

Chicano Manifesto

The history and aspirations of the second largest minority in America

Armando B. Rendón

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THE DEL RIO
MEXICAN AMERICAN
MANIFESTO TO THE NATION

(Original Version as Read to an Audience of More than Two Thousand)

On this historic day, March 30, 1969, the Mexican American community of the United States of America stands in solidarity with the Mexican American poor of Del Rio, Texas. The infamy recently perpetrated upon them by local and state authorities has exhausted our patience. From throughout the country and all walks of life, we have come to join our voices with theirs in denouncing the forces that oppress them and us, and in demanding redress of their grievances and ours. We believe that both our denunciation and our demand are firmly in keeping with a country made up of minorities and committed to abide by democratic ideals.

Recent events in this city have made it amply clear that our minority continues to be oppressed by men and institutions using the language of democracy while resorting to totalitarian methods. A highly regarded OEO project of self-determination, the Val Verde County VISTA Minority Mobilization program, has been arbitrarily cancelled by Governor Preston Smith at the request of three Anglo county commissioners representing less than five percent of the population. The fourth commissioner, a Mexican American representing the rest of the citizens, while originally abstaining, joined his vote to that of the other three following the Governor's decree. The charges were pathetic—a reflection of nervous power-wielders who saw the growing assertiveness of the poor served by VISTA Mexican Americans as a threat to their traditional supremacy. A collusion was alleged between the VISTA volunteers and the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), a local group of youngsters, mostly high schoolers, who frequently assail the injustices of what they call the “gringo system.” Without bothering to consult with the local Community Action Program Board, or the Austin Regional OEO office, both of which continue to endorse the Del Rio VISTAS, the Governor sent wires to the National VISTA office and to all Texas judges in whose counties other VISTA programs are operating, informing them of the cancellation of the Val Verde County program, and adding, “the abdication of respect for law and order, disruption of the democratic process, and provocation of disunity among our citizens shall not be tolerated by this office.”

A dispassionate analysis of this appalling misuse of power by both the Val Verde Commissioners and the Governor reveals it is they, not the poor, the VISTAS, or MAYOs who are guilty of “abdication of respect for law and order, disruption of the democratic process, and provocation of

disunity among our citizens.” Del Rio was no paradise of unity, before VISTAs and MAYOs arrived. Except for minor differences of detail, the list of local grievances they have dramatized parallel the experience of countless other communities where Mexican Americans are still treated as conquered people. We see our own conditions elsewhere as we review the sorry catalogue that our destitute Del Rio brothers have shared with us in describing the Anglo-controlled establishment:

1. It is they who built a multi-million dollar school for their children, then built barracks for ours.
2. It is they who stole our land, then sold it back to us, bit by bit, crumb by crumb.
3. It is they who speak one language and resent us for speaking two.
4. It is they who preach brotherhood and practice racism.
5. It is they who make ado about equal opportunity but reserve it to themselves or their replicas.
6. It is they who proclaim concern for the poor through a welfare system calculated to keep our people in perpetual dependency.
7. It is their police system that harasses and overpolices our sons and daughters.
8. It is their educational system that violates the innocence of our children with required literature like *The Texas Story*, a book that caricatures our ancestors.
9. It is their double standard of justice—minimum penalty for gringo and maximum for Chicano—that makes criminals of our young men.
10. It is they who denounce our militancy but think nothing of the legal violence they inflict on us mentally, culturally, spiritually and physically.

There must be something invincible in our people that has kept alive our humanity in spite of a system bent on suppressing our difference and rewarding our conformity. It is such an experience of cultural survival that has led us to the recovery of the magnificence of LA RAZA. However we define it, it is a treasure house of spirituality, decency, and sanity. LA RAZA is the affirmation of the most basic ingredient of our personality, the brownhood of our Indian ancestors wedded to all the other skin colors of mankind. Brown is the common denominator of the largest number among us—a glorious reminder of our Aztec and Mayan heritage. But in a color-mad society, the sin of our coloration can be expiated only by exceptional achievement and successful imitation of the white man who controls every institution of society. LA RAZA condemns such a system as

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racist, pagan, and ultimately self-destructive. We can neither tolerate it nor be a part of it. As children of LA RAZA, we are heirs of a spiritual and biological miracle where in one family blood ties unite the darkest and the fairest. It is no accident that the objects of our veneration include the black Peruvian Saint Martin de Porres, the brown Indian Virgen de Guadalupe, the blond European madonnas, and a Jewish Christ of Indian and Spanish features.

We cannot explain our survival and our strength apart from this heritage—a heritage inseparably linked to Spanish, the soul language of LA RAZA. On this day we serve notice on Del Rio and the nation that for their sake and ours we are willing to lay down our lives to preserve the culture and language of our ancestors, to blend them with that which is best in these United States of America, our beloved country. Let no one forget that thousands of our Mexican American brothers have gallantly fought and died in defense of American freedoms enjoyed by us more in hope than reality. We shall escalate the defense of such freedoms here at home to honor those who fell for them yesterday, and to sustain those who live for their fulfillment tomorrow. We are committed to nonviolence, even while living in the midst of officially tolerated violence. We are prepared however, to be as aggressive as it may be necessary, until every one of our Mexican American brothers enjoys the liberty of shaping his own future.

We feel compelled to warn the Val Verde Commissioners and Governor Preston Smith that they are inviting serious social unrest if they do not immediately rescind their VISTA cancellation action. Likewise, we feel compelled to warn the United States Congress that unless legislation is enacted to protect the VISTA principle of self-determination from arbitrary termination by local and state officials, the entire concept of volunteer service, whether at home or abroad, will be prostituted in the eyes of those idealistic fellow-Americans who participate in it. Lastly, we feel compelled to warn the whole nation that unless the ideal of self-determination is upheld with our poor at home, the entire world will judge us hypocritical in our attempt to assist the poor abroad.

On this day, Mexican Americans commit themselves to struggle ceaselessly until the promise of this country is realized for us and our fellow-Americans: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.