico is the country that has suffered in its flesh and in its blood from the claws of imperialism."

Between 1838 and 1853, to be more exact, the North Americans stole 949,808 square miles of land unimaginably rich in agriculture, oil and mineral resources, and gave the Mexican government, which had no choice in the matter, a mere 25 million dollars. This territory is now occupied by the states of Texas, Nevada, Utah, California, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado.

This same territory has spawned Barry Goldwater and Lyndon B. Johnson, who are representative of the white

population that squatted on the land and usurped it acre by acre, with the full support of their government.

In addition to the land, the native population of Mexicans and Indians also passed into Yankee hands. Saved from actual slavery by one of the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, these natives nonetheless became the facile victims of merciless exploitation and, in the case of the Indians, of utter annihilation.

It was in the Southwest that the systematic genocide of the American Indian reached its ultimate stage, with the deliberate campaign of the U.S. cavalry. There, emaciated and exhausted, wasted by war, starvation and flight, the last warriors made their final desperate stand in the 1870's, only to have their survivors herded into reservations like animals. A few, as in the case of New Mexico, escaped total extinction by mixing with the Mexicans. But even that was not much of an escape. The Mexicans, or rather, the "Mexican-Americans" were now citizens of the United States and thus immediately accessible for legal exploitation.

Betrayed by the upper classes, who married off their daughters to as many gringos as they could find, the Mexican-American peasants became subject to new masters. As the hard-knuckled Yankee farmer divided up the old latifundias, the peasants were stripped of the comparative protection of feudalism, without escaping the evils of peonage. Utilizing these peasants as a perfect source for cheap "stoop labor," Yankee farmers became agricultural industrialists and instituted the monopolies that today exist throughout the Southwest.

The Mexican, by contrast, was left to his own fate, without a government, without representation, without hope. Squalor, poverty, starvation, abysmal illiteracy, discrimination and migrant labor are his wages in America. During the

last hundred years since the Mexican-American War, his Spanish-speaking leaders are not leaders at all; Americanized beyond recall, they neither understand or care about the basic Mexican-American population, which has an identity of its own.

As sons of Mexican manual laborers in California, we have travelled to Revolutionary Cuba, in defiance of the travel ban, in order to emphasize the historical and cultural unanimity of all Latin American peoples, north or south of the border. Having no real leaders of our own, we accept Fidel Castro. We believe the example of Cuba will inevitably bring socialist revolution to the whole of Latin America.

After a two month visit to Cuba, we can now see why the U.S. government has put a travel ban on the island. It is because the social problems characteristic of Latin America are being solved there. This is the first Latin American country to provide free education for its mass population. This is the first Latin American country that is feeding all of its people and providing work for them. This is the first Latin American country whose leadership is solely dedicated to solving the social crimes committed by imperialism upon an underdeveloped country and at the same time, not interested in personal wealth.

We two members of the Mexican-American population present the following points in the form of a declaration:

- (1) That Cuba is an example of social revolution for all Latin America.
- (2) That we support the position of Mexico in maintaining relations with Cuba, in spite of U.S. intimidation via the O.A.S.
- (3) That the international position of Cuba and the voice of Fidel Castro are making clear to the entire world the so-

cial crimes committed in Latin America by U.S. imperialism, as well as the prime solution to these crimes: social revolution.

- (4) That we support Fidel Castro as the real voice of Latin America, declaring to the world with dignity that social justice must be given to Latin America.

As Mexican-American citizens of the United States, we petition the U.S. government to stop immediately its aggressive policy on Cuba and to allow our brothers in Latin America to choose their own course of solving their social problems.

QUE VIVA AMERICA LATINA!

QUE VIVA CUBA REVOLUCIONARIA!!

QUE VIVA FIDEL CASTRO RUZ!!!

**WE DEMAND:
STATEMENT OF CHICANOS OF THE SOUTHWEST
IN THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN**

by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales

Several hundred Chicanos journeyed to Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1968 to participate in the Poor People's Campaign. The caravans from the Southwest brought together Raza from the isolated villages and urban barrios. Under the leadership of Reies Lopez Tijerina, of New Mexico, and Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, of Colorado, they issued a national policy statement—"We Demand." It was Gonzales, a former Democratic party leader in Denver, businessman, poet, and national and international amateur boxing

champion, who was largely responsible for the formulation of the statement that was to become a focal point of the annual Chicano Youth Liberation Conferences sponsored by his organization, Crusada por Justicia—Crusade for Justice. ("We Demand," *La Raza Yearbook*, Sept., 1968.)

Education

We demand that our schools be built in the same communal fashion as our neighborhoods . . . that they be warm and inviting facilities and not jails. That the teachers and other personnel live in the neighborhoods of the schools they work in. We demand a completely free education from kindergarten to college with no fees, no lunch charges, no supplies charges, no tuition, no dues . . . this in compensation for decades of poor education given our raza. . . .

That from kindergarten through college, Spanish be the first language and English the second language and that the textbooks be rewritten to emphasize the heritage and contributions of the Mexican-Americans in the building of the Southwest. We also demand the teaching of the contributions and history of other minorities which have also helped build this country.

We also feel that each neighborhood school complex should have its own school board made up of members who live in the community the school serves.

Housing

The necessary resources to plan our living accommodations so that it is possible for extended family homes to be situated in a communal style . . . around plazas or parks with plenty of space for the children. We want our living areas to fit the needs of the family and not the needs of the city pork barrel, the building corporations or architects.

Agricultural Reforms

We demand that not only the land which is our ancestral right be given back to those pueblos with restitution given for mineral, natural resources, grazing and timber used.

We demand compensation for taxes, legal costs, etc., which pueblos and heirs spent trying to save their land. We demand the suspension of taxation by the acre and institute instead the previous taxation system of our ancestors; that is the products of the land are taxed, not the land itself.

Job Development

We demand training and placement programs which would develop the vast human resources available in the Southwest. For those of our people who want further choices in employment and professions we wish training programs which would be implemented and administered by our own people.

In job placement, we demand that first of all, racist placement tests be dropped and in their place tests be used which relate only to the qualifications necessary for that job. Further, we demand non-discrimination by all private and public agencies.

We demand seed money to organize the necessary trade, labor, welfare, housing, etc., unions to represent those groups. We further demand that existing labor, trade and white collar unions non-discriminatory membership practices be enforced by a national labor relations act.

Law Enforcement

We demand an immediate investigation of the records of all prisoners to correct the legal errors, or detect the prejudice which operated in those court proceedings, causing their convictions or extra heavy sentencing. As these cases

are found, we demand that the federal government reimburse those prisoners for loss of time and money.

We demand immediate suspension of officers suspected of police brutality until a full hearing is held in the neighborhood of the event.

We demand suspension of the city-wide juvenile court system and the creation of a neighborhood community court to deal with allegations of crime. In addition, instead of prowl-car, precinct system, we want to gradually install a neighborhood protection system, where residents are hired every few families to assist and safeguard in matters of community safety or possible crime.

Economic Opportunities

We demand that the businesses serving our community be owned by that community. Seed money is required to start cooperative grocery stores, gas stations, furniture stores, etc. Instead of our people working in big factories across the city, we want training and low interest loans to set up small industries in our own communities. These industries would be co-ops with the profits staying in the community.

LA RAZA UNIDA

by Jorge Lara-Braud

"Our father, the Spaniard, left us. We decided to stay with our mother, the Indian, here in New Mexico," said Reies Lopez Tijerina, the land grant leader. ". . . we were born as the consequence of a conflict of races and cultures, when the Spanish discovered,

explored and christianized this continent. Out of that conflict came a New Breed, a new people. Sometimes we are known as *La Raza*, which is The Race, The People. But the name we are known by does not matter. We are a New Breed." In the many attempts to define the New Breed, one of the earliest was this analysis of *La Raza Unida* ("What Is La Raza," by Jorge Lara-Braud, *La Raza Yearbook*, September, 1968).

1. What is LA RAZA UNIDA? It is a ground swell movement of Mexican-American solidarity throughout the Southwest comprising a loose fellowship of some two or three hundred civic, social, cultural, religious, and political groups.
2. What has brought it about? The need deeply felt among Mexican-Americans to dramatize their plight as a disadvantaged minority, to assert their rights as first-rate citizens, and to assume their rightful share of the social, economic, educational, and political opportunities guaranteed by the American democratic system.
3. Are Mexican-Americans a disadvantaged minority? The most recent study, the Mexican-American Study Project conducted at UCLA and funded by the Ford Foundation, has disclosed that in the Southwest, as compared to the Negro, the Mexican-American is on generally the same level economically, but substantially below educationally. As for dilapidated housing and unemployment, the Mexican-American is not too much better off than the Negro.
4. Why this sudden awakening? Actually, it is not as sudden as it looks. Its first manifestations begin in the period following the Second World War. Mexican-Americans emerged from that conflict with a new determination to

make their sacrifice count. No ethnic group has received a larger proportion of decorations, and few had sustained as large a share of casualties. These veterans challenged in and out of court the blatant legacy of discrimination still prevailing in the Southwest, often displayed by the glaring signs or the brutal words "No Mexicans allowed." The G.I. Bill made it possible for quite a few to obtain college degrees, better jobs, and positions of leadership. For some the new status proved an irresistible temptation to overidentify with the Anglo way of life, to the distress of thoughtful Mexican-Americans and Anglos alike. Fortunately, a much larger number of those who "arrived" saw in their hard-fought-for success a call to advance the cause of their ethnic brethren without supine surrender, or excessive glorification of their cultural uniqueness.

Since then Latin America has been rediscovered south and north of the Rio Grande, following the tremors set off by the Cuban revolution. Spanish is once again a prestige language, and being bilingual somehow is no longer un-American. Then came the radiation fall-out of the Negro civil rights struggle which made even the most disillusioned Mexican-American begin to dream large dreams again. But if anyone thought the new vision borrowed from this struggle would give way to violence, there emerged in 1965 the most inspirational of all, Cesar Chavez. It is he, more than anyone else, who has contributed to LA RAZA UNIDA the mystique of the pursuit of justice through non-violent means. His recent 24-day penitential fast was undertaken to signify the Christian determination of himself and his followers not to be driven into acts of violence by the obdurate grape-growing firms near Delano, California, which refuse to enter into contract negotiations with his fledgling union, while using every conceivable means to discredit it.

5. Are all members of LA RAZA UNIDA non-violent? The vast majority abhor violence. Indeed, one of their most persistent criticisms is that they have been the victims of too much violence, and they are sick of it. From painful experience they know the animal-like quality of him who has perpetrated it against them, whether by legal or illegal means. Some have begun to use excessively militant language and symbols, something many of us genuinely regret. But even then we see them resorting to the only language that apparently present-day society is able to understand. The rare instances of actual violence are to be seen more as a last-ditch attempt at survival, than as a premeditated strategy. Their profound disenchantment with things as they are today in this nation has made them turn their eyes to the land of their ancestors. There, many have found symbols of redress in the events and figures of the Mexican Revolution. The result is a commitment to nothing less than revolution, but with a difference—through non-violent means, if possible. An unbiased look at this vigorous awakening of the Mexican-American will make us realize it is a tremendous affirmation of faith in the American dream. They actually believe, unlike many other sectors, that this society is still capable of undergoing a reformation of “freedom and justice for all.”

6. Isn't the term “la raza” a racist term? No, quite the opposite. It has been borrowed from the countries south of the Rio Grande, where it connotes a blending of a new family of man composed of the original inhabitants of the Americas, the Indians, and all other immigrants from throughout the earth, who, since the time of Columbus, have come to the New World in search of a new creation. Hence, it is not surprising that October 12, south of the Rio Grande is not so much Columbus Day as “el Dia de la Raza.”



VIII. LA CAUSA: LA TIERRA (THE EARTH)