

GUTIERREZ: In gringos, there is nobody wearing white hats. They are all a bunch of animals. Anglos who have open minds and a genuine interest in resolving the conflict and ills of the community will receive cooperation from MAYO. All they have to do is declare themselves.

Source: University of Texas, Arlington, Public Affairs Archives, <http://www.uta.edu/public-affairs/official-statements/stories.php?id=2133>.

5 Reies López Tijerina, Recovering Lost Lands, 1969

In 1987, a highly unconventional Hollywood film appeared. The Milagro Beanfield War had little action, violence, or sex. It told the story of working-class Mexican Americans battling an Anglo land developer in rural New Mexico. Trouble arises when a Chicano handyman diverts water earmarked for a resort development and begins to grow beans in a field that had belonged to his dead father. Local farmers were bitterly divided over the development. Some favor the project because they think it will bring jobs to the area, while others worry that it will bring higher taxes, which will force them to sell their land.

The Milagro Beanfield War was part populist fable and part political allegory. The beanfield symbolically represents the restoration of the town's Chicano roots. But like many fables it is rooted in reality. During the 1960s, a growing number of northern New Mexico farmers, led by the Chicano activist Reies López Tijerina, began to stand up to developers who threatened to destroy their farmland and their way of life. Explosive battles erupted over water rights and land claims.

A sharecropper's son who began working as a migratory farm worker at the age of 7, Tijerina knew firsthand the plight of Chicanos in rural New Mexico. As a child, he was educated in more than 20 segregated schools as his family moved in search of farm work. He briefly served as a Pentecostal minister before he found his life calling: to restore the Spanish and Mexican land grants of New Mexico's Chicanos.

In 1963, he established the Alianza Federal de Mercedes (The Federal Alliance of Grants). By 1965, when his group had gained support from small ranchers and farmers whose use of national forest lands had been reduced, the Alianza claimed a membership of 20,000. The movement gained national attention when the Alianza occupied an amphitheater in Kit Carson National Forest and subsequently staged a raid on a county courthouse. In 1969, Tijerina was convicted of attempting a "citizen's arrest" of New Mexico's governor and the Chief Justice of the United States, Warren Burger. His larger goal was to create an "Indo-Hispano" movement, which would unite peoples of Indian and Mexican heritage.

While the Alianza declined, the effort to protect the land claims of Mexican Americans did not end. In 1975, Senator Joseph Montoya and Representative Manuel Lujan of New Mexico called for a study of violations of property rights guaranteed in the treaty and restitution for those whose rights had been violated, but the bills died in committee.

In his "A Letter from the Santa Fe Jail," Reies López Tijerina explains why he has sacrificed his freedom to protest against prejudice and discrimination.

... At this time, August 17, I have been in jail for 65 days – since June 11, 1969, when my appeal bond from another case was revoked by a federal judge. 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. . . .

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. . . .

Source: Reies López Tijerina, "A Letter from the Santa Fe Jail" (1969), <http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/hiz16/documents/TEJERINA.HTM>.

6 Rúben Salazar, The National Chicano Moratorium, 1970

The struggle for equality is not simply political; it also involves retaining and recovering a history, a culture, and a distinctive identity. During the 1960s, a group of Mexican American students at California State University, Los Angeles, held the first modern Cinco de Mayo celebration, to commemorate Mexico's 1862 victory over France at the battle of Puebla. Cinco de Mayo

became a day on which Mexican Americans reaffirm their roots, express cultural pride and self-determination, and celebrate with sights and sounds of Mexico.

In 1969, Chicano activists formed a coalition, known as the National Chicano Moratorium, to protest the Vietnam War. Among American soldiers from the Southwest, nearly 20 percent of the casualties were Mexican Americans, almost twice their proportion of the population. Antiwar protests by Chicanos culminated on August 29, 1970, when more than 20,000 Mexican Americans marched in east Los Angeles against the war and the disproportionately high casualty rate of Chicano troops. Some 1,500 police officers disrupted the rally by firing tear-gas canisters into the crowd. Three Mexican Americans were killed and more than four hundred were arrested. Among the dead was a Los Angeles Times columnist, Rubén Salazar, who was killed by a tear-gas projectile. This incident had far-reaching consequences. It led many Mexican American activists to focus on the issue of police brutality and unequal justice.

In this selection, Rubén Salazar explains to the US Commission on Civil Rights why many Mexican Americans distrust law enforcement.

Justice is the most important word in race relations. Yet too many Mexican Americans in the Southwest feel with David Sanchez, Los Angeles Brown Beret leader, that "to Anglos justice means 'just us.'"

La Ley or the Law, as Mexican Americans call the administration of justice, takes forms that Anglos – and even Negroes – never have to experience. A Mexican American, though a third-generation American, for instance, may have to prove with documents that he is an American citizen at border crossings, while a blue-eyed blond German immigrant, for example, can cross by merely saying "American."

Besides the usual complaints made by racial minorities about police brutality and harassment, Mexican Americans have an added problem: sometimes they literally cannot communicate with the police. . . .

One of the many reasons a Mexican American cannot relate well to *la Ley* is that he doesn't see many of his own in positions of authority serving on agencies which administer justice. The 1960 census indicated that Mexican Americans represent about 12 percent of the Southwest's population. In 1968, only 7.4 percent of the total uniformed personnel in law-enforcement agencies in the Southwest were Mexican Americans. . . . Only ten law-enforcement agencies are headed by Mexican Americans and eight of these are in communities of less than ten thousand in population.

(A commission study of the grand-jury system of twenty-two California counties concluded that discrimination against Mexican Americans in juror

selection is "as severe – sometimes more severe – as discrimination against Negroes in grand juries in the South.") . . .

A commission staff report said that "one of the most common complaints (throughout the Southwest) was that Anglo juvenile offenders were released to the custody of their parents and no charges are brought, while Mexican American youths are charged with offenses, held in custody, and sent to a reformatory." . . .

The commission's report further stated that it is felt throughout the Southwest that "the most serious police harassment involves interference with attempts by Mexican Americans to organize themselves in order to assert their collective power."

To the advocates of brown or Chicano power, the Texas Rangers, or *Los Rinchés*, are symbols of this repression. . . . At the time of the hearing, there were sixty-two Texas Rangers, none of them Mexican Americans. . . .

Farm workers, labor organizers, and civil-rights workers testified before the commission that the Texas Rangers break agricultural-worker strikes in the Rio Grande Valley through force and intimidation. The unionization of farm workers is seen as a holy war in Texas, where farm hands get no workmen's compensation, no state minimum wage, no unemployment and disability insurance, and where there are no mandatory standards in farm-worker housing. (In contrast, California requires by law all of these things.) . . .

Pete Tijerina, executive director of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, had noted that the U.S. Attorney General had intervened on behalf of Negro cases throughout the South, but that "not once, not once, has the Attorney General . . . intervened in any Mexican American case." . . .

Source: *Strangers in One's Land*, Publication No. 19. US Commission on Civil Rights Clearinghouse. May 1970.

7 Vilma S. Martínez, *The Struggle Continues*, 1975

Today, there are over 18 million Mexican Americans: an increase by a third over the number in 1990, which makes Mexican Americans the US's fastest-growing minority group. Mexican Americans are also the youngest Americans. The average age is nine years less than the national average. Immigrants actually raise the average age of the Mexican American population; the average age of Mexican Americans born in the United States is under 16.

In a span of half a century, the Mexican American population has been utterly transformed. In 1940, Mexican Americans were the most rural ethnic group in