

POWER, JIVE, AND A WALK-OUT

# SEPTEMBER 16 — WHY?

BY MANUEL LOPEZ

Yesterday there was a mass walkout of Chicano students. From elementary school through the Universities, tens of thousands of Chicanos walked out. Why?

I think we should look first to the historical perspective of September 16th. It was on this day that Father Hidalgo, a Catholic priest, issued the *Grito de Dolores*, a call for revolution to throw out the Spanish oppressors. Father Hidalgo stepped down from the pulpit and picked up a rifle. "Ya Basta!" (Enough!) was his cry. Thus began the revolution that eventually drove out the Spanish oppressors. Of course Mexico has had dictators and oppressive governments since, but Chicanos still relate to and identify with September 16th.

On March 27-31, 1969, there was a Chicano Youth Liberation Convention held at the Crusade for Justice in Denver. Fifteen-hundred youth from high schools, colleges, universities, campos and barrios met with professors, lawyers, teachers, guerrilla theatre groups (teatro campesino y teatro Chicano) and many others and asked question like: Who are we? Where are we going? How do we get there? Out of this convention came a call for all Chicanos to influence and control those things that affect their lives — the philosophy of self-determination. This philosophy was written in a revolutionary poetic document called *El Plan de Aztlan*. There was also a resolution passed that on September 16th Chicano students across the nation would walk out of school.

The educational institution was chosen because it is, perhaps, the most visible and oppressive institution the Chicano must deal with. From the moment he enters the educational system, the Chicano is brainwashed into thinking he is inferior and stupid. He is made to believe that his only potential is stoop labor and other menial jobs. He is tracked into remedial classes and then into the Armed Forces.

The young Chicano is made to feel ashamed of the language he speaks. Instead of rewarding and recognizing the intelligence and talents of the bi-lingual child, the schools punish him and insist that he "speak American." The trust and respect taught in our culture is interpreted by the Anglo as un-aggressiveness and stupidity. "Those lazy Mexicans just don't want to get ahead." It is small wonder, then, that by the time a Chicano reaches high-school age he has "dropped out" of school.

He has been alienated from the educational system and has thus been alienated from the American Dream. To quote Dr. Manuel H. Guerra: "This alienation pervades the educational milieu because the pluralistic differences of American society have not found the spiritual and intellectual bonds to unite basic separateness of race, national origin, religion and culture. Thus the 'American

Dream' which was thought to be a uniting factor entertained by all Americans was, in reality, an illusion and a myth. It did not extend equally to many citizens of Black, Brown, Yellow and Red pedigree in a fraternity which established its own exclusive clauses in the name of patriotism. The myth solicited total commitment, but in practice it denied many citizens their inalienable rights... 'The American Dream' could never unite the American peoples as a whole because it was never an American dream in the first place.

"It was never a product of our popular conscience, with as much respect for people of low station as people of means. The materialistic fibers of this false dream can never override the idealistic concept of man in the American mind, for this is where the National Treasury of the United States resides, rather than Fort Knox."

Into the above steps the Chicano university student. We, as students — as United Mexican American Students (UMAS) — must analyze and relate the University to our people and our communities. It seems that educators as a group are among the most conservative professionals in the country. The people that man the university apparatus seem dedicated to the maintenance of the status quo. The university must survive in the face of many obstacles: high taxes, stubborn ultra-conservative legislature, declining alumni contributions and the rising cost of living. They are, in fact, a big business. However, unlike General Motors, the University does not worry about changes or innovative ideas.

The Chicano from the barrio brings his hopes, problems, frustrations, talents and fears to this academic community. Again to quote Dr. Guerra: "The question remains a rhetorical one. Can the educator in higher education respond to the challenge of the Chicano student?" The question of applicable to all aspects of the University: curriculum change, sensitivity to the needs of the Chicano, admission changes and a meaningful seeking out of new methods of testing that are relevant to the Chicano and his culture and not WASP values.

We as a group — UMAS — have recognized and identified many of the inequities of the University of Colorado Denver Center. We have dedicated ourselves to bringing about change. We have sought out and recruited Chicanos that we, not the University, thought had the intelligence, ability and desire to complete a University education. We have begun to change the curriculum. We recognize that recruiting Chicanos into the University is only a small part of the job that needs to be done. Those Chicanos must not come out the robots that the University is designed to produce. They must have the knowledge,

expertise, desire and commitment to return to their communities and address themselves to problems that exist now. They must, if we are to survive, offer solutions to those problems.

The University has been forced to offer a few crumbs. They say words that sound like the University is indeed committed to our philosophy of self-determination. However, words do not recruit Chicanos into the University; words do not set up new courses in Chicano studies; words do not give us needed positions in the administrative structure; and words do not put needed books in the library. What little UMAS has gotten has been the product of the University avoiding a major confrontation. The strategy is simple: Give the Chicanos and Blacks some money to recruit a few students; give them a few courses; and smile and agree with them at negotiations. It's very easy to agree verbally to a point and then — months later — say you didn't say it or that you interpreted it in another manner. It's very easy to agree to a point and then — months later — suddenly find that there are no funds available to honor the commitment.

We did not participate in the national action simply in support of other students. We did it because we are getting jived here and now. The programs and proposals have been presented. "Can the educator in higher education respond to the challenge of the Chicano student?"

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