

of educational reform calling for the institution of Chicano studies programs, and (2) the establishment of El Movimiento Estudiantil de Aztlán (MECHA or MEChA, the Student Movement of Aztlán), an organization intended to supersede all other student groups by uniting them under the banner of cultural nationalism.⁴¹ The convention, and the organization it spawned, mirrored the increasingly radical notions espoused by Corky Gonzales, whose appeal was at its height at this time. Several weeks before, a number of the delegates at Santa Barbara had attended the Denver Youth Conference, where the Spiritual Plan of Aztlán had been formulated. Gómez-Quíñones had been one of its principal authors.

Naturally, educational issues were of paramount importance to MECHA, as they were to other student associations. Like them, too, it put major emphasis on community involvement, working with a variety of local Chicano community service and political action groups. *Mechistas* were especially active in support of the UFW and LRUP, in spite of the bad blood between the two organizations.

MECHA went into a serious tailspin between 1971 and 1973, from which it never completely recovered.⁴² There are many reasons for this diminished status. The enthusiasm that inspired the organization initially could not be sustained after the original leaders left college.⁴³ Internal divisions took their toll, as well. The dominant nationalist emphasis was challenged in the early seventies by a socialist-inspired wing insisting that class issues receive priority over ethnic considerations. This point of view was ultimately rejected, and distraught socialists abandoned the organization in droves. The same went for frustrated Chicanas who found MECHA reluctant to deal with feminist issues.

Given its numerous problems, it is easy to see why MECHA failed to achieve its ambitious program. It remains today a loose federation of chapters scattered throughout the country.⁴⁴ The failure of MECHA parallels the ultimate decline of the Chicano student movement in general. Its strengths and weaknesses are best summarized by Juan Gómez-Quíñones, whose participation gives his insights particular cogency: "At its best, the work of student activists has been seminal in its influence on much later activity as well as generously courageous in its militancy; at its worst, it has been anarchic and self-indulgent, given to rhetoric and organizational inconsistency."⁴⁵

THE CHICANO MOVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

The Chicano Power movement was not confined to students; Chicanismo was also pervasive in barrios, where it was particularly evident among the working class. The most visible of the militant barrio organizations was the Brown Berets. A paramilitary group, it was founded in East Los Angeles in 1967 by David Sánchez, Carlos Montez, and Ralph Ramírez, all of them college students at the time.⁴⁶ The