

“The Chicano Wars”

The Advent of the Chicano Movement
in Pueblo, Colorado

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Introduction to Chicano Studies 101

The Rising Storm

The 1960's began with the promise of the Kennedy presidency and ushered in a period of hope and long awaited progress for the Chicano people of Pueblo. The Civil Rights Movement was gaining momentum. Dr. Martin Luther King's dream would eventually culminate in the passage of the Civil Rights Laws and subsequent implementation of the legislation's derivative programs. These programs would provide the nation's minorities with previously unattainable rights and the promise of a life with dignity.

The Civil Rights Movement was the harbinger of the idealism that was to permeate the American landscape during this turbulent decade. America's youth emerged as the nation's social conscience. Their idealism was manifested in their opposition to the Vietnam War and prompted a national awakening of social consciousness that gave birth to a plethora of social movements. The Peace Movement, the Counter Culture Revolution, the Liberation of American women, the Sexual Revolution, Civil Rights Movement, and the Militant Black and Chicano Movements were initiated and guided by the nation's youth.

When analyzing the beginnings of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo, it came as no surprise that the catalysts who wrought so much change in my hometown were student products of the youth oriented and idealistic 60's.

The most prominent of Pueblo's young Chicano leaders to emerge during the late 60's was Alberto Gurule. Gurule, son of Euberto Gurule of Trinidad, received his A.A. Degree from Trinidad State College and B.S. Degree from Southern Colorado State College in Pueblo. While employed as a caseworker for the Pueblo County Welfare Department, he was granted a full salary education leave to study for his Master's Degree in social work at the University of Denver. He completed the D.U. Master's Program in 1968 at the age of twenty four. He then returned to Pueblo to assume his position as a social worker. Upon the resumption of his duties, Gurule embarked on a remarkable career as a Chicano activist and community organizer. He and his youthful shock troops would eventually win for the Chicanos of Pueblo a precious commodity they had previously been denied--dignity.

To fully comprehend the task that confronted Gurule, a brief sketch of Pueblo in the 60's is required.

The city of Pueblo in the 1960's was rife with discrimination. The city population was approximately 125,000. The official Chicano population was pegged at 31,800--a figure most Chicanos felt was woefully underestimated.¹ Though the Chicanos represented a definite minority of the total population, they comprised a majority of the school dropouts, juvenile probation offenders,

welfare recipients, and inmates within the Pueblo city and county jails.² A general overview of the discrimination existing in Pueblo can be demonstrated by analyzing employment statistics for Pueblo's School District 60. In 1968, the District employed 1,847. Only 125, or 6.7%, were Spanish surnamed. Of that total, 23.2% were maintenance workers, clerical help, and teacher aides.³ Most Chicano children completed a full 12-year course of study never having been exposed to a Chicano teacher. The lack of Chicano role models in the schools served to reinforce a readily identifiable inherent inferiority complex.

Additional evidence of discrimination is contained in probationary reports for the years 1968 and 1969. The information is provided below:⁴

	<u>1968</u>		<u>1969</u>
White	--416	White	--603
Spanish-surnamed	--622	Spanish-surnamed	--926
Negro	-- 80	Negro	-- 84
Other	-- 0	Other	-- 13

The disproportionately large numbers of young Chicanos referred to juvenile court is evidence of the discriminatory treatment Pueblo police accorded young Chicanos. Further evidence is contained in the following letter written by former Pueblo Police Chief, Roy Harper, on April 11, 1962. The letter was written in response to an inquiry from an Anglo mother whose daughter was dating a Chicano.⁵

If this is the same ---- ----- your daughter is dating, tell her he is a typical Pueblo Mexican, (they call themselves Spanish-Americans) won't work steady, gets a girl pregnant, beats hell out of her and after few kids

arrive he leaves her to support the kids any way she can.

This racist stereotypical interpretation of the Chicano people of Pueblo, reflected the general attitude of the Pueblo Police Department, and, unfortunately, a large portion of Pueblo's Anglo citizenry. Roy Harper was later elected to Pueblo's City Council in 1970. Harper by no means represented an extreme viewpoint. A well known Pueblo educator and coach often began a new school year by drawing a pinto bean on the board and then labeling it a Mexican brain much to the howling approval of his Anglo students. Mexican brides were always segregated in the social section of the Pueblo paper and relegated to the back pages. The Anglo expected the Chicanos of Pueblo to know their place, (primarily as a source of labor) and not to step beyond the social or economic borders they alone determined.

During the 60's, the Pueblo Chicano community suffered from a near sterility of leaders and trained professionals. Only one Chicano attorney was practicing in the city. The large professional pool of teachers, lawyers, doctors, dentists, and business types that would later emerge was almost non-existent. Into this bleak scenario Al Gurule stepped and established the framework for Pueblo's Chicano Movement.

Gurule realized that the success of the Pueblo movement would be contingent upon student participation. Using the young as shock-troops, he intended to emulate the tactics of

the national movements that were then sweeping the country. To motivate the college students, he helped sponsor a Chicano student organization at Southern Colorado State College. He used the new club, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan, as an organizational base. Joining forces with the Pueblo G.I. Forum, Pueblo Welfare Rights Organization, and Legal Services of Pueblo, Gurule and MECHA subjected Pueblo to its first bitter taste of the Chicano Movement.

On December 12, 1969, Gurule and his coalition of concerned organizations began to picket local Safeway stores in support of Caesar Chavez's "La Causa." Chavez's national grape boycott became the catalyst for developing legions of Chicano and Anglo supporters nationwide. Inspired by the charismatic leadership of Chavez and dogged determination of Gurule, young Chicanos in Pueblo became actively involved in "La Causa" and thus were recruited for the local movement as well. Martin Serna, a leader of the MECHA college organization, would later help organize a Pueblo farm workers movement that focused upon their wage scales and working conditions. Serna and Magdalena Aviala, a labor organizer from the San Luis Valley, coordinated a Pueblo to Denver march in an effort to publicize the plight of Colorado's farm workers. Martin Serna would fast develop as Gurule's chief lieutenant. [References to Serna will be made repeatedly when the thrust of this paper turns to the

struggle against Pueblo's education system.]

The national appeal and success of "La Causa" provided the impetus the Pueblo Movement needed. Chicano students began to actively participate in the MECHA program and vociferously began to demand change. Using the successful formula employed against Safeway, Gurule and MECHA changed the focus of their attack to Coors beer. A national boycott of Coors products had been undertaken to protest the Company's racist hiring policies. Coupled with the conservative politics of the Coors family, the Company made an excellent target. The Southern Colorado State College pub was chosen as the site of the demonstration. The pub served Coors beer on tap and the pub's college location was ideal for a student sponsored demonstration. During the demonstration, forty three students joined hands and prevented students, faculty, employees, and guests of SCSC from the use of the pub.⁷ As a result of their action, fifteen demonstrators were arrested including Gurule. In an attempt to avoid further threatened demonstrations, the College requested and received a restraining order enjoining any of the forty three participants from "interfering in any manner whatsoever with the operation or sale of 3.2 beer at the SCSC pub."⁸

Gurule's arrest resulted in the additional charge of inducing minors to riot. Eighteen of the demonstrators were high school students. Gurule's arrest on these charges and

continued role as an activist would keep his name in the newspaper on a regular basis and attach to him a stigma of notoriety from which he would never escape. The charges against Gurule resulted in a long drawn out process of delays and appeals designed to overturn the charges. Eventually, Gurule was forced to request a change of venue to El Paso County for his forthcoming trial. Gurule cited threatening phone calls he received following television coverage of the Coors protest as the basis for his request. He was called a troublemaker and threatened with death over the phone.⁹ Though SCSC President Victor Hopper later chose to drop all charges, the notoriety attached to Gurule as a result of the Coors demonstration and subsequent arrest seriously damaged Gurule's credibility with his colleagues and the Anglo community. In the eyes of the Anglo, Gurule was no longer a young, intelligent and admired social worker. He had assumed the character of a demagogue. The Anglos saw in Gurule a professional enigma who was upsetting the status quo and thus their privileged position in Pueblo's society. Ironically, many Chicanos also condemned Gurule. They were simply unaccustomed to challenging the Anglo and Gurule represented a brash new generation of Chicanos armed with education and full of confidence and indignation. It was something they simply could not comprehend.

The Coors boycott strained Gurule's working

relationship with his colleagues. Pueblo County Welfare workers were divided in their support of Gurule. Following his arrest, many of Gurule's coworkers staged a demonstration on his behalf in front of the County Judicial Building.¹⁰ As the thrust of Pueblo's Gurule orchestrated Chicano Movement continued to foment controversy, many of his former friends and colleagues turned their backs on him. On March 26, 1970, by a vote of 69-41, County Welfare Department employees voted to veto further support of Al Gurule and his controversial approach to helping Pueblo's Chicanos.¹¹ Gurule's rejection by his colleagues came three months following his disgusted resignation from the County Welfare Department.

Gurule found an ally and ideal source of employment with the Social Services of Pueblo United, a United Fund agency. He was hired by the Agency's Director, the Rev. Marvin Kapushion, to pursue a job title that was tailor made for Gurule's long term strategy. The job required a social workers who was bilingual, understood the Spanish culture, and the ability to work with Chicano groups, interpret the feelings of the Chicano community, and to act as a catalyst in helping minority people develop community strengths and cohesion skills with which to implement these goals. A special emphasis would be placed on working with Chicano youth in the La Casa Verde area.¹² In developing this job title in conjunction with Gurule's philosophy, Rev.

Kapushion knew full well he would incur the wrath of Pueblo's Anglo community. Father Kapushion chose to accept the challenge because he saw the critical need in the community for someone to work with Chicano youth. He thus provided Gurule with the ideal employment situation he needed to pursue the continuation of Pueblo's Chicano Movement.

Continuing his emphasis upon the correlation of youth participation and a successful Movement and in compliance with the description of his job title, Gurule established a youth organization in the east side barrio of La Casa Verde. Exploiting the national publicity Los Angeles' Brown Berets achieved during the 1968 high school blowouts, Gurule and his youthful club members organized a similar para military group and devised a Black Beret Creed which outlined the goals and philosophy of the new organization. The Creed was later published in the Pueblo paper and ignited a firestorm of controversy. The Creed is provided below.¹³

FUNCTIONS

1. A Black Beret will always be observant of everything and anything in his surroundings.
2. Stress self discipline.
3. Let your leader know where you're at, and are going.
4. Reports from all beret communities shall be presented at general council meeting.
5. Every beret should read at least 1 hour of current political events each day.

6. In order to get respect for your beret from people you have to have respect for it as well as yourself.
7. Upon the expelling of any beret, he will meet with the local berets, state the case to the council where the defendant shall await jurisdiction.
8. Practice the Chicano Code.
9. Turn in everything captured by attacking forces (riot helmets, mace, nightstick, etc.).
10. You are a service to your people, not masters.
11. U*N*I*T*Y.
12. The Black Beret will not be racist; he will respect other people's color and culture and demand respect for his own.
13. Age limit 15 but there may be exceptions if voted in.

CHICANO CODE OF AZTLAN

1. I WILL NOT STEAL FROM OR EXPLOIT A CHICANO BROTHER.
2. I WILL NOT FIGHT OR KILL A CHICANO BROTHER.
3. I WILL RESPECT OUR WOMEN.
4. I WILL LEARN TO KNOW THE ENEMY.
5. I WILL GIVE MY LIFE FOR MY PEOPLE.
6. WE WILL ALLY OURSELVES WITH THE POOR.
7. WE WILL REMOVE GRINGO BUSINESS AND OTHER EXPLOITERS.
8. WE WILL CONTROL OUR OWN LIVES AND COMMUNITY.
9. WE WILL PROTECT OUR OWN PEOPLE.
10. WE ARE ONE FAMILY, LA FAMILIA DEL LA RAZA.

The Berets interpreted their code and function as a

positive way of instilling pride within themselves, developing Chicano unity and forcing the Anglo to treat the Chicano with dignity. The Anglo community saw something else. The tone of the Creed was aggressive. To the Anglo, the Creed smacked of an all out declaration of war. References to giving one's life for my people, turning in weapons captured from attacking forces, and driving Gringo exploiters from our neighborhoods did very little to encourage Anglo support for the Berets.

An indignant Anglo community began an immediate counter attack. Preconditioned by the example of the Oakland based Black Panthers, local Anglos and a select group of Chicanos were anathema to the development of a similar militant group in Pueblo. Their interpretation of the Beret Creed further reinforced their obstinacy.

In an effort to undermine the Berets, community leaders focused upon the funding of the Berets via Pueblo's United Fund. The agency that employed Gurule and underwrote the La Case Verde Berets, was a non-denominational agency funded by the Pueblo United Fund.¹⁴ Many Anglos bitterly resented the charitable contributions being deducted from their paychecks to fund a para military organization that, in their eyes, was synonymous with black power politics and in the hysterical interpretation of many Anglos, was tantamount to communism.

Anglo community leaders resorted to extortion in their

efforts to defund the Casa Verde Berets. A boycott of the United Fund was threatened and then successfully undertaken. One thousand seventy donors canceled their pledges, resulting in a loss of \$25,000 to the Fund.¹⁵ The boycott's apex was reached with the United Fund's largest contributor, the CF&I, threatened large scale defections. In an effort to forestall the collapse of Pueblo's most crucial charitable foundation, Gurule appealed to the steel workers to maintain their support of the United Fund.¹⁶

In the midst of the chaos, Father Kapushion rushed to defend his friend and to attempt to defuse what was fast becoming an explosive racial situation.

To provide Father Kapushion with a much needed local forum, Bishop Buswell of the Pueblo Catholic Diocese, appealed to the news media to present all sides of the issue fairly so that citizens could form a fair and honest opinion.¹⁷ Utilizing KOAA-TV and the local newspaper, Father Kapushion attempted to put the controversial Creed in its proper perspective. Father Kapushion stated that the Creed must be understood for what it is, "a youthful declaration of self pride and ethnic awareness. To suspicion warfare attack, militancy, and violence among these kids is to misunderstand them."¹⁸ In an effort to explain and condone the activities of Al Gurule, Father Kapushion explained Gurule's role as that of a positive role model. Father Kapushion stated, "What Al Gurule has done is

positive. He has channeled their exuberance and hostility into a quest for self improvement, a fearlessness to express themselves, and to seek what is rightfully theirs."¹⁹

Father Kapushion further emphasized his support of Gurule and publicly stated that Gurule's actions were fully within the framework of his job title as Developer of Minority Goals for the Social Services United Agency. Kapushion made this statement to negate a commonly held belief that Gurule was acting as a rogue Chicano activist.

Additional evidence supporting Father Kapushion's confidence in Gurule could be found in the success of Gurule's work among the Casa Verde youth. The little green house that served as their meeting place was alive with formerly disenfranchised Chicano youths. Gurule had instilled within them a sense of pride and commitment. He never stopped stressing the importance of education. He established a club library and encouraged his club members to read extensively. He tied his youth group into the MECHA organization at SCSC and the minority recruitment program providing his Berets with access to college scholarships.²⁰ Parental involvement was encouraged by Gurule. This resulted in the development of the Casa Verde Mothers Organization. Gurule had defeated apathy and motivated an entire barrio neighborhood. His accomplishments could not have been described as anything but successful.

Father Kapushion ended his defense of Gurule by

castigating the local newspaper for publishing the Creed in a devious effort he described as steeped in sensationalism and designed to polarize the Anglo and Chicano communities.²¹

In a benign effort to lend credibility to the statements of Father Kapushion, his Superior, Bishop Charles Buswell, spoke out for ethnic harmony. Bishop Buswell reiterated his plea for a fair hearing of all sides and explained that national social changes were occurring everywhere and Pueblo was no exception. Buswell stated, "As changes come, tensions are bound to develop. It is living through these tensions with a true spirit of common concern that we will mature as a community. May we do this with mutual understanding and with God's blessing."²²

It would require more than God's blessing to save the Pueblo United Fund. The Anglos wanted to conduct a witch hunt. They had to settle for a resignation.

The potential collapse of Pueblo's United Fund coupled with the racial tensions produced by his controversial Black Berets presented Al Gurule with an ultimatum. His eventual resignation was inevitable. Gurule chose to make public his resignation during a symposium held at Southern Colorado State College on April 4, 1970. The theme of the symposium was "A City in Crisis: Operation Understanding."²³ The symposium was sponsored by well meaning Pueblo community leaders in an effort to initiate a dialogue that would

hopefully result in a new understanding between Pueblo's Anglo and Chicano communities thus bridging the chasm that currently existed. When rendering his resignation before a crowd of four hundred, Gurule stated that he was resigning his position as Developer of Minority Goals for the Social Services of Pueblo United, "Because I won't stoop as low as those bigots that would withdraw money from twenty-seven agencies just to try to hurt one man."²⁴ His closing comments were a reaffirmation of his commitment to stay in Pueblo and continue his work among Chicano youths. He made it quite evident that he planned to expand his Berets and recruit new members in the Salt Creek, West Side, and Bessemer barrios. "You're not getting rid of me that easy," he stated.²⁵ Gurule's remarks brought a standing ovation from a predominantly partisan crowd.

Following Gurule's resignation speech, Father Kapushion addressed the symposium and assured them that Gurule's resignation had not been instigated by pressure from him or the United Fund. "My admiration for Al has increased because he manifested enough concern for the community and the fellow agencies of the United Fund to resign rather than harm them." In a final tribute to his employee and friend, Father Kapushion reviewed the positive success Gurule had enjoyed working with the Casa Verde youth. He closed his tribute by stating, "I have put my neck on the line for Mr. Gurule and I thank God that I had the courage to do so."²⁶

Al Gurule and the Rev. Marvin Kapushion worked in tandem as constructive catalysts. Those in attendance at the symposium witnessed what could have been--should have been--a Chicano and Anglo teamed together for the benefit of the entire Pueblo community. A brown and white coalition in the city of Pueblo was subsequently circumvented.

The Anglo community had won a hallow victory. Gurule's resignation resulted in the defunding of the Casa Verde Berets. It did not put an end to the Movement. Gurule's Beret organization was once referred to as a cancer by an anonymous Anglo source--how prophetic. The tumor was about to be diagnosed malignant.

The Chicano Movement Versus School District 60

Gurule's resignation failed to temper the enthusiasm of his youthful disciples. The young leaders Gurule forged via the MECHA college organization and Casa Verde Berets, assumed the initiative of the local Movement and cut their umbilical cord to Gurule. Gurule changed the emphasis of his approach and began to focus his attention upon the ultimate arena of social change--politics. Working closely with his philosophical guru, Corkey Gonzales, Gurule began the development of Colorado's La Raza Unida Party. Gurule's calculated plunge into politics would eventually culminate in his unsuccessful bid for the gubernatorial seat in 1970. The controversy surrounding the campaign of the radical

twenty six year old candidate kept his name and crusade in the minds of the Pueblo community.

The new thrust of the Pueblo Movement was centered on the issue of education. The issue of education would share the spotlight with the imperative need to develop a unique Chicano political party. The Berets and their college counterparts began a campaign directed against Pueblo's School District 60. The MECHA students hoped that education would be the panacea that would cure the ills of the Chicano people. In a retrospective analysis of their personal experiences in the Pueblo school system, MECHA members recognized the glaring disparities that existed between Anglo and Chicano students attending District 60 schools. A limited number of young Chicanos were being encouraged to pursue college prep courses. An anachronistic impression of the Chicano student infected counselors and teachers alike. The Chicano student, in their eyes, was what he had always been--a cheap source of future labor, vis-a-vis CF&I. Chicano students represented the largest pool of dropouts and were woefully under represented in academic honor groups such as Honor Society and Gold and Silver Cord. Very few Chicanos were scholarship recipients. A belief in the inherent ignorance of the Chicano child was almost sympathetically ascribed to by many District 60 staff members. Combined with the outright racism of many District personnel, it was remarkable that a select group of young

Chicanos persevered and excelled in view of the fetters that confronted them.

In order to provide the Chicano student with a positive experience in the Pueblo school system and to subject the Chicano student to a quality education, the Berets and MECHA organization demanded changes. During this important juncture in the forward progress of the Pueblo Movement, a prominent leader emerged. Martin Serna, MECHA member, Brown Beret, and confidant of Al Gurule, stepped into the fray. Serna would be responsible for developing the strategy that would lead to the eventual defeat of Pueblo School District 60.

To initiate the campaign against District 60, Serna planned a walkout to coincide with the celebration of El Diez y Seiz de Septiembre, 1970. To encourage student participation in the walkout, the Berets distributed information leaflets at their respective high schools. The leaflets prompted a controversy when the local newspaper printed a facsimile accompanied by a photo caption that read, "George Washington, Go Home." The information contained in the leaflet is provided below:27

CHICANO INDEPENDENCE DAY
16TH OF SEPTEMBER

WHAT

THE 16TH OF SEPTEMBER IS MEXICO'S LIBERATION DAY--SO WE LA RAZA--WILL BEGIN TO RECOGNIZE THIS DAY AS A NATIONAL HOLIDAY--BECAUSE WE ARE RELATED MORE TO PANCHO VILLA THAN THE SO-CALLED FATHER OF THIS COUNTRY, GEORGE WASHINGTON.

WHY

- A. BECAUSE EDUCATION AS IT STANDS TODAY IS IRRELEVANT TO US--LA RAZA WE CAN NO LONGER IDENTIFY WITH AMERICAN HEROES SUCH AS BILLY THE KID--CUSTER AND HIS LAST STAND AND DANIEL BOONE--BECAUSE THESE PEOPLE WERE NOT BROWN AND WE ARE.
- B. BECAUSE OF THE RECENT POLICE ATTACKS IN EAST LOS WHERE THE CHANGOS (POLICE) SLAUGHTERED RUBEN SALAZAR AND THE REST OF OUR BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE!

WHO

- A. CHICANOS AND OTHER DISSATISFIED STUDENTS WHO WISH TO PARTICIPATE AGAINST PRESENT EDUCATION WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THIS IS OUR HOLIDAY.
- B. STUDENTS FROM KINDERGARTEN TO COLLEGE LEVELS--TEACHERS--ADMINISTRATORS--THE COMMUNITY--IN OTHER WORDS Y O U!

WHEN

WALKOUT SEPTEMBER 16TH, 10:30 A.M.

WHERE

ALL CHICANOS WILL MEET AT MINERAL PALACE PARK 10:30 A.M. THE MARCH WILL THEN BEGIN ON SANTA FE AVENUE SOUTH TO 4TH STREET AND PROCEED TO BRADFORD PARK. BRADFORD PARK WILL BE LIBERATED.

Obviously, the battle lines had been drawn. To the Anglo community, the isolated threat of Al Gurule's east side Casa Verde cancer was almost longed for when compared to the mayhem that could occur in the Pueblo high schools if the Chicano students could be mobilized. Every Anglo parent dreaded the prospect of using the schools as a social battlefield. It was this fear that Serna and the Berets continued to play upon.

During the 1970 El Diez y Seis de Septiembre

celebration at Mineral Palace Park, the keynote speech was delivered by Al Gurule, La Raza Unida's candidate for governor. He used the opportunity to attack inequities in the judicial and school system.²⁸ He leveled criticism at the School District for attempting to prevent students from participating in the walkout thus denying them the opportunity to celebrate their heritage. Gurule's presentation was followed by a student who issued a list of demands designed to improve the quality of education for Chicano students attending District 60 schools. This list of demands was formally presented to the School District 60 Board of Education on October 14, 1970 during a stormy board meeting. The acceptance of these demands became the established goal in the Movement's battle against the District. The demands are listed below.²⁹

1. The idea behind the school lunch program is to provide hot lunches for the youth at low prices or no cost at all... We are tired of being exploited within our own community or school by persons who are racist... We are demanding lower cost per meal in all schools.
2. We demand classes in Chicano History of the Southwest and we also demand... literatures used in these classes be written by Chicanos and also taught by Chicanos.
3. We demand that any program set up by Officials for Chicano students be subject to review by the students and their parents prior to implementation.
4. We demand more Chicano teachers and counselors... We not only demand brown skins, we demand brown minds and hearts.
5. We also demand respect from administration and teachers. If this is not adhered to, we demand

that those officials who violate our rights and respect be dismissed or reprimanded by the school board.

6. We demand that... Chicanos be able to utilize classrooms or any facilities in any school when needed... We also demand that gymnasiums and all these facilities be open to the community for their use at no extra cost.
7. We also demand that September 16 and May 5 be recognized as holidays for all Chicanos... because these days are relevant to us students.
8. We demand that our Chicano organizations in all schools be respected... and have right to bring in any speaker we want... and they will be respected.
9. We demand that all white racist teachers and school administrators immediately cease harassment of Chicano students who took part in September 16 walkout.. and be given opportunity to make up work they missed.

Following the presentation of the demands, Dr. Lee Williamson, Superintendent of District 60, responded. His comments were hardly conciliatory and failed to recognize the crux of the problem--the cultural gap that existed between the Chicano student and the Anglo oriented school system. Dr. Williamson responded to the demand for a Chicano Studies course by stating that Chicano Studies was not a viable course because a comparable course entitled Southwest History was already offered. The fact that the course emphasized the Anglo's role in settling the Southwest was not mentioned. The Superintendent continued by stating that preferential treatment accorded to Chicano parents in determining programs would offend Slovenian, Italian, and Oriental parents. The fact that the ethnic groups mentioned

represented a very small percentage of total school enrollment when compared to the large percentage of Chicano students attending District 60 schools was not mentioned nor was the fact that these students were not targets of discrimination within the School district, and, therefore, their parents had no reason to demand program development participation. The Superintendent admitted that hiring Chicano teachers and counselors was desirable, but not based on a brown mind, brown heart approach. This, he claimed, was a form of racism. To the charge of disrespect by teachers and administrators, he responded by saying that respect is mutual. No reference was made to the covert and even overt racism that existed in many schools. In a mild concession, Dr. Williamson agreed that the District must treat all groups equally and that the Chicano organizations could function in the schools if they followed the proper format and secured a faculty sponsor. In response to the demand for recognition of September 16th and May 5th as school holidays, Dr. Williamson incurred the wrath of the Chicanos attending the board meeting when he compared Mexican Independence Day to the celebration of Columbus Day and St. Patrick's Day. According to the Superintendent, the celebration of September 16th was appropriate only if the students were citizens of Mexico.³⁰ His ignorance of the community that he served was appalling. A compromise was impossible. The "Chinga Factor" was about to be applied.

Failing in their efforts to work through the system via its elected school board, the Berets devised a new strategy. The image of the Chicano with hat in hand and respectfully glancing downward in the presence of the Anglo patron was to be no more. The obstinance of the Anglo dominated school board would be overcome by using the militant application of violence.

The application of violence to foster social change is very effective. The threat of doing harm to one's progeny is a remarkable way of softening a stubborn viewpoint. The strategy devised by Martin Serna and the Berets was to disrupt the school system by creating a degree of chaos that would prevent the schools from functioning. This could be most effectively accomplished by organizing mass walkouts of Chicano students at the high school level. High school students could be politicized and were old enough to be cognizant of the impact their efforts would have on behalf of the long term success of the Chicano Movement. As the recipients of the sub-standard education being protested, many willingly supported the Beret strategy.

Centennial High School was targeted as the location of the first walkout. Centennial was ideally suited. Three days of spontaneous racially inspired fighting had erupted at Centennial prior to the planning of the walkout. The recalcitrant mood of the Centennial Chicano students provided the perfect setting for a walkout.

The walkout occurred during the month of May 1970. Three hundred Chicano students blew out of the school and encircled the building.³¹ Teachers and administrators who attempted to prevent the walkout were harshly dealt with. Several were accosted by the young Chicanos and beaten. Specifically targeted was the principal and the teacher who began each school year by labeling a pinto bean drawn on his blackboard as a Mexican brain. Both men were subjected to a beating. Centennial's athletes attempted to join forces in a futile effort to quell the wrath of the Chicano students. The Chicano protestors formed a brown wedge behind the figure of a Chicano from the west side barrio who placed a bugle to his lips and blew a Hollywood version of charge that would have delighted any screenwriter. Following his screaming bugle, the Chicano forces plunged into the athletic elite of Centennial High School causing them to beat a hasty retreat. The field definitely belonged to the Chicano students.³²

The District was incensed. Immediate expulsion was extended to all participants of the walkout. The Berets immediately secured the intervention of Pueblo Legal Services. Attorney Mike Galvez forced the District to reinstate the expelled students. One week following the walkout, Chicano parents allied with the Berets and staged a "walk-in" at Centennial. Fifty parents and a contingent of Berets walked into Centennial High School and occupied

several classrooms. They refused to leave until the school board agreed to act on the demands that had been previously presented. Superintendent Williamson and several principals met with the group and agreed to accelerate the District's final decision on the demands.³³ The District was facing an ultimatum and knew it.

The confrontation between the Berets and the District remained at an impasse for several months. The following school year, 1971, the Berets combined their strategy of applied violence with a legal attack upon the District. A Civil Rights lawsuit was filed against the District listing twenty separate allegations. The allegations were concrete and the District was facing a legal as well as a community showdown. The walkouts continued during the 1971 school year and spread from the high schools into the middle schools and grade schools. At one point, several hundred grade school children blew out of their elementary schools.³⁴ Further pressure was placed on the District when the Berets threatened a total boycott of District 60 schools. To reinforce the threat the Berets established an alternative school at St. Leander's Parish for boycotting Chicano students.³⁵ A boycott would subject the District to a devastating loss in state revenues which were based on daily attendance figures. The situation became so pressure-packed, that Superintendent Williamson rendered his resignation stating a desperate need to return home to Texas

to care for his ailing mother. What was really ailing was his willingness to continue in an administrative hot seat.

A search for a new superintendent began immediately. The school board stressed the importance of ability to work with ethnic minority groups as an imperative job qualification. The school year ended with the continued threat of the Beret's planned boycott and the school board's desperate search for a superintendent.

During the 1973 school year, the Civil Rights suit was settled. The District was found in non-compliance across the board.³⁶ The District was now compelled to legally meet the demands of the Berets and the Chicano community they represented. This resulted in the hiring of Chicano teachers and counselors and the development of an Affirmative Action Program to increase the promotion of Chicanos to administrative posts. The District agreed to implement a Chicano Studies Program and recognized May 5th as a school holiday for Chicano students.³⁷ The most important victory stemming from the Civil Rights suit was the sense of respect and dignity the Anglo community had to begrudgingly extend to the Chicano people as a result of their hard won victory. The new superintendent was charged with implementing the directives mandated by the Civil Rights decision. The Chicano community, through its proxy the Brown Berets, had won an astounding victory. Anglo parents were relieved. The constant threat their children

had been subjected to during the racially charged walkouts made for three harrowing years.

Though the initial battle had been won by the Chicano people of Pueblo, the struggle continues. Al Gurule, Martin Serna, Eddie Montour, and the Berets represented an imperative first step!

Footnotes

1. Serna, Martin. "Editorial," El Zapatista, 2.
2. Ibid., 2.
3. Ibid., 3.
4. Ibid., 3.
5. Ibid., 3.
6. Anon, "Protestors Cover 20 Miles as Denver March Starts," The Pueblo Star Journal.
7. Anon, "Fifteen Are Charged in Beer Protest," The Pueblo Star Journal.
8. Anon, "Restraining Order Granted Against Coors Protestors," The Pueblo Star Journal.
9. Anon, "Gurule Case to be Heard in El Paso District Court," The Pueblo Star Journal.
10. Anon, "Gurule Released on Bond After Surrender to Sheriff," The Pueblo Star Journal.
11. Read, Marvin, "Welfare Employees eto Gurule Support," The Pueblo Star Journal.
12. Editor's Note, "Albert Gurule's Duties Outlined," The Pueblo Star Journal.
13. Editor's Note, "Black Beret Creed," The Pueblo Star Journal.
14. Anon, "United Fund Sidesteps Gurule Issue," The Pueblo Star Journal.
15. Anon, "United Fund Foresees \$24,000-\$25,000 Loss Through Cancellations," The Pueblo Star Journal.
16. Fowler, Dave, "Gurule Asks Steel Workers to Support United Way," The Pueblo Star Journal.
17. Read, Marvin, "Creed Expression of Ethnic Unity," The Pueblo Star Journal.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.

20. Hirchenberger, Eileen, "East-Side Youth Flock to Casa Verde," The Pueblo Star Journal.
21. Hickman, Tom, "Pueblo Diocese Leader Defends Berets' Creed," The Denver Post.
22. Read, Marvin, "Bishop Asks for Ethnic Harmony," The Pueblo Star Journal.
23. Holman, Loy, "Grievances Aired During Pueblo Discussion," The Rocky Mountain News.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Anon, "Albert Gurule's Resignation Called Independent Decision," The Pueblo Star Journal.
27. Anon, "Chicano Leader Voices Praise and Criticism," The Pueblo Star Journal.
28. Ibid.
29. Hickman, Jeanne, "District 60 School Board Hears List of 9 Demands by Chicano Students," The Pueblo Star Journal.
30. Ibid.
31. Montour, Eddie, Brown Beret and Chicano Community Activist, Taken from a personal interview July 7, 1984.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.

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