LATINOS

Public declarations by African Americans of race pride and ethnic heritage prompted members of other minority groups to reassess their own place and backgrounds. This was an especially compelling discussion among American Latinos, who had lived in a world that offered contradictory messages about their race and culture. Across the country, from neighborhoods in New York to communities in Texas and barrios in California, this discussion exploded.

CHICANO MANIFESTO

Armando B. Rendon

Being raised as a Latino in the United States meant dealing with a complex personal heritage. For Armando Rendon, this entailed coming to terms with his own background as well as understanding the degree to which many Latinos had been seduced into presenting themselves in a shallow imitation of white culture.

I am a Chicano. What that means to me may be entirely different from what meaning the word has for you. To be Chicano is to find out something about one's self which has lain dormant, subverted, and nearly destroyed.

I am a Chicano because of a unique fusion of bloods and history and culture. I am a Chicano because I sense a rising awareness among others like myself of a fresh rebirth of self and self-in-others.

I am a Chicano because from this revived and newly created personality I draw vitality and motivation more forceful and tangible than I ever did or could have from the gringo world.

I am a Chicano in spite of scorn or derision, in spite of opposition even from my own people, many of whom do not understand and may never fathom what Chicano means.

I am a Chicano, hopeful that my acceptance and assertion of Chicano will mean a better life for all my people, that it will move others into making the same act of will to accept and develop a newfound identity and power.

There is a mystique among us Chicanos, something that we have searched for and now have found. It draws us together, welds from insecure, disparate groups and viewpoints a common focal thought, experience, and power. For so many years we have disclaimed or claimed this or that label, sought leadership even from the Anglo, founded any number of organizations, worried over internal issues, fought for prestige and position within our little groups; and all the while the Anglo kept us in subjugation.

To be Chicano is nothing new; it is as old as our people. But it is a new way of knowing your brown brother and of understanding our brown race. To be Chicano means that a person has looked deeper into his being and sought unique ties to his brothers in la raza.

I nearly fell victim to the Anglo. My childhood was spent in the West Side barrio of San Antonio. I lived in my grandmother's house on Ruiz Street just below Zarzamora Creek. I did well in the elementary grades and learned English quickly.

Spanish was off-limits in school anyway, and teachers and relatives taught me early that my mother tongue would be of no help in making good grades and becoming a success. Yet Spanish was the language I used in playing and arguing with friends. Spanish was the language I spoke with my abuelita, my grandmother, as I ate atole on those cold mornings when I used to wake at dawn to her clattering dishes in the tiny kitchen; or when I would cringe in mock horror at old folk tales she would tell me late at night.

But the lesson took effect anyway. When at the age of ten I went with my mother to California, to the San Francisco Bay Area where she found work, I had my first real opportunity to strip myself completely of my heritage. In California the schools I attended were all Anglo except for the recently immigrated Mexican students located in the barrios that Sacramento had allocated to the "Mexicans." I found my people striving to survive in an alien environment among foreign people. . . . I rediscovered my own people, or perhaps they redeemed me. . . . For the first time in many years I became immersed in a tough, macho ambiente (an entirely Mexican male environment). Only Spanish was spoken. The effect was shattering. It was as if my tongue, after being struck dumb as a child, had been loosened. . . . I was cast in a spiritual setting which was a perfect background for reviving my Chicano soul. Reborn but imperfectly, I still had a lot to learn about myself and my people. But my understanding deepened and renewed itself as the years went by. I visited bracero camps with teams of Chicanos; sometimes with priests taking the Sacraments; sometimes only Chicanos, offering advice or assistance with badly
needed food and clothing, distributed through a bingo-game technique; and on occasion, music for group singing provided by a phonograph or a guitar. Then there were barrio organization work; migrant worker programs; a rural elf-help community development project; and confrontation with anti-poverty agencies, with the churches, with government officials, and with cautious Chicano, too... .

I owe my life to my Chicano people. They rescued me from the Anglo kiss of death, the monolingual, monocultural, and colorless gringo society. I no longer face a dilemma of identity or direction. That identity and direction have been charted for me by the Chicano—but to think I came that close to being sucked into the vacuum of the dominant society.

Chicano is a beautiful word. Chicano describes a beautiful people. Chicano has a power of its own. Chicano is a unique confluence of histories, cultures, languages, and traditions.

Chicano is the one unique word of the Mexican American people. Its derivation is strictly internal; it owes nothing to the Anglo penchant for categorizing ethnic groups. In a way, Chicano is indefinable, more a word to be understood and felt and lived than placed in a dictionary or analyzed by Anglo anthropologists, sociologists, and apologists.

Chicano has the ring of pachuco slang, of shortening a word, which is typical of our Mexican American experience. It also echoes the harsher sounds of our native ancestors of the Mexican Valley, but is softened by the rounded-vowel endings of our Spanish forebears. It is the perfect word to characterize the mezcla that is la raza. It portray the fact that we have come to psychological terms with circumstances which might otherwise cause emotional and social breakdowns among our people if we only traddle cultures and do not absorb them.

Chicano is a very special word. Chicano is a unique people. Chicano is a prophecy of a new day and a new world.