**The Chicano/Chicana Movement**

The Chicana and Chicano Civil Rights Movement, sometimes called the Chicano Movement or El Movimiento, Spanish for The Movement, was essentially a political, educational, and social justice journey with the purpose of achieving social liberation and empowerment for the ethnic community of Mexican-Americans in the United States. By the 1960’s, at the height of the Civil Rights era, strife had become apparent between the dominant oppressor of white mainstream society and the discriminated ethnic Latino communities all across the nation. Inequalities and injustices in societal issues became the final push factor for these ethnic communities to become socially and politically conscious of their rights as citizens of the United States, and so it led to them uprising against an unequal society. Mexican-Americans demanded better education, working conditions, political empowerment, and social liberation (freedom to keep their cultures, language and traditions alove).

During this civil rights era, revolution was already in the air. There were changes to self-identity in all ethnic communities; African-Americans began to embrace the term Black as a way to empower themselves. For Mexican-Americans, a new form of identity was born, in the term of Chicana and Chicano; a term that united La Raza (The Race). Once considered as a derogatory term towards Mexican-Americans, Chicano and Chicana now became the name to show cultural, political, and ethnic identity and unity. Chicana and Chicano had become the notorious symbolic term used to associate themselves with La Causa (The Cause), which is the fight for equality in American society.

The Chicana/o Movement went from political campaigns to educational reform. There are a few speculations as to the origins of the Chicano Movement. Some Chicana/o scholars argue that the Chicana/o Movement was a continuation of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement during the 1940’s; In contrast, numerous historians, sociologists, and political analysts suggest that the Movement began in 1848, when the United States defeated Mexico in the land conquest of the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846; a war where the United States annexed more than 6 present day Southwest States, a phenomenon that has been known to become as the Mexican Cession of 1848 under the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. In any case, the origin of the Chicana/o Movement is at best ambiguous, but nevertheless, it represents an ethnic struggle that has been fought for many decades now, and continues today…

**The Quest for a Homeland**

The quest for a Mexican-American homeland was introduced by Chicano independence activists during the height of the Movement during the 1960’s and 1970’s. They used the symbolic term of Aztlan to refer to their Aztec mystical land of origin, which is the area that the United States Annexed in 1848. The reason why they desperately wanted to socially and culturally reclaim these lands were for the sheer purpose of establishing their own Chicana and Chicano society; a Society that would be in their direct control, apart from the influence of white mainstream society. In 1969, the First National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in March 1969 held in Denver, Colorado gave birth to the Chicano nationalist manifesto known as “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan” (The Spiritual Plan of Aztlan), which advocated for Chicano nationalism and self determination for Mexican-Americans. Fundamentally what this Chicano nationalistic plan did was structured the idea that Chicanos must use their nationalism as the key for mass mobilization and organization. Once Chicanos were committed to the idea and philosophy of El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan, they could only conclude that social, economic, cultural, and political independence was the only road to total liberation from oppression, exploitation, and racism.

El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan included people from all levels of Chicano society - the barrio (Latin neighborhoods), the campo (farms), the ranchero (rancher/farm keeper), the writer, the teacher, the worker, the professional. Essentially the cause was for MexicanAmerican/Chicano liberation.The manifesto called for unity, economic control, educational opportunities, access to gate keeping institutions, self defense, cultural awareness and recognition, and of course political liberation. Although the manifesto was no more than an ideology, it set the foundation for future generations from all Latino backgrounds to embrace their indigenous roots through language, clothing, art and poetry.

Things to think about while reading:

1. What were the main dynamics of El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan?

2. What were its implications?

3. In what sense was the quest by Chicanas/os to get back their symbolic homeland true?

4. How radical was El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan?

5. What were the political ideologies of it?

6. Has cultural nationalism grown as a result of El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan?

7. Do you believe that Chicanas/os will ever reclaim their “homeland?”

**Reclaiming Education in Schools**

The educational system had been viewed as broken, unequal, and discriminatory for quite some time now. There was no doubt that education reform was at the top of the Chicana/o Movement agenda. Mexican-Americans/Chicanas/os took notice of the lack of incorporating their historical background in the courses and curriculum of U.S. history. In addition, many of these schools lacked proper facilities to facilitate the education these ethnic students deserved. And so came the response by students. In the town of East Los Angeles, a great number of High Schools became the target for educational reform through social activism. As a former student myself from one of the original East L.A. public high schools involved in the walkouts, Wilson High School, I know firsthand the effect it had on not only the quality of education students received many years later following the aftermath, but also the impact it had on the community as well. Apart from Wilson, other major high schools involved in these walkouts consisted of Lincoln, Roosevelt, Garfield, and Belmont. The East L.A. Walkouts, also known as the Chicano Blowouts, were a series of walkouts and Page 10 boycotts orchestrated mainly by the students and one Chicano educator, Salvador Castro, against the educational inequalities they were experiencing in those schools during that period. Prior to these events, both college and high students had been developing a method to get the school board’s attention, and they felt that walking out was the best form of activism to express their beliefs and concerns about “the inequitable conditions, inadequate resources, and unjust education they received in the city’s public schools” in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Based on the article “Examining Transformational Resistance” by Daniel Solórzano and Dolores Delgado, “In 1968, people witnessed a worldwide rise in student movements in countries such as France, Italy, Mexico, and the United States. In March of that year, more than 10,000 students walked out…” This was so massive and known that it made headline news across various countries of Latin origin. It gave proof to the world that a new group of young students was conscious of their ethnic background, and they knew themselves they were on the rise, in great numbers too. Page 11 At the the First National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in the March 1969 convention held in Denver, Colorado El Plan de Santa Barbara was written, a manifesto that would change the educational world for Chicano students forever. This document/manifesto was created in April 1969 at the University of California, Santa Barbara for the institutionalization and implementation of Chicana/o Studies educational programs on all campuses. “El Plan de Santa Barbara” was was written by the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, and has been the basis for the Chicana/o Studies educational departmental program in California. In the next couple of years society took notice of the effects that the Chicano Blowouts of 1968 and the Chicano Plan for Higher Education proposal in 1969 had on academia. Evidently their passion paid off, for it indirectly led into the establishment of the Chicana/o Studies Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1973 (Departmentalized in 2005); similar to the development of the Ethnic Studies Program initiated at the University of California, Berkeley essentially due to the 1969 Third World Strike.

Things to think about while reading:

1. What is your perspective on the Plan de Santa Barbara?

2. What changes did it implement in the educational system in California?

3. What do you think about Chicana/o High School students becoming aware of the inequalities in education and showing activism through a social movement by walking out/boycotting the East L.A. H.S.’s?

4. How has UCLA and UC Berkeley, the top two public universities in the country, advanced from the Plan de Santa Barbara, leading them to become pioneer in such academic disciplines?

**The Movement Continues**

According to the archives from MEChA, in 1987-1988 the Faculty Senate Committee recommended the disestablishment of the Chicana/o Studies program and suspension of the major. The next few years it worsened, when the program was struggling with only a yearly budget of $1500 and UCLA suspended new admissions to all incoming Chicana/o Studies majors. These acts were seen as unjust to many students and therefore sparked the protests from many student organizations and outside advocates. MEChA was one of the original groups to hold first demonstrations in support of a Chicana/o Studies Department demanding that Chancellor Page 17 Charles Young meet with community leaders and establish the program at UCLA. When Chancellor Young refused to established the program, a new form of student activism surfaced to the eyes of society. In the book “De Colores Means All of Us” the author Elizabeth Martinez states how “It soon became clear that if a new movement were to emerge, it would need an agenda that would also be new…an agenda had to move beyond narrow cultural nationalism and recognize the need for serious, nonsectarian coalitions with other progressive students of color…” (220). This was no longer a high school matter but rather a world class university battling for the departmentalization of a concentrated study. However, Chancellor Young kept giving them the go around, and finally on the eve of Cesar Chavez’s wake, he announced his refusal to establish a Chicana/o Studies Department. His decision motivated students to take a stand against his controversial beliefs. On May 11, 1993 an off-campus group known as the Conscious Students of Color organized a sit-in at the Faculty Center, which led UCLA official to summon UCPD and LAPD officers in riot gear to take control of the situation. Martinez proclaims “they arrested 99 students, grabbing their heads, necks and ears, dragging them…Charged with felony (vandalism), not just the usual Page 18 trespassing, 83 went to jail” (221). The very next day, about 1000 students attended MEChA’s rally in protest for the release of the arrested students. Many coalitions with diverse ethnic and student groups joined in the struggle; they knew that what affected one minority would indirectly affect the other one. Plus, the African American and Asian American communities had to invest in this protest, for they too had wanted their own ethnic studies program at UCLA, so they figured to join the Latinos in their quest. More types of protests followed, coming in the forms of marches and the famous hunger strike that made national news. In early June, hundreds of strike supporters began to march several miles across Westwood and Los Angeles, eventually leading back to the campus at UCLA. But the main form of activism that showed how serious they were about this issue was the hunger strike that some students and a Professor of the UCLA Medical School went on. This hunger strike lasted for weeks, consuming nothing but water, putting their beliefs in front of their health. But their actions and sacrifices paid off. As Natalie Branach, writer for the UCLA Daily Bruin wrote in 2003 in her article “The hunger strike ended when the UCLA administration compromised and created the Cesar Chavez Center for Interdisciplinary Instruction in Chicana/o Studies” and Page 19 so the departmentalization of Chicana/o Studies was finally initiated. Finally, in the year 2005, after many decades of struggle, their great effort was recognized by evident of both the department and the interdisciplinary studies at UCLA were combined to become the official Cesar E. Chavez Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies. In contrast, several political and social issues have also emerged in the past few years that have yet once again inspired and motivated young Chicana/o students to protest on behalf of their societal beliefs and values. When legislation came out with such immigration policies and laws in 2006, it led to Los Angeles county high school students to once again walkout in protest. However, this movement was different, it became national, for it motivated hundreds of thousands of students to walkout all across the United States, as they showed their passion and struggle for not only political impartiality, but rather social equalities. These federal policies, Proposition 187 and HR 4437 sparked some of the largest youth movements in all of Southern California and the United States for it was a multiethnic movement. According to Los Angeles Times article “Massive Student Walkout Spreads Across Southland” by Anna Gorman and Cynthia Cho, “The protests Page 20 are believed to eclipse in size the demonstrations that occurred during the anti-Proposition 187 campaign in 1994 and even a famous student walkout for Chicano rights in 1968.” In addition, they assert in their article that these protests consisted of middle school students as well, in more than 50 Los Angeles Unified campuses, causing great attention, for these new Chicana/o activists were as young as 13 years old. The article also states how L.A. Mayor Villaraigosa argues that this legislation popularly known as the “Sensenbrenner Bill” would “criminalize 12 million people.” The true power of political activism was evident and undeniable when immigration legislation HR 4437 was denied. These amazing students paved the way for future generations to succeed in school and be motivated to help out their community. Even though the time periods and level of higher education were different, the struggle showed a common purpose and goal. It showed that Chicana/o students have powerful political voices and capabilities to respond to inequalities in the higher educational system, and actually alter certain aspects in the world of academia that students experience and take advantage everyday at these schools today. Because there is still a lot of work to be done for the betterment of the Chicana/o community, new forms of activism will emerge one day and change the quality of education once more.