

A New Mexican-American Militancy

By HOMER BIGART
Special to The New York Times

LOS ANGELES—Five million Mexican-Americans, the nation's second largest minority, are stirring with a new militancy. The ethnic stereotype that the Chicanos are too drowsy, too docile to carry a sustained fight against poverty and discrimination is bending under fresh assault.

The Chicano revolt against the Anglo establishment is still in the planning stage, however. No national leader has arisen. La Causa, as the struggle for ethnic identity is called, has only a fragmented leadership of regional "spokesmen." No one really seems to want a chief, for as one young militant explained: "It's too easy to co-opt, buy off or assassinate a single leader."

The Mexican-Americans are a distinctive minority, separated from the dominant culture by a great gulf of poverty and differences in language and culture.

California, with two million, and Texas, with a million and a half, have the most Chicanos. New York probably has fewer than 10,000 and they are completely submerged by the massive Puerto Rican presence.

Some Mexican-Americans, notably in New Mexico, claim descent from Spanish explorers. Others say they were derived from the ancient Aztecs, and stress their Indianness. But the vast majority describe themselves as mestizos, people of mixed Spanish and Indian blood.

They all have a common complaint: they say the Anglos treat Chicanos as a conquered people by suppressing their Spanish language in the schools and discriminating against them in jobs, housing and income.

Consigned in the main to menial jobs, they earn a little more money than the Negro, but because their families are larger, the per capita income is generally lower: \$1,380 for Mexican-Americans, against \$1,437 for nonwhites in the Los Angeles area.

The worst-off Chicanos are the farm workers. Testifying last December before the Civil Rights Commission in San Antonio, the local Roman Catholic Archbishop, the Most Rev. Robert E. Lucey observed that migrant farm workers lived



Nelson Tiffany for The New York Times

Mexican-American at work in California's Imperial Valley

"in the awful reality of serfdom."

Like other ethnic groups, the Chicanos are drawn to cities. The crowded urban barrios are usually adjacent to the Negro ghettos, and the rising ferment among Mexican-Americans has been stimulated in part by the Negro civil rights movement.

There are varying degrees of Chicano militancy:

In the Spanish-speaking ghetto of East Los Angeles, barrio toughs boast of grenades and other explosives cached for the day of revolt against the gringo.

In Denver, Rodolfo (Corky) Gonzales plans a massive nation-wide school walkout by Chicano students on Sept. 16, Mexico's Independence Day. Corky, a former prize fighter, claims total victory in last month's strike at a high school in the west side barrio, a strike marred by violence in which, Corky says, a dozen police cars were disabled.

Quixotic Courthouse Raider

In New Mexico, Reies Lopez Tijerina, the quixotic former evangelist who raided a courthouse two years ago to make a "citizen's arrest" of a district attorney, takes a visitor on a tour of a "pueblo libre," a proposed free city-state in the wilderness where Chicanos will control their own destiny.

Unfortunately, 90 per cent of the pueblo is national forest. This does not bother Tijerina's

followers. They claim the land under Spanish royal grants made prior to American sovereignty. They have chopped down the boundary markers and other signs of gringo occupation.

They have even held a mock trial for a couple of forest rangers who fell into their hands. Tijerina himself is under a two-year Federal sentence for aiding and abetting an assault on a ranger. His conviction is under appeal.

Tijerina, who has been alternately snoozing and crunching sunflower seeds in the back seat while his lawyer, Bill Higgs, takes the wheel, suddenly comes to life. At a high pass where the road cowers under skyscraper rocks, the leader shouts: "Here's our port of entry for the Free City of Abiquiu."

Straight ahead, gleaming in the sun, is the Abiquiu Reservoir of the Chama River and on either side, sloping gently to the mountains, are wide stretches of grazing land. The black tower of Flint Rock Mesa looks down on a bowl completely empty of cattle and men.

"To me, this is holy ground," cries Tijerina with some of his old Pentecostal fervor. "Here we will build a city dedicated to justice. This is our Israel! And just like the Jews we are willing to die for our Israel, yes sir."

A Diverse People

Mexican-Americans are as diverse as any other people. Cesar Chavez, the gentle, introspective, sad-eyed director of the California grape strike, is totally unlike either the fiery Tijerina or the somberly wrathful Corky Gonzales.

Mr. Chavez has been called the spiritual leader of the Chicano moderates. His tiny bedroom at Delano, Calif., where he spends most of his time (he is afflicted with muscular spasms) is adorned with photos of his heroes—Gandhi and Martin Luther King, both apostles of nonviolence—and of his political mentor, the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

His belief in nonviolence seems unshakeable. He told a visitor: "Those of us who have seen violence never want to see it again. I know how it tears people apart. And in the end we lose."

"I'm not saying we should lay down and die. I think I'm as radical as anyone. But I think we can force meaningful change without the short cut of violence."

The strength of the militants is impossible to gauge. Tijerina contends he has 35,000 members in his Alianza; Corky Gonzales says he can muster 2,500 for a demonstration in Denver. Barrio militants in Los Angeles say they have "gone underground" and refuse to discuss strength.

"Our people are still frightened, but they are moving," commented Mr. Chavez, who said he had no wish to become a national leader. "I'm at most a leader of our union, and that union is very small," he said.

Three years ago, the Mexican-American community had no staff-funded organization except Mr. Chavez's organizing committee. Today there are several, including the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (which resembles the N.A.A.C.P. Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.) and the Southwest Conference of La Raza (The People), both of which are supported by the Ford Foundation.

The grape strike is now in its fourth year. The main issue is no longer money. Most of the table grape growers against whom the strike is directed have raised wages. The main issue now is recognition of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, and Mr. Chavez says he expects a long tough fight before that is achieved.

This week Mr. Chavez extended the strike to the Coachella Valley of Southern California. The strikers expect even more trouble in organizing the workers there than in the San Joaquin Valley, for the Coachella vineyards are only 90 miles from the border and a plentiful supply of strike breakers can be recruited from

the hordes of "green carders" who pour across the frontier each day in search of work.

These green carders, so-called from the color of identification cards, are aliens who are allowed to commute to jobs in this country. They are a constant source of cheap labor, undermining wage scales in the border region and frustrating union attempts to organize not only the farms but also the new industries that are settling in dozens of frontier towns from Brownsville, Tex., to San Diego.

Chicanos are demanding a tightening of the immigration laws. They would curb the commuting by requiring the green carders to reside in the United States. Then, confronted by higher living costs on this side of the border, the Mexicans would no longer be willing to work at depressed wages and might be more receptive to joining a union, the Chicanos believe.

The grievances of the Mexican-Americans, most of whom live in California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado, with sizable colonies in the Middle West (founded in the last century by construction gangs for the Santa Fe Railroad) sound familiar: job discrimination, miserable housing, social isolation, lack of political power (the result of gerrymandering the urban barrios) and exposure to a school system completely insensitive to Mexican-American history and cultures.

In only one respect is the Mexican-American better off than the Negro. Provided he is not too swarthy and provided he has money, the Chicano can escape from the barrio and move into Anglo middle-class districts.

He is worse off in other respects. Of all the minorities, only the American Indian makes less money than the Chicano. A linguistic and cultural gap separates the Mexican-American from the Anglo. Proud of his ancient Spanish-Indian heritage, the Chicano is less eager for assimilation than the Negro.

Most Speak Little English

Most Chicano children speak only a few words of English when they enter school. It can be a traumatic experience, especially in districts where Chicano pupils are spanked if they are overheard using Spanish in the halls and on the playground.

Recalling his first encounter with the strange and threatening atmosphere of an Anglo public school, Arnulfo Guerra, now a successful lawyer in Starr County, Tex., said that when a Chicano wanted to go to the toilet he had to wave his hand and try to say: "May I be excused?" Mr. Guerra said with a laugh that for a long

time he believed that "bisquez" (be excused) was the Anglo word for toilet.

Children caught speaking Spanish were sometimes humiliated, he said, by having to stand with their nose pressed against the blackboard inside a circle of chalk. If overheard on the playground, they were made to kneel and ask forgiveness.

Besides being confronted with a foreign language, the Chicano pupil finds that the attitudes, social relationships and objects depicted in his lessons are entirely outside his home experience. He is constantly admonished that if he wants to be an American, he must not only speak American but think American as well.

Their school dropout rate (34 per cent for Chicano children enrolled in Grades 7-12 in Texas) is the highest for any minority group.

In San Antonio, which has the second largest Mexican-American colony (about 350,000; Los Angeles is first with about one million), a hearing conducted last December by United States Civil Rights Commissioner J. Richard Avena disclosed subtle forms of discrimination.

School officials admitted, according to Mr. Avena, that junior high school counselors tended to steer Chicanos into predominantly Mexican-American vocational high schools. This betrayed the counselors' ethnic stereotype of the Chicano as an individual inherently equipped only for vocational training and unsuited for the Anglo college preparatory schools, he said.

The school system is a prime target of Chicano wrath. "Cultural rape" is a term frequently used by Mexican-Americans to describe what they call the system's attempt to make little Anglos out of their children.

School strikes and boycotts in the Southwest are becoming an almost daily occurrence. In Texas, Chicano pressure has obliged the school districts of San Antonio, Austin, El Paso and Edcouch-Elsa (adjacent towns in the lower Rio Grande Valley) to stop the punishment of children using Spanish in schools or playgrounds.

In Denver a few weeks ago, Corky Gonzales made the school board suspend a teacher accused of "racist" remarks.

The teacher denied having called a Chicano "stupid," denied having said: "If you eat Mexican food you'll look like a Mexican," and his denials were supported by some students who said he had been quoted out of context.

However, the school board seemed intimidated by the disorders that attended the walk-out. Stones and bottles were thrown at police cars; a 26-year-old Mexican-American

was struck by a charge of bird-shot fired by a policeman; 16 others were injured, and more than 40 persons, including Corky, were arrested.

Concessions Granted

The board made a number of concessions: more emphasis on Mexican history and literature in west side barrio schools, a re-evaluation of the counseling programs (Corky charged that some counsellors were urging Chicano youths to join the armed forces) and Mexican food in the cafeteria.

A grand jury returned no indictments on the Denver outbreak, although it found that "the inflammatory statements of Rodolfo (Corky) Gonzales at Lincoln Park bordered upon violations of the anarchy and sedition laws of the state." It exonerated the patrolman for

Chicanos Confronted By Gringos and Anglos

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AUSTIN, Tex., April 19 — Three words that have come into common use in the confrontation in the Southwest are "Chicano," "gringo" and "Anglo."

Chicano is never used in Mexico, but in the Southwest it is considered a diminutive of Mexicano, or little Mexican.

Gringo is similar to a Spanish word that has come to mean gibberish, so it is said that a gringo is someone who speaks a language that the people of Mexico do not understand.

Anglo is used to distinguish a white person who is not of Mexican ancestry.

The precise derivations of the words remains unclear, despite their common use in the area.

shooting the demonstrator and praised the police for "remarkable self-restraint in the face of vile abuse and obscene taunts."

Corky Gonzales, 40 years old, father of eight children, was one of the top 10 featherweights from 1947 to 1955. A former Democratic district captain in the barrio, he gave up politics because, he said, "I was being used." Then he founded a militant organization, "Crusade for Justice."

On a recent warm April day, a visitor to Corky's headquarters, a former Baptist church in the decaying Capitol Hill district of Denver, was led upstairs to a barnlike room where four or five hairy, unkempt youths were watching the funeral of Dwight D. Eisenhower on television. They were offensive and rude.

"C'mon, stick him in the ground and get it over with," one of them said, and the others laughed.

Accompanied by Guard

Corky, when he arrived with a bodyguard, went directly to his office, a musty cluttered room that had been the minister's study. He was no longer a featherweight, but he still looked trim and tough. He had grown a bushy black mustache, and he wore a pendant symbol of his movement—a three dimensional head representing Spanish father, Indian mother and mestizo offspring, mounted on an Aztec calendar plaque.

"How can there be justice," he demanded bitterly, "if we don't have our people on the jury system and the draft boards?"

Denver Chicanos had lost faith in the political system, he said, because every Mexican-American who achieved office in the country was "absorbed into the Anglo establishment and castrated by it."

Chicano schoolchildren were being perverted, he said, by "middle class aspirations," and the middle class was "dying and corrupt." He was against competitive society: "Success today in this country is learning how to cut throats."

Corky said he believed the best way to unify Mexican-Americans was through nationalism.

To foster Chicano nationalism Corky held a five-day conference in Denver at the end of March. About 1,000 youths from five southwestern states showed up, and they represented an ideological spectrum that included the New Left, Communists and liberals.

Coalition in Dispute

The convention nearly broke up on the issue of coalition with Negroes. Some barrio youths, resentful of Negro dominance in the civil rights movement, insisted on maintaining racial separateness.

Corky, who had quarreled with the black leadership of the Poor People's March on Washington a year ago, preached a modified ethnic nationalism, and he prevailed. Coalition with the blacks might be feasible later, he said, but meanwhile the Chicano must first achieve enough self-reliance to "do his thing alone."

As a first step toward liberating the Chicanos, Corky told the youths to go home and prepare a nationwide walkout of Mexican-American students on Sept. 16.

Down in Albuquerque, meanwhile, Corky's main rival for leadership of the Chicano youth, Tijerina, was plotting his own demonstration. It would be held on June 5, the second anniversary of his shootout at the Rio Arriba County courthouse, an event as significant to Mexi-

can-Americans, Tijerina believes, as the Boston Tea Party was to the American colonists.

Two years ago Tijerina and his band raided the courthouse in the northern New Mexico hamlet of Tierra Amarilla to "arrest" the district attorney for "violation of our civil rights."

Acquitted by Jury

He said that the district attorney, the sheriff, the state police and the forest rangers were all conspiring to deprive the Mexican-Americans of ancestral land, insisted that the Federal Government had welched on a promise, contained in the protocol to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (which ended the Mexican-American war in 1848) to honor some old Spanish and Mexican land grants.

A jury acquitted Tijerina of kidnaping and other charges growing out of his bloodless coup.

Tijerina's headquarters are in a blue and white two-story adobe building on a quiet Albuquerque street — quiet except when terrorists are trying to bomb the place. Tijerina, a hawk-faced man vibrant with nervous energy, said he suspected the Minutemen, a right-wing Anglo organization, of perpetuating three explosions, the last of which wrecked a dozen automobiles in the headquarters parking lot.

The leader of the Alliance of Free City-States has taken a few precautions. His apartment above the ground-floor meeting hall is protected by a steel door, by 18-inch concrete walls and by a triple-layered steel and cement floor.

Inside this fortress Tijerina discussed the future. The June 5 anniversary would be peaceful, he said, unless the gringo interfered. Some new Chicano families would be settled in the free city-state of San Joaquin and there would be a barbeque.

"Are you in rebellion?" he was asked.

"I don't know," he replied thoughtfully. "It's a matter of interpretation. The Government has raped our culture. So I think the Government is in revolt against the Constitution. It's our constitutional obligation to go on the cultural warpath to save our honor and identity. We demand that the Government cease the illegal occupation of our pueblos."

Tijerina said he had signed a treaty of mutual respect with the Hopi Indians, pledging mutual support against any aggressor.

Another plan for territorial revision was being advanced in Texas by Dr. Hector P. Garcia, founder of the American GI Forum, an organization of moderate Mexican-Americans.

Dr. Garcia proposed that South Texas, which has a large Chicano concentration, be made

a separate state. This would give the Mexican-Americans a chance to send one or two Senators and several Congressmen to Washington, he said, thereby easing the frustrations of political impotence.

The new Chicano militancy, with its cry of "Brown Power," can be heard even in Texas, where Mexican-Americans have long complained of brutal suppression by the Texas Rangers and by the state and local police.

Last month more than 2,000 Chicanos paraded through the border town of Del Rio, ostensibly to protest Gov. Preston Smith's decision to shut down the local projects of VISTA, the domestic Peace Corps, but also to cry out against discrimination.

Normally such demonstrations are small and sedate, the Chicanos parading behind a priest carrying the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

But this time the priest and the Virgin were forced to yield the front of the line to militants of the Mexican-American youth Organization (MAYO), and they tacked a manifesto on the courthouse door warning that violence might erupt if demands for equality were not met.

One of the founders of MAYO, José Angel Gutierrez, 22, said the organization's goals were the formation of political units independent of the Republican and Democratic parties ("only Mexicans can really represent Mexican interests") gaining control of schools, and the building of economic power through the weapon of boycott.

But the cause has had serious setbacks in the Rio Grande Valley. Attempts to organize farm labor have failed completely. Unemployment is high. And a powerful friend of the Chicanos, the Rev. Ed Krueger, was recently dismissed by the Texas Conference of Churches as its field representative in the lower valley.

Mr. Krueger said he had been under pressure from conference officials to "work with the establishment instead of with the poor," and that his superiors were also displeased because he refused to withdraw a suit against the Texas Rangers, a suit alleging that the Rangers manhandled Mr. Krueger and his wife when they tried to photograph a farm strike in Starr County two years ago.

The dismissal of Mr. Krueger was investigated by a panel headed by Dr. Alfonso Rodriguez, in charge of the Hispanic-American ministry of the National Council of Churches. The panel reported "tragic conditions of alienation, polarization, conflict and tension" in the valley, adding that the tension had been aggravated by Mr. Krueger's dismissal.

Farther west, El Paso and Phoenix show scant signs of Chicano militancy, despite their teeming barrios. In El Paso, where thousands of Mexican-Americans still live in squalid, rat-infested, barrack-like "presidios," some of which have only one outhouse for 20 families, about the only recent demonstrations have been peaceful "prayer-ins" on the lawn of a slumlord's agent.

In Phoenix a Roman Catholic priest, the Rev. Miguel Barragan, field representative of the Southwest Conference of La Raza, said it was difficult to involve the older Chicanos because they were prejudiced against political solutions, recalling the turmoil in Mexico. And the newer migrants feared police harassment and loss of jobs.

Yet the priest warned:

"If there are no immediate changes in the Southwest, no visible improvement in the political and economic status of the Mexican-American, then I definitely foresee that our youths will resort to violence to demand the dignity and respect they deserve as human beings and as American citizens."

"I see the barrios already full of hate and self-destruction. I see an educational system doing psychological damage to the Mexican-American, creating a self-identity crisis by refusing to recognize his rich cultural heritage and by suppressing his language."

"And therefore, to me, burning a building and rioting is less violent than what is happening to our youth under a school system that classes as 'retarded and inferior' those with a language difficulty."

In California Mexican-American demands for larger enrollments of Chicanos at the Berkeley and Los Angeles campuses of the University of California were receiving sympathetic attention. And Berkeley was planning a Department of Ethnic Studies in which Mexican history and culture would be taught.

But in East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights, these concessions were taken as insignificant crumbs.

Basically, people are tired of talking," said a youth in the Boyle Heights barrio. "A confrontation is inevitable. It's not unusual to see people going around with grenades and TNT. The tension is here; the weapons are here. The new underground organizations of ex-cons, addicts and dropouts make the Brown Berets look like Boys Scouts."

Across town, on the U.C.L.A. campus, a neutral observer gave a pessimistic but somewhat milder assessment. Prof. Leo Grebler, a German-born economist who directed a four-

year study of Mexican-Americans for the Ford Foundation, a study soon to be published, recalled how Gunnar Myrdal in his classic study of the Negro in the United States had been over-optimistic about the nation's ability to cope with the racial crisis.

Professor Grebler said that he and his coauthors, Prof. Joan W. Moore, a sociologist, of the University of California, Riverside, and Dr. Ralph Guzman, a professor of political science at California State College in Los Angeles, were making no such error in their projections about the Mexican-Americans.

The study will conclude that the Anglo Establishment must quickly remove obstacles to the socio-economic development of the Mexican-Americans and broaden its understanding of this minority.

Some idea of the ignorance and apathy displayed toward Mexican-Americans by the dominant institutions was reported in Washington by Vicente T. Ximenez, who resigned recently as chairman of the Federal Interagency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs.

Mr. Ximenez, who is the first Mexican-American member of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, said he had invited 50 of the nation's largest foundations to send representatives to a conference on Mexican-American problems on March 22. Only two of the 50 accepted, he said, and the conference was canceled.

"The negative replies didn't bother me so much as the reasons they gave," Mr. Ximenez said. He quoted a letter from the Guggenheim Foundation that noted: "Our program is confined to awarding fellowships through annual competition to advanced workers in science, scholarship and the arts."

"I can't understand," Mr. Ximenez said rather dryly, "why we Mexican-American can't qualify for advanced work in science, scholarship and the arts."

A tour of the Southwest revealed many Chicanos were aware of the strategic position they might hold in an increasingly divided white and black nation.

Tijerina has said: "We are reaching the point where the black and white color gap will demand a brown, middle-color peacemaker."

And a would-be Chicano power-broker predicted in Los Angeles that a coalition of Mexican-Americans and blacks would sweep Councilman Thomas Bradley, a Negro, to victory over Mayor Sam Yorty in next month's Los Angeles mayoralty election.

"With this strong coalition," he said, "we can control every political job in the city by 1972."

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