

## PALM SUNDAY - MARCH 1969

Eloy Padilla

In the spring of 1969, I was completing my junior year at the University of Texas at Austin. After graduating from San Felipe High School in 1966, I entered the University in the fall and from the very beginning my eyes were opened to the truths of our history and status in society was revealed in the classes I attended and how we were being treated as Mexican-Americans at the school.

During the first year I concentrated on my studies and I was on the Dean' List during the first semester and Honor Roll List during the second semester. It was not until the second year that I became involved in organized efforts by joining the newly formed Mexican American Student Organization (MASO). The goals of the MASO were quite simple at first, asking for the school to increase the number of MA students that were enrolled at the school from a low 20% to at least 33% of the state's population. I was elected an officer of the organization as Sargent at Arms.

It was during the second semester that my involvement in fighting "racism" came to a head. There was a businessman in Austin by the name of Don Weedon, who owned a nightclub and service station near the University. He was a former UT football player and apparently was very well known. In the Spring of 1968, there was a heavyweight boxing tournament taking place on television to replace the title held by Muhammed Ali. His title had been taken away from him when he was charged with refusing the draft to go to Vietnam. On the evening of the title fight between Joe Frazier and Jerry Quarry, it was publicized that Quarry was the last white hope to reclaim the title for the "white people". Weedon's nightclub was showing the fight at his club and there was a band playing which included a black young man playing the trumpet. When Quarry lost the fight to Frazier, Weedon became so furious that he picked up a bar stool and hit the young man over the head. He was taken to the hospital comatose and it was several days before he regained consciousness. He was a student at UT and also played in the University's band and there were several students who had been looking for him. When they found out what had happened to the young man, the students became furious.

University students who were members of Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) organized a boycott of Weedon's business near the school, a Conoco service station on Guadalupe Street. They picketed the station and asked for other student organizations to join them. I was attending my Economic class and we were discussing the use of a Boycott to influence change in how a business conducted itself. The professor suddenly said, "why are we here discussing a theory of boycott when we can go down the street and see such a thing in action." We went as a class to the station and I saw several members of MASO across the street holding picket signs and marching around the station. They called for me to cross over and join them and I did. Soon afterwards, several of the protesters started sitting down in front of the cars trying to enter the station and they were immediately arrested and taken to jail. There was only a few left when the MASO group decided

to sit down and I joined the group. We were taken in to the county jail and were bonded out rather quickly. This began my initiation of activism against discrimination and fighting to get rid of the racism prevalent in our society.

A year later, during the spring of 1969, MASO received a message from several organizations around the state regarding an act of obvious racism in my home town of Del Rio. It was announced that Governor Preston Smith had ordered the removal of the Vista Minority Mobilization Team from Del Rio, along with the supervisor of the Team Aurelio Montemayor. "Monte," as we called him had been my Junior year English teacher at San Felipe High School. He was a well-liked teacher and a respected mentor to many students. His removal had angered the students in San Felipe and a call for a march to protest this removal was called for. State-wide organizations sent representatives to the march and MASO sent five delegates to take part in this event.

President of the organization, David Montejano, along with three other members and myself, traveled to Del Rio from Austin in time to take part in a organizational meeting at the local American G. I. Forum Hall night before the Sunday march. Present at the meeting were many of the leaders in the Mexican-American (Chicano) Civil Rights Movement at the time – Jose Angel Gutierrez, Willie Velasquez, Mario Compean, Juan Patlan, along with political leaders like Gonzalo Barrientos, Carlos Truan, Joe Bernal, Joe Uriegas, Judge Albert Pena and of course, Bishop Patrick Flores were there. Del Rio leaders Dr. Fermin Calderon, Eulalio Calderon, Mike Gonzalez were all there with Mr. Montemayor.

They were expecting at least 2,000 or more marchers the next day, some of who were members of the newly formed Brown Berets, Mayo members and other college organizations. The march was to take start from the Del Rio Civic Center after a short meeting at the center and go south to the Val Verde County Courthouse and then to the local Moore Park. The speeches were long and patience of the young protesters was short and after Jose Angel gave a fiery talk, the marchers exited the civic center and we started the trek to the courthouse. The college age students and older marchers were to lead and take position on the sides to protect the young very active young people and to protect them in case of some trouble from any bystanders along the way. There was no major incidents along the way, although the marchers were loud and vocal!

At the courthouse, the only one who spoke in front of the courthouse door was Jose Angel Gutierrez. After a short talk which excited the group, he nailed the "CHICANO MANIFESTO" to the door and the crowd dispersed. The majority of the group followed Bishop Flores and other religious leaders to the Park, where a Palm Sunday Mass was held. There was no violence during or after the March and it was successful in motivating many to join the Chicano Movement which was gaining momentum around the state.