

Mexicanos were forced to fight hard just to retain their recent gains in a period of conservative ascendancy.

### THE CHICANO LEGACY

Writing about the Chicano movement in the early 1990s, one observer tersely commented, "Nothing remains of it now but a handshake practiced by middle-aged men."<sup>75</sup> Granted, outside of the recent immigrant rights marches, there does not appear to be much militancy among Mexicanos since the *movimiento*, either in the barrios or in the schools.<sup>76</sup> Even the term *Chicano* has fallen upon bad times. The meaning of the *movimiento*, moreover, is much debated these days. While, understandably, participant historians like Rudy Acuña and Armando Navarro continue to describe Chicanismo and its accomplishments in glowing terms, a point of view best articulated today by the literary scholar/activist George Mariscal, the trend among historians in recent years, especially among younger professors, has been to advance a much more modest assessment.<sup>77</sup> But few of them would go as far as David G. Gutiérrez, who practically reduces the *movimiento* to a nonhappening. After noting that "Chicano activists never came close to exerting the same kind of moral pull on the public's consciousness that their counterparts in the black-liberation and antiwar movements were able to achieve," the highly respected historian, in what appears to be a case of damming with faint praise, concedes that "the movement probably did help to increase general awareness about the 'nation's second largest minority' and to intensify federal, state, and local government efforts on its behalf."<sup>78</sup> A more realistic assessment of the Chicano legacy, however, lies somewhere between the two extremes. On balance, militants had a powerful and positive impact on contemporary society, and their legacy continues to resonate among many Mexicanos today.

Chicano activists were correct when they acted on the premise that American institutions respond to the needs of a minority community only when they are forced to. A good example was the War on Poverty. The programs emanating from that government-sponsored campaign were initially concessions to the black community, thanks in part to the urban riots of the midsixties, but also to the efforts of the black civil rights movement. It was largely Chicano militancy that forced LBJ to include Mexicanos, who received many benefits from these government-supported programs, not the least of which was the opportunity for leadership training.<sup>79</sup> By the beginning of the twenty-first century, there were literally hundreds of community service organizations serving the Mexicano community that traced their roots to the turbulent decade between 1965 and 1975.

The Brown Power movement brought other gains as well. Reform legislation was one. Bilingual and bicultural education, for example, owed its existence to