

3. Reies Lopez Tijerina Writes an Open Letter from Santa Fe Jail, 1969

From my cell block in this jail I am writing these reflections. I write them to my people, the Indo-Hispanos, to my friends among the Anglos, to the agents of the federal government, the state of New Mexico, the Southwest, and the entire Indo-Hispano world—"Latin America."

I write to you as one of the clearest victims of the madness and racism in the hearts of our present-day politicians and rulers.

At this time, August 17, I have been in jail for 65 days—since June 11, 1969. . . . I am here today because I resisted an assassination attempt led by an agent of the federal government—an agent of all those who do not want anybody to speak out for the poor, all those who do not want Reies Lopez Tijerina to stand in their way as they continue to rob the poor people, all those many rich people from outside the state with their summer homes and ranches here whose pursuit of happiness depends on thievery, all those who have robbed the people of their land and culture for 120 years. . . .

What is my real crime? As I and the poor people see it, especially the Indo-Hispanos, my only crime is UPHOLDING OUR RIGHTS AS PROTECTED BY THE TREATY OF GUADALUPE-HIDALGO which ended the so-called Mexican-American War of 1846–48. My only crime is demanding the respect and protection of our property, which has been confiscated illegally by the federal government. Ever since the treaty was signed in 1848, our people have been asking every elected president of the United States for a redress of grievances. Like the Black people, we too have been criminally ignored. Our right to the Spanish land grant pueblos is the real reason why I am in prison at this moment.

Our cause and our claim and our methods are legitimate. . . .

This truth is denied by the conspirators against the poor and by the press which they control. There are also the Silent Contributors. The Jewish people accused the Pope of Rome for keeping silent while Hitler and his machine persecuted the Jews in Germany and other countries. I support the Jews in their right to accuse those who contributed to Hitler's acts by their SILENCE. By the same token, I denounce those in New Mexico who have never opened their mouths at any time to defend or support the thousands who have been killed, robbed, raped of their culture. I don't know of any church or Establishment organization or group of elite intellectuals that has stood up for the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. We condemn the silence of these groups and individuals and I am sure that, like the Jewish people, the poor of New Mexico are keeping a record of the Silence which contributes to the criminal conspiracy against the Indo-Hispano in New Mexico.

As I sit in my jail cell in Santa Fe, capital of New Mexico, I pray that all the poor people will unite to bring justice to New Mexico. My cell block has no day light, no ventilation of any kind, no light of any kind. After 9 P.M., we are left in a dungeon of total darkness. Visiting rules allow only 15 minutes per week on Thurs-

days from 1 to 4 P.M. so that parents who work cannot visit their sons in jail. . . . My cell is dirty and there is nothing to clean it with. The whole cell block is hot and suffocating. All my prison mates complain and show a daily state of anger. But these uncomfortable conditions do not bother me, for I have a divine dream to give me strength: the happiness of my people.

I pray to God that all the Indo-Hispano people will awake to the need for unity, and to our heavenly and constitutional responsibility for fighting peacefully to win our rights. Already the rest of the Indo-Hispano world—Latin America—knows of our struggle. It is too late to keep the story of our land struggle from reaching the ears of the Indo-Hispano world. All the universities of Latin America knew about our problems when [Nelson] Rockefeller went there last summer. Will Latin America ignore our cry from here in New Mexico and the Southwest? Times have changed and the spirit of the blood is no longer limited by national or continental boundaries.

The Indo-Hispano world will never trust the United States as long as this government occupies our land illegally. The honest policy of the United States will have to begin at home, before Rockefeller can go to Latin America again to sell good relations and friendship. Our property, freedom and culture must be respected in New Mexico, in the whole Southwest, before the Anglo can expect to be trusted in South America, Mexico and Canada.

This government must show its good faith to the Indo-Hispano in respect to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and the land question by forming a presidential committee to investigate and hold open hearings on the land question in the northern part of New Mexico. We challenge our own government to bring forth and put all the facts on the conference table. We have the evidence to prove our claims to property as well as to the cultural rights of which we have been deprived. WE ARE RIGHT—and therefore ready and willing to discuss our problems and rights under the Treaty with the Anglo federal government in New Mexico or Washington, D.C., directly or through agents. . . .

Because I know WE ARE RIGHT, I have no regrets as I sit in my jail cell. I feel very, very proud and happy to be in jail for the reason that I am. . . . I am sure that not one of my prison days is lost. Not one day has been in vain. While others are free, building their personal empires, I am in jail for defending and fighting for the rights of my people. Only my Indo-Hispano people have influenced me to be what I am. I am what I am, for my brothers.

4. The Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education Discusses the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MECHA), 1969

MECHA is a first step toward tying the student groups throughout the Southwest into a vibrant and responsive network of activists that will respond as a unit to

oppression and racism and that will work in harmony when initiating and carrying out campaigns of liberation for our people.

... It is the function of MECHA to further socialization and politicization for liberation on all campuses. The student movement is to a large degree a political movement and as such must not elicit from our people the negative responses that we have experienced so often in the past in relation to politics. ... To this end, then, we must redefine politics for our people for it to be a means of liberation. The political sophistication of our Raza [Race] must be raised. ... In addition, the student movement is cultural and social as well. The spirit of MECHA must be one of *hermandad* and cultural awareness. ... MECHA must bring to the mind of every young Chicano that the liberation of his people from prejudice and oppression is in his hands and that this responsibility is greater than personal achievement and more meaningful than degrees, especially if they are earned at the expense of his identity and cultural integrity.

MECHA, then, is more than a name, it is a spirit of unity, of brotherhood, and a resolve to undertake a struggle for liberation in a society where justice is but a word. MECHA is a means to an end. ...

Other students can be important to MECHA in supportive roles; hence the question of coalitions. ... Some guidelines might be kept in mind. ... Is it beneficial to tie oneself to another group in coalition which will carry oneself into conflicts for which one is ill prepared or into issues on which one is ill advised? Can one safely go into a coalition where one group is markedly stronger than another? Are the interests of MECHA and of the community being served? ... All of these and many more questions must be asked and answered before one can ... say that he will benefit and contribute to a strong coalition effort.

Supportive groups. When moving on campus, it is often ... advised to have groups ... willing to act in supportive roles. For example, there are ... faculty members who are sympathetic. ... These faculty members often serve on academic councils and senates and can ... provide another channel to the academic power structure and can be used as leverage in negotiation. However, these groups are only as responsive as the ties with them are nurtured. ... It ... means laying good groundwork before an issue is brought up, touching bases with your allies beforehand.

Sympathetic administrators. ... Administrators are most interested in not jeopardizing their positions and often will try to act as buffers or liaison between the administration and the student group. In the case of Chicano administrators, it should not a priori be assumed that because he is Raza he is to be ... trusted. If he is not known to the membership, he must be given a chance to prove his allegiance to *la Causa*. ... It is from the administrator that information can be obtained as to the actual feasibility of demands or programs to go beyond the platitudes and pleas of unreasonableness with which the administration usually answers proposals and demands. The words of the administrator should never be the deciding factor in students' actions. The students must at all times make their own decisions. ... Students must constantly remind the Chicano administrators and faculty where their loyalty and allegiance lie. ...

In short, it is the students who must keep after Chicano and non-Chicano administrators and faculty to see that they do not compromise the position of the stu-

dent and the community. By the same token, it is the student who must come to the support of these individuals if they are threatened for their support of the students. ...

It is a fact that the Chicano has not often enough written his own history; his own anthropology, his own sociology, his own literature. He must do this if he is to survive as a cultural entity in this melting-pot society which seeks to dilute varied cultures into a gray-upon-gray pseudo-culture of technology and materialism. The Chicano student is doing most of the work in the establishment of study programs, centers, curriculum development, entrance programs to get more Chicanos into college. ... Students must be careful not to be coopted in their fervor for establishing relevance on the campus. ... MECHA must not compromise programs and curriculum ... essential for the total education of the Chicano for the sake of expediency. The students must not become so engrossed in programs and centers ... that they forget the needs of the people whom these institutions are meant to serve. To this end, barrio input must always be given full and open hearing when designing these programs, when creating them, and when running them. The jobs created by these projects must be filled by competent Chicanos. ... Therefore, students must demand a say in the recruitment and selection of all directors and assistant directors of student-initiated programs. ... All advisory and steering committees should have both student and community components as well as sympathetic Chicano faculty as members.

Tying the campus to the barrio. The colleges and universities in the past have existed in an aura of omnipotence and infallibility. It is time that they be made responsible and responsive to the communities in which they are located or whose members they serve. ... Community members should serve on all programs related to Chicano interests. ... All attempts must be made to take the college and university to the barrio. ... Also, the barrio must be brought to the campus, whether it be for special programs or ongoing services which the school provides for the people of the barrio. The idea must be made ... to the people of the barrio that they own the schools, and the schools ... are at their disposal. The student group must utilize the resources ... for the benefit of the barrio at every opportunity. This can be done by hiring more Chicanos to work as academic and non-academic personnel on the campus. ... This applies to hiring Chicano contractors to build on campus, etc. ... Many other things could be considered in using the resources of the school in the barrio. ...

Most colleges in the Southwest are located near or in the same town as a barrio. Therefore, it is the responsibility of MECHA ... to establish ... working relationships with organizations in that barrio. ... However, MECHA must be careful not to overstep its authority or duplicate the efforts of another organization already in the barrio. ...

... MECHA ... must determine with the help of those in the barrio where they can be most effective. There are, however, some general areas in which MECHA can involve itself ... : (1) policing social and governmental agencies to make them more responsive ... to the people of the barrio; (2) carrying out research on the economic and credit policies of merchants in the barrio and exposing fraudulent and exorbitant establishments; (3) speaking and communicating with junior-high and high-school students, helping with their projects, teaching

them organizational techniques, supporting their actions; (4) spreading the message of the movement by . . . speaking, radio, television, local newspapers, underground papers, posters, art, theaters, in short spreading propaganda of the movement; (5) exposing discrimination in hiring and renting practices and many other areas. . . . It may mean . . . having to work in conjunction with other organizations. . . . Realize that MECHA . . . should accept the direction of the group involved. Do not let loyalty to an organization cloud responsibility to a greater force—*la Causa*.

Working in the barrio is an honor, but it is also a right, because we come from these people. . . . Mutual respect between the barrio and the college group should be the rule. Understand . . . that there will initially be mistrust . . . on the part of some in the barrio for the college student. This mistrust must be broken down by a demonstration of affection for the barrio and La Raza through hard work and dedication. If the approach is one of a dilettante . . . , the people will know it and react accordingly. If it is merely a cathartic experience to work among the unfortunate in the barrio—stay out.

Of the community, for the community. *Por la Raza habla el espíritu* ["The spirit speaks for the Race"].

5. Armando Rendon Recalls the Winter Garden Project of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), 1969

At a MAYO conference in Mission, Texas, in December 1969, MAYO unveiled the Winter Garden Project, a plan to redeem a ten-county area in South Texas for Chicanos. MAYO's purpose was twofold: first, to politicize as many young Chicanos as possible within a regulated format of social contact, with workshops on a variety of subjects and activities geared to impress the young people with tangible problems and objectives through symbolic means. . . .

Secondly, MAYO democratized the Winter Garden Project by involving the conference students in deliberating the kinds and extent of efforts to be made this year and establishing priorities. [José] Gutiérrez [a founder of Mexican American Youth Movement (MAYO)] envisions a number of projects such as Crystal City, but in the economic, political, and social arenas as well, which can serve as models for action elsewhere in Texas or the Southwest. Whether a strategy that is successful in Texas, given the political and social make-up of the region, can be exported to another region is questionable; but already through the Crystal City schools' victory and the more recent election triumphs, MAYO has proved that the . . . system can be beaten. Particularly where Chicanos predominate, there is no reason for Anglos to have the balance of power and influence. Chicanos can have their share of control, or all of it if need be, and that would just kill the gringo.

As found in Armando Rendon, "No Future Without the Young," in Armando Rendon, *Chicano Manifesto* (New York: Avon Books, 1971), pp. 203–204.

6. César Chávez Speaks with Bob Fitch About La Causa, 1970

FITCH: The first question I'd like to ask is "Why [table grape] boycott?"

CHAVEZ: You know, when you consider everything, we don't have any options. Most of the other things that would have been options depended entirely on the good will of the government and we know enough to know that they're not going to move. Especially, they're not going to move in a conflict situation like ours. Personally, the big reason was this: I thought the American public would respond affirmatively. . . .

F: What's the realistic basis for optimism about a public response to the boycott?

C: Well, first of all, I contend that not only the American public but people in general throughout the world will respond to a cause that involves injustice. It's just natural to want to be with the underdog. . . . In this struggle it's . . . a contest between a lot of people who are poor and others who are wealthy.

F: What happened to the other options? Such as legislation?

C: . . . Once you get into legislation then it's the whole question of compromise. The only reason growers are seeking legislation now, after 35 years, is because they are under pressure. They want to use legislation to take away that new-found right the workers have found through the boycott.

F: What do you mean?

C: Legislation that's being proposed permits unions but takes the boycott . . . away from the workers, and doesn't permit them to strike during harvest time. Of course that's the only time we work. The proposal comes not out of a spirit of giving the workers civil rights, but as a gimmick to further restrict their rights.

F: Why can't you stop the importing of Mexican labor?

C: It's a long history of the government and the employers working together. . . . In fact, it's part of the system. Even under the most liberal administrations we wouldn't get them to enforce border controls. The immigration service and the border patrol always worked on the assumption that it is not really illegal for these people to be here provided they are working, are being useful to the growers. The moment they stop being useful—either because they strike or because they don't work any more since the crops are finished—then of course it becomes very illegal and they are thrown out. It's a very corrupt system.

F: "Corrupt" implies collusion to break the law, which is a very heavy charge. Do you want to make that charge?

C: Sure, sure, except that I'm not saying that money crosses hands. What I'm saying is that the guy before me did it, the guy before him did it, so I can't change it. It's that kind of setup.

F: That takes any connotation of deliberate action away from the growers.

Bob Fitch, "Tilting the System: An Interview with Cesar Chavez," pp. 204–207. Copyright © 1970 Christian Century Foundation. Reprinted from the February 18, 1970, issue of the *Christian Century*.