

symbols, or who were embittered by his rejection of *La Raza*—"The Race," a self-referent used by Chicano cultural nationalists—that Chávez saw as a new form of racism.²⁰ Notwithstanding these criticisms from both political extremes, the union leader has been and remains the most respected Mexican American among his own people, three-quarters of whom, at a minimum, see him as a hero. Not surprisingly, at his death, his name was bestowed upon a variety of streets, schools, parks, and community centers, often in the face of outraged Anglo opposition. The most publicized instance occurred in 1993, when Chicano students at UCLA, after a lengthy hunger strike, succeeded in getting university officials to set up a César Chávez Center for Interdisciplinary Study and Chicano and Chicana Studies. Many more honors followed. The deceased civil rights leader was awarded the Presidential Medal of Honor in 1994. Six years later, California passed legislation making his birthday an official state holiday, and in 2010, the UFW Headquarters in Delano, Forty Acres, was designated a national historic landmark.

OTHER EARLY CHICANO LEADERS

During the sixties, another extraordinary individual emerged from the ranks of the Mexicano community who received national attention and, for a short while at least, had a profound impact on young Chicano activists, Reies López Tijerina (1926–2015).²¹ Tijerina is assuredly the most fascinating and controversial of movement personalities. Born near Falls City in Karnes County, Texas, the son of migrant farm laborers, he was raised by his father and grandmother after his mother's premature death. At eighteen, he embraced a fundamentalist form of Protestantism and enrolled in the Assembly of God Bible Institute at Isleta (now part of El Paso), where he studied for the ministry. Expelled from the school, he became an itinerant Pentecostal evangelist. His travels took him throughout the country. In 1950, Tijerina and his coreligionists set up a utopian community near Casa Grande, Arizona, but this experiment in communalism did not last long. In 1957, he left Arizona, a fugitive from the law, and headed south, broadening his interests during his brief stay in the country of his forefathers. "Entering Mexico as an itinerant religious leader, he left it deeply motivated by the philosophy of the Mexican revolution."²² In 1960, Tijerina made his way to New Mexico, where he championed a new cause—the crusade to recover lost Hispano lands. Toward that end, he founded the Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Land Grants) in 1963.

This improbable crusade led by an unlikely champion gained surprising support among Hispanos, people notoriously Catholic and conservative. The reasons are largely historical. During World War II, continuing the trend initiated during the Depression, Hispanos were forced to leave their traditional villages in northern New