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LA COMUNIDAD EN LUCHA:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EAST LOS ANGELES
HIGH SCHOOL BLOWOUTS

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The purpose of the SCCR Working Paper Series is to publish works that significantly advance our knowledge about Chicanos and other Latinos. We invite your comments and critique. Please address your remarks to the author.

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In the year 1968 millions of people witnessed the worldwide rise of students movements. Students in Spain, France and Mexico were calling for self-determination and social economic justice. In Mexico City alone, over 200,000 students participated in direct confrontation with the state.¹ Given this worldwide context of student revolts, it is no surprise that in early March of 1968, approximately 15,000 students, lead by high school teacher Sal Castro, waged strikes against seven schools in East Los Angeles (East L.A.) and neighboring areas to protest the quality of education in the schools.² The event, which is commonly referred to as the Blowouts, was significant because it was the first mass protest by Chicanos in the barrios and led to the political mobilization of East Los Angeles. The Blowouts were the result of years of frustration at unsuccessful attempts to make change in the education system through the "proper channels" (i.e., voting, participating in P.T.A.). Direct action was the last resort people used because they felt that it was the only weapon to make change in an Anglo controlled education system. This paper will trace the development of the East Los Angeles High School Blowouts, covering components which contributed significantly to the development of the direct action. For example, one of the motivating factors for change was the poor quality of education in the East L.A. education system. But, it is also important to place the development of the Blowouts in the context of the 60's, taking into account the role models such as Cesar Chavez, Reies Tijerina, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales and the Black Civil Rights Movement. This paper will also examine several of the organizations which played key roles in the East Los Angeles Blowouts like the Brown Berets, the

¹ Juan Gómez-Quíñones, *Mexican Students Por La Raza: The Chicano Student Movement in Southern California 1967-1977* (Santa Barbara, CA: Editorial La Causa, 1978), p. 15.

²David F. Gómez, *Somos Chicanos* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 223.

United Mexican American Students and two East L.A. newspapers, Inside Eastside and La Raza. The story of the Blowouts and the subsequent arrest of 13 leaders in the Blowouts will be related. In conclusion, there will be an analysis of the successes and failures of the Blowouts .

Conditions in Education

During the 1960's and before, East Los Angeles high schools had a deplorable record of educating Chicano students. Fifty percent of Chicano students who entered high school in the 1960's never graduated. Many did not even have the opportunity to attend high school. Chicanos had an average of 7.1 years of schooling as compared to 9 years for blacks and 12 years for Anglos. Of those who did attend and finish high school, very few went on to college. Only two percent of the college population of the United States was Chicano. Of these only half graduated.³

It was not the Chicano students who had failed, but the education system that systematically discriminated against them. From the moment the Chicano children entered school, they were made to feel ashamed of their culture. Five out of ten barrio schools did not allow students to speak Spanish.⁴ Not only was their language demeaned, but also their style of dress. They were often told, to "Stop looking like pachucos," and forbidden to wear certain clothes, which were a source of pride for the students.⁵ Thomas Carter, in *Mexican Americans in School: A History of Neglect*, documented racist teacher attitudes that contributed to the negative self-image of Chicanos. Most teachers believed that Mexican culture produced a lack of motivation in

³Kaye Briegal, "Chicano Student Militancy: The Los Angeles High School Strike of 1968," ed. Manuel Servin. *An Awakened Minority: The Mexican-Americans*. 2nd ed. (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1974), pp. 215-16.

⁴Gomez, *Somos Chicanos* , p. 106.

⁵ibid., p.106.

the students. They were pessimistic about the Mexican ability to learn. The teachers saw the Chicano child as inferior to the white child, an inferiority which the overt racists attributed to innate stupidity and which more "open-minded" racists attributed to laziness or apathy in the culture. One California junior high school teacher told Carter: "We will keep trying...but there is nothing you can do with those kids, they can't discuss, they can't talk, all you can do is give them seat work to keep them busy and keep them under control."⁶ How were Chicano students going to excel in school when Spanish was prohibited in the classroom or on school grounds; when Chicano history was not taught; when Anglo teachers believed in the intellectual inferiority of Chicanos; and when Chicanos who were not pushed out of the system were tracked into vocational courses or the army, rather than college preparatory courses?⁷

The schools served, much like today, as an instrument of oppression used by the dominant white culture. The schools were employed as a mechanism to place Chicanos in an underprivileged condition in society. "Purposefully the [schools] turned out Mexicans with poor but basic abilities in reading and figuring, just enough to be able to take orders from the *patrón* and do their work."⁸ Throughout, the Southwest Mexicans could be seen as the ones who filled the lowest positions in carwash operations, restaurants, shopping centers, and so on. Chicanos faced many oppressive conditions, and it was the educational system which perpetuated those conditions. There has

⁶Thomas P. Carter, *Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1970), p. 14.

⁷International Socialist Review, "Chicano Nationalism" in *Readings on la Raza*, ed .Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 223.

⁸Gomez, *Somos Chicanos*. p. 105.

been a long history of struggle for political empowerment and the right to a decent education by Chicanos in East Los Angeles.

Pre-60's Activism

Before the Blowouts, Chicanos in East Los Angeles recognized the oppression in the school system. In the 1950's, the Chicano struggle centered around the Education Committee of the Council of Mexican-American Affairs. This group, comprised of college educated and professional Chicanos, sought change through the accepted channels: meeting with legislators, school officials, and the general public to address the failure of the schools to educate Chicanos.

In the mid 1960's, many of the same people were involved in a campaign to elect a Chicano, Ralph Poblano, to the Los Angeles (L. A.) Board of Education. This campaign failed, but persistence of the community of East Los Angeles yielded fruit when in 1967 the first Chicano, Julian Nava, was elected to the L.A. Board of Education.

Even the success of electing Chicanos to public office failed to improve the quality of education for Chicanos: most Chicanos read below grade level, the drop-out rate remained high, and cultural oppression continued in the schools.⁹ In 1967, Chicanos in the Los Angeles City School System in grades 1, 2 and 3 score in the bottom 3%, 5%, and 7% respectively on the nationally administered Stanford Reading Test.¹⁰ Frustration in the Chicano community, especially of the youth, was becoming intense as conveyed by the following quote which expresses the dismay at the low reading scores: "It is now apparent that our voices are not being heard. So, to hell with it. Merry Christmas brother. 1968 will be different. Next year the community is going

⁹Briegel, "Chicano Student Militancy," Servin, *An Awakened Minority*, p. 217.

¹⁰La Raza (Los Angeles), 25 December 1967, p. 4.

to be heard one way or the other."¹¹ There were others who expressed a similar sense of frustration: "[the oppression] will end when we, as Chicanos, form a united front and take over our schools. That is the only way we are going to be able to have a voice in our children's education. As things stand now, the key to the success of the Educational Complex is intensive involvement of the community both in the policy making levels and parent participation levels"¹² The Chicano community of East L.A. had tried to improve their economic, social, and political situation through the means prescribed by society, yet their efforts had been futile.

Militancy in the 1960's

While some Chicano activists tried to relieve their oppression by electing leaders to public office, the larger society was showing them that change could only be made through direct action. Chicano leaders like Reies López Tijerina, Cesar Chávez and Rodolfo "Corky" Gónzales, and the Black Civil Rights Movement were good examples of this type of activism. The Black Civil Rights Movement and the Chicano activist were significant influences in the development of the Blowouts for two reasons: They provided role models for the youth to emulate and they helped to create a general climate in society that gave people hope that change could be made to better their lives.

In the 1960's, Chicanos implemented a series of mass and direct action campaigns. The most successful campaign was the grape strike and boycott initiated by the National Farm Workers Association, later to become the United Farm Workers of America. The farmworkers struck against California farmers in 1965, refusing to pick grapes until their union was

¹¹ La Raza (Los Angeles), 25 December 1967, p. 4.

¹²La Raza (Los Angeles), 15 January 1968, p. 3.

recognized and they received a decent wage. The strike was originally small scale, but it soon garnered the support of liberal churches, civil rights groups and organized labor, as well as the general populace. Through their nationwide strike and boycott of California table grapes, farmworkers obtained recognition of their union and the right to decent wages. This movement was built from the ground up by Chávez, Dolores Huerta, and by farmworkers who were tired of being treated as second class citizens.

At this time, there was another well-known Chicano leader, Reies López Tijerina. Unlike Chávez, who preached non-violence, Tijerina preferred direct and violent action to call attention to the causes for which he fought. Tijerina organized rural Chicanos in New Mexico to regain the lands that were guaranteed to them by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.¹³ According to Tijerina, these lands had been stolen from Mexicans by Anglo settlers. New Mexican farmworkers gave him their support because they had tried to regain their stolen land through the court system for years to no avail. They staged many marches and demonstrations to gain public support.

Although both Chávez and Tijerina served as role models for Chicanos, their movements were limited to Chicanos in rural communities, neglecting the needs of urban Chicanos. The vacuum unfilled by Chávez and Tijerina was taken up by Rodolfo "Corky" Gónzales. Corky was a product of the urban barrios. He formed a civil-rights group, the Crusade for Justice, which spoke to the needs of Chicanos in the barrios. The Crusade called for reformation of the police and court systems, improved housing, better

¹³The Treaty of Guadalupe Hildalgo at the conclusion of the Mexican-American War promised to protect the property and civil rights of the Spanish-American inhabitants of New Mexico, but no provisions were established to enforce the provision of the treaty. For a discussion of the violations of the treaty see Moquin, *A Documentary History of the Mexican-Americans*, p. 349-57.

education for Chicanos, and greater and more diverse employment opportunities.¹⁴ He called for Chicanos to unite under the banner of nationalism and to fight for self-determination. His appeal to Chicanos was related to the fact that he was fighting for them so that they could have control of the institutions affecting their lives.

The Civil Rights Movement was another influence. The movement taught Chicanos that they did not have to conform to social standards which dictated that they were a lower class of citizen. The civil rights movement exemplified a courageous effort to mobilize a mass of people that had traditionally been disempowered. The many successes of this movement paved the way for Chicanos to demand their rights. More specifically, many of the student sit-ins that took place in the early sixties showed Chicanos that change could be made in this racist society. These direct action campaigns, from the farmworkers to the civil rights movement, helped convince Chicanos that change was not going to come through established channels, but rather through mass action movements.

Key Players

While it is important to look at the influences on Chicano students, it is also important to examine some of the leading players in the Blowouts: The Brown Berets (formerly the Young Citizens for Community Action), United Mexican American Students (UMAS), and two East Los Angeles newspapers, Inside Eastside and La Raza. The Young Citizens for Community Action (YCCA), originally formed in 1966, consisted of Chicano students fighting for student needs. In September 1967, the YCCA opened a coffee shop where they organized history and cultural classes. Their agenda covered

¹⁴Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera, *The Chicanos: A History of Mexican-Americans*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 274.

projects from political campaigning, which would give Chicanos access to political institutions, to meeting with city officials to discuss student concerns. Because Chicanos often suffered from police brutality and harassment, they also took up that issue. YCCA participated in demonstrations protesting police brutality. During different encounters with the police they began wearing brown berets. The choice of the color brown, the color of their skin, was a sign of pride in being Mexican. This practice resulted in an official name change to the "Brown Berets," as the organization began to take a more militant tone towards the solution to Chicano oppression. The Brown Berets considered themselves the revolutionary youth of la Raza.¹⁵ The purpose of the Brown Berets was in their own words:

To give vocal as well as physical support to those people and causes which will help the people of the Mexican-American communities... to keep a watchful eye on all federal, state, city and private agencies which deal with the Mexican-American, especially law enforcement agencies...to protect, guarantee, and secure the rights of the Mexican-American by all means necessary. How far we must go in order to protect these rights is dependent upon those in power. If those Anglos in power are willing to do this in a peaceful and orderly process, then we will be only too happy to accept this way. Otherwise, we will be forced to other alternatives."¹⁶

The Brown Berets played a significant role in the Blowouts, but not as organizers.¹⁷ "When the cops moved in it was the Berets that received the short end of the stick most, it was the Berets that were dragged behind bars."¹⁸ In essence, they remained true to their goals in protecting the high school

¹⁵The word Raza literally means race, but it used to refer to Mexicanos as people with a common language, culture, and history.

¹⁶La Raza (Los Angeles), 7 June 1968, p.13.

¹⁷Interview with Carlos Muñoz Jr. December 6, 1988.

¹⁸Chicano Student News: Mano a Mano. 15 March 1968, p. 6.

students from the police, by exposing themselves in the front line and taking the brunt of police abuse.

The Berets received a disproportionate amount of media coverage because of their military uniforms and militant outlook . Overnight, the Brown Berets were conceived to be the Chicano equivalent to the Black Panthers, but in reality they were just a small group of high school students. The media attention they did receive, portraying them as militant, was significant because it sent a message to the Los Angeles community and the rest of California that Chicano students were ready to struggle for their rights.

In 1967, Chicano college students began to see a need to fight against oppressive social conditions in the universities. They held a conference at Loyola University to discuss the issue of student organizing. This conference led to the founding of Chicano student organizations at various colleges in the Los Angeles area. They named themselves the United Mexican American Students (UMAS). Students also established a central UMAS which would serve as a coordinating body for the ten UMAS chapters that would developed by May of 1968. At first the organization served as a social and tutorial organization for Chicano students who faced a hostile environment on college campuses. UMAS also provided tutoring for Chicanos in the surrounding communities. However, many UMAS chapters soon began to see that the work they were doing was not adequate to solve the inequalities in society. They saw a need to change the institutions affecting the lives of Chicanos not only by working within the system, but also outside of it, through protests and strikes. The UMAS chapter at California State University at Los Angeles stated its role as follows:

UMAS is cognizant of the social, economic, and political ills of our Mexican people...we see our role to stand united in the effort to affect

social change for the betterment of our people. We believe the ills that beset our people are not products of our culture, but that said ills have been inflicted by the institutions which today comprise the establishment in the American society.¹⁹

UMAS also took a strong stance on the importance of taking pride in Mexican culture: "We have begun to recognize our role as an organizational agent through which Chicano students are able to recognize themselves as Mexicans and to take pride in it ."²⁰

Like the Brown Berets, UMAS served as a buffer between the police and the striking high school students. However, UMAS was also instrumental in helping to organize the Chicano high school student for the Blowouts. They actually went into the high schools and talked to the students about the importance of striking to make educational change.

Also very influential in the development of the Blowouts were the newspapers, *La Raza* and *Inside Eastside*. *La Raza* covered much of the political, social and cultural activities of the East L.A. community. One of the prevalent themes of the newspaper was the failure of the East L.A. school system to provide quality education for Chicanos. In its December 25, 1967 issue, *La Raza* ran an article entitled "Time of Studies and Statistics" that outlined the following statistics: 65% of students in mentally retarded programs in Santa Ana are Mexican-American due not to actual retardation but to the failure of the Anglo Educational System; the drop-out rate among Chicanos in the Southwest is 60%; the average educational level of Mexican-American is 8.6 years, 4 years below the national average; and only 2% of Chicanos are in college. In the same issue, another article quotes "the goal for 1968 is to change our educational system; change is not only desirable but it is

¹⁹Carlos Muñoz Jr. "Chicanos," to be published May 1989, Ch. 3 p. 33.

²⁰*Ibid*, Ch. 3 p. 35.

ESSENTIAL," thus, representing the frustration people felt at the education system in East L.A and fueling the desire to make change. Before the Blowouts, La Raza had printed ads which said, "Turn On, Join In, Walk Out."²¹

Inside Eastside covered much of the same material as La Raza, but was geared toward high school students. There were articles covering dances and school activities, and advice columns to high school students, dealing with topics such as the danger of drugs. Thus, newspapers were a vehicle for voicing discontent and presented information for those individuals interested in activities and organizing.

The Blowouts

The oppressive conditions in the schools and the frustration of not being able to make changes through the proper channels created a dialogue between different community activists, students, and teachers in East L.A., late in 1967, to discuss ways to publicize the plight of Chicanos in the school system.²² Among the leading activists was Lincoln High School teacher Sal Castro. Castro typified the frustration felt by many Chicanos by the white male administrators lack of concern for the education of Chicanos. As a teacher, Castro saw the racism that prevailed in the schools. He tried to make changes within the school bureaucracy, but to no avail. Disillusioned by the politics at these schools, he knew that something different had to be done to improve the education of Chicanos:

The school don't give a damn about Chicano kids. They give them garbage cans for schools and trash to learn. They endanger their lives

²¹ Gerald Rosen, "The Development of the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles From 1967-1969," *Aztlan* vol 4 no. 1 (Spring 1973): 164.

²² Carlos Muñoz Jr, "The Politics of Protest and Chicano Liberation: A Case Study of Repression and Cooptation," *Aztlan* vol 5 no. 1&2 (Spring 1974), 127.

with condemned buildings and their minds with hate, prejudice, and lies... The way education stands now, it means to put race down and forget that you are Chicano. Ya Basta! We have had enough. We will take no more!²³

Out of the community dialogue came the idea that a student walkout would be the best method to advertise the poor quality of education. Castro along with some of his students went out to communicate the idea to other Chicano groups. They received support from the Brown Berets, UMAS, college professors, clergy, and other professionals. A committee comprised of individuals and members of the aforementioned organizations was formed to develop a set of student demands. In an article in the Chicano Student News: Mano a Mano the students expressed their reasons for the Blowouts and their proposed demands:

BLOW OUTS were staged by us, Chicano students, in the East Los Angeles High Schools protesting the obvious lack of action on the part of the LA School Board in bringing ELA schools up to par with those in other areas of the city. We, young Chicanos, not only protested but at the same time offered proposals for much needed reforms...

We want immediate steps taken to implement bi-lingual and bi-cultural education for Chicanos...Teachers, administrators, and staff should be educated; they should know our language, (Spanish), and understand the history, traditions and contributions of the Mexican culture. HOW CAN THEY EXPECT TO TEACH US IF THEY DO NOT KNOW US? We also want the school books revised to reflect the contributions of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to the U.S. society, and to make us aware of the injustices that we, Chicanos, as a people have suffered in a "gabacho" dominated society...

Classes should be smaller in size, say about 20 students to 1 teacher, to insure more effectiveness. We want new teachers and administrators to live in the community their first year and that parents from the community be trained as teacher's aides.²⁴

²³Raul Ruiz, "Sal Castro" Chicano Student 4/25/68 p 2

²⁴Chicano Student News: Mano a Mano. 15 March 1968, p. 3.

The major demand was the issue of community control of the schools; they wanted a Chicano administration at any school that was predominantly Chicano, the implementation of a citizen review board, and the placement of school facilities under the jurisdiction of Chicano Parent's Council. In all, the committee developed thirty-six demands.²⁵

The original plan was to go before the L.A. Board of Education and present them with the various needs of the Chicanos of three East L.A. high schools: Garfield, Roosevelt and Lincoln. If their needs were not met, then they would walkout. The ad hoc committee, with the help of UMAS and other college students, established blowout committees at Roosevelt, Lincoln and Garfield, and a central coordinating committee. But, their plans did not proceed as originally intended. An incident on March 1, 1968 at Wilson High School, which was not one of the original three schools, altered their plans. The principal of the school arbitrarily decided to cancel the play "Barefoot in the Park," sparking criticism from students. The incident was enough to prematurely trigger the high school strikes. One of the students who walked out described the event as follows:

It was nearly lunch and that's when it was supposed to happen. The word had been around. People were talking...talking about the walk-out. The bell rang to go lunch. Practically half the school was mobbed together in the halls. Everyone was heading for the main door. Many of the senior students were asked to blockade the exit. Soon everyone was leaving the halls...we later found another exit...the auditorium gates!!! Approximately 500 students were crowded against these gates. First 10...then 20...and pretty soon 200 were out the gate, encouraging others to walk-out. The boy's vice principal Mr. Royer pushed the gates back in as Barbara Mungaray pushed them back out. Many of the students who were still in, demonstrated by throwing fruit, books, malts, and even a trash can over the gate. The Jr high boys vice principal, Mr. Williamson, was ordering students out of this area...he

²⁵Jack McCurdy, "Demands made by east Side High School Students Listed," Los Angeles Times. March 17, 1968, pt. C, pp. 1-5.

was thrown an egg at. Photographers were then on the scene. Carol Goldstein was questioned by CBS; Barbara Mungaray questioned by the cops; Alice Torres suspended for participating actively, etc., etc. The police came and students on the outside came back in...The police, without being asked, were going to use tear gas on us, but the principal Mr. Skinner did not want this. The bell rang to go to class...approximately 300 students didn't go to class. Senior High Girls began forming a sit-in which wasn't successful. Many were wearing a foot on their sweaters which represented the walk-out. The principal Skinner came out with a megaphone and said that students who would leave the campus would have to bring in their parent or parents on Monday. Students who didn't attend classes formed rallies, sit-ins, etc. The cops then left and everything began to calm down. For right now anyways.²⁶

Although triggered prematurely, the goals of the blowout remained the same; the students would not return to classes unless they got smaller class sizes, more emphasis on Chicano history and culture, and expanded student rights.

Following the first walkout, on March 5, about 2000 Chicano students walkout in Garfield High School in protest of the poor quality of education for Chicanos.²⁷ "Squadrons of club wielding sheriffs aided and advised by administrators...attempted to prevent Chicano students from walking out," but this did not deter the students.²⁸ The following day, 2700 students at Garfield High School walked out of school.²⁹ They left leaflets calling for educational reform. Garfield students continued to walk out for two more days.

At Roosevelt High School, students began to walk out on Wednesday March 6. The principal immediately locked the gate, but the most determined students were not deterred and climbed over fences. Like in the other schools the police were summoned to provide law and order. Instead, they provoked

²⁶Chicano Student: Mano a Mano. 25 April 1968, p. 2.

²⁷Chicano Student News: Mano a Mano. 15 March 1968, p. 5.

²⁸Chicano Student News: Mano a Mano. 15 March 1968, p. 5.

²⁹"Classes Boycotted by Student Groups at 2 High Schools," Los Angeles Times. March 6, 1968, p. 3.

students by calling them "mother fucking Chicanos."³⁰ At least two Chicanos were beaten by the police, "jumped by four full grown armed policemen, beaten to the ground and held down with a club to the neck."³¹ One student at Roosevelt expressed her sentiment towards the walkouts and her feelings of frustration at the school system:

During the first week of March, 1968, in the East Los Angeles communities it was NOT calm, quiet, like the establishment was taking for granted that it would be for the next hundred years. We students of Roosevelt, Lincoln, Wilson and Garfield stood up high and PROUD to be counted, not subtracted! No longer shut-up by the establishment. No longer do we listen to the preachers of the equality "lie"! Nor do we listen to their "LIES", their "DECEITFULNESS". NO MORE! The first blow-outs at Roosevelt, Wilson, Lincoln, and Garfield, made the establishment turn around and look at our side of town as it is! Now we DEMAND that we get what we should have had years ago. The Board of Education says they have "no money"! Do you know why they have no money for us. Because of a war in Vietnam 10,000 miles away, that is killing Mexican-American boys-and for WHAT? We can't read, but we can die! Why?

Dr. Nava came to "LOOK" over our school, took one look at our gym, turned around and reported the new gym is beautiful. But, did our Dr. Nava look at all our school? Did he notice our crowded classrooms, lousy food, closed restrooms? Does Dr. Nava still condone swats for silly reasons? I want my sister and brother, my future sons and daughters to get an education; not just take up space in a class room because it is the law! I am a B-12 at Roosevelt High School. My mother is a Mexican, my father an Anglo. I am very proud of my ancestry and I will fight my cause till the generations to come can all graduate and all be able to read what is written on their diplomas!!³²

At Belmont High School on Thursday, March 8, students attempted to walkout, but found their school invaded by police. "Helmeted cops with night sticks moved through the halls from classroom to classroom grabbing

³⁰Chicano Student News: Mano a Mano. 15 March 1968, p. 5.

³¹Chicano Student News: Mano a Mano. 15 March 1968, p. 5.

³²Chicano Student: Mano a Mano. 25 April 1968, p. 7.

students as they went and hustling them roughly, either to the principal or to jail."³³ At least one student is know to have been badly beaten in Ramparts Division Jail.

The Blowouts also hit Lincoln, Venice, and Jefferson high schools. The youths carried signs reading "Chicano Power" and "Viva La Raza." The police made efforts to crush the student protest by arresting and beating the students. Chief Redding of the Los Angeles Police Department and Governor Reagan claimed that the demonstrations were the result of outside agitators. The outsiders were college students form UMAS or members of the Brown Berets. This people were not outside agitators, but people in that were born, raised, and lived in the barrios. As one Wilson high School student put it: the Blowouts "was the beginning of our being."³⁴ La Raza had come alive to better their own lives.

After a week of protests, the L.A. Board of Education called a special meeting for Monday, March 11 to discuss the Chicano students' proposal for change. A portion of the East L.A community backed the students in their struggles. As a result, the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee (EICC) was formed as a coalition of Chicano students (Brown Berets, UMAS, etc.), parents, professionals, professors, clergy, and community groups. This coalition became the leading organization speaking for the rights of the Chicano high school students. The coalition placed the educational problems of Chicanos in public focus through the coverage they received in the L.A. Times and Chicano newspapers throughout the Southwest, awakened Chicanos to the need for political action against the Anglo educational power structure, and generated a drive for community control of the barrio schools.

³³Chicano Student News: Mano a Mano. 15 March 1968, p. 4.

³⁴Chicano Student: Mano a Mano. 12 June 1968, p. 2.

At the March 11 meeting, Chicano students and their supporters asked for amnesty for those students involved in the strike and for a community meeting in East L.A. to discuss the necessary changes in the education system. The Board of Education agreed to these two requests and the students returned to school.

Aftermath

A community meeting was held on March 28 at Lincoln High School and drew more than 1200 people. The Board of Education went on record as opposing any punishment for the students that were involved in the strikes and agreed to further meetings with members of IECC. However, the meeting turned out to be a bitter disappointment; the Board of Education claimed to "agree with 99% of the student demands, but that the district [did] not have the money to finance the massive changes proposed."³⁵ The board's inaction prompted the students to walk out of the meeting. It seemed to many that the Blowouts had accomplished nothing.³⁶

To compound the feeling of failure of the Blowouts, thirteen people were arrested and indicted in connection with the Blowouts for conspiracy on March 31, two and one half months after the strikes. The people arrested were: Moctezuma Esparza, Vice-chairman of Central United Mexican American Students; Cruz Olmeda, Chairman of the Brown Berets; Eliezer Risco, Editor of La Raza; Joe Razo, EYOA Community Consultant; David Sánchez, Prime Minister of the Brown Berets; Carlos Montes, Minister of Information for the Brown Berets; Ralph Ramirez, Minister of Discipline for Brown Berets; Sal Castro, Lincoln High School teacher; Carlos Muñoz,

³⁵Jack McCurdy, "Demands made by east Side High School Students Listed," Los Angeles Times. March 17, 1968, pt. A, p. 1.

³⁶Briegel, "Chicano Student Militancy," *Sen/in, An Awakened Minority*, p. 222.

President of Cal State UMAS; Fred López; Richard Vigil; Henry Gómez; and Pat Sánchez. Carlos Muñoz, characterized the actions "as an act of fascism, political intimidation and harassment of innocent citizens whose only crime is being concerned about the plight of our people and who share a fervent desire to bring about better education for our young people."³⁷ The charges these people faced were reported in June 2 issue of the L.A. Times:

"Conspiracy is a felony charge, although the alleged acts involved—disturbing a school and the peace—are misdemeanors. It can be a felony to plot a misdemeanor authorities explained."³⁸

The police action triggered the political organization of East L.A. Support for those arrested came from Senator Robert Kennedy, Cesar Chavez, Stokely Carmichael of the Student non-violent Coordinating Committee, the League of United Latin American Citizens and Bert Corona of the Mexican American Political Organization. EICC grew tremendously and waged a campaign, which included demonstrations, to protest the arrests of the 13 leaders who became known as the L.A. 13. They were joined in the picket lines in front of the Hall of Justice in downtown L.A. by Black nationalists, like Maulana Ron Karenga of US, the Black Panther Party, civil rights organization, and leftist movements like Students for a Democratic Society. Over 2,000 Chicanos and supporters gathered at the Central Police Station on Sunday, June 2nd to protest the arrests of the L.A. 13. The atmosphere was filled with cries of: Set our Brothers free-now! Chicano Power! Mexicanos al Grito de Guerra! Viva Sal Castro, Viva José Razo, Viva David Sánchez—Viva la Raza!

³⁷Chicano Student: Mano a Mano. 12 June 1968, p. 2.

³⁸Ron Einstoss, "13 Indicted in Disorders at 4 L.A. Schools; Arrests Underway," Los Angeles Times. June 2, 1968, pt A, p. 11.

Legal defense was provided by the American Civil Liberties Union, The NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Committee for the Defense of the Bill of Rights, but primarily by the Chicano Legal Defense Committee, which was "a union of organizations who are concerned with the problem of legal justice for the Chicano. These organizations...banded together because they recognize the significance of the conspiracy charges here in Los Angeles for all who are actively engaged in the struggle for the betterment of the social, political, economic, and educational system."³⁹ The Chief counsel for the organization was attorney Oscar Acosta.

Certain sectors of the Chicano community felt the people arrested should be sent to jail. This opposition came from the Chicano middle class sector, or those of working class background, who, economically speaking, had achieved some semblance of success and who strongly believed in the "American Way of Life" (i.e. you can make it if you just try hard enough). They were composed of teachers, administrators, and parents formed an organization called the Education Committee of Greater East Los Angeles.⁴⁰ The group believed that the oppression of Chicanos was just a myth perpetuated by those who were too lazy or intellectually inferior to raise themselves out of poverty. They saw those arrested as Communists or radicals who were causing trouble for no reason. However, the opposition was small compared to the large Chicano working class, which felt powerless and saw the Blowouts as a way to change a system that was too entrenched in middle class values to see the importance of educating Chicanos.

³⁹Chicano Student Movement. September 1968, p. 3.

⁴⁰Carlos Muñoz Jr, "The politics of Chicano Urban Protest: A Model of Political Analysis" (Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont College, 1973), p 56.

One of those arrested was Sal Castro. He was released on bail in early June, but was not allowed to resume his teaching position at Lincoln High School. The Board of Education had a policy which barred any person facing felony charges from teaching. Consequently, Castro was reassigned to work outside the classroom until his case was dealt with in the courts.

By the beginning of the 1968-69 school year, the thirteen "conspirators" had still not been tried. Castro would not be allowed to resume his teaching position unless he was cleared of the charges. Chicanos involved in the blowout, including members of the EICC, UMAS, the Brown Berets and other community organizations, appeared before the Board of Education in late September to demand Castro's reinstatement. The Board of Education failed to grant the demand, which resulted in the Chicanos' decision to wage a sit-in at the Board office until the demand was met. Thirty-five Chicanos remained in the Board of Education offices for 8 days until they were arrested on October 2. One Chicana expressed why she participated in the sit in:

I allowed myself to be arrested as a member of La Raza Humana which values, dignity, justice and pride as the rights of all people. The Chicano has too long been victimized by the WASP establishment. It is time to take a stand and to say to them: we will no longer beg for the crumbs, we will obtain our rights. Along with 34 others I took that stand last Wednesday night, and I will do it again when necessary. Sal Castro was one issue in a larger battle and we must not stop here.⁴¹

The day after their removal, the Board of Education reinstated Castro to his teaching position at Lincoln. The sit-in was significant for Chicanos because it demonstrated that they could change the policies of the school board. Despite this success, Castro was later transferred to a predominantly Anglo school in another part of Los Angeles.

⁴¹ Chicano Student News. October 1968 p. 5.

By October 1968, the demands originally made by the students for educational change and community control had practically been forgotten by the East L.A. community. The Anglo power structure had been successful in re-focusing the activities of the community on the L.A. 13, rather than on the original 36 demands. Most of the students and militant grass-roots organizers of EICC had become disillusioned with the lack of action on the student demands. The more militant Chicano student groups, like the Brown Berets and UMAS, stopped attending EICC meetings because of discontent at the increasingly reformist bent of EICC. EICC's vigorously militant image gave way to a more liberal reformist organization whose goal was to achieve fuller participation in mainstream America, rather than to reject oppressive social conditions. One of the leaders of EICC stated, "The EICC has indicated that a vital Mexican American political organization requires a membership that is organized, relatively acculturated into American society."⁴² The EICC became a forum for moderate Chicano politicians and a source of human resources for political campaigns.

Although the EICC became an organization intent upon political assimilation and accommodation, it did accomplish the appointment of a Mexican-American Education Commission of the L.A. Board of Education so that the community could have input on decisions affecting it. However, the commission, rather than being a tool for educational change or community control of school, became an advisory body. Most of the members of the EICC became members of the commission, so the group saw little need to continue with the EICC. The board tended to be made up of people from middle class

⁴²Michael Tirado, "Mexican American Minority's participation involuntary Political organizations," Ph.D. Dissertation (Claremont Graduate School, 1970. Cited by Carlos Muñoz Jr, "The politics of Chicano Urban Protest: A Model of Political Analysis" p. 135.

backgrounds whose interests were not closely tied to the general community. Although the commission contributed to those of the development of bilingual/bicultural programs and to the recruitment and hiring of Chicano administrators and teachers, it did not work for the original goal of community control of the schools. In the end, the EICC lost the grass-roots support which had made it an important organization fighting for the rights of Chicanos. The commission became nothing more than symbolic participation in the political process.

Blowouts: Success or Failure

If one just looks at the surface, it appears that the Blowouts were a failure: most of the demands were not met and instead 13 Chicano leaders were arrested on felony charges. But should the success or failure of the Blowouts be measured in terms of what the system gives you or does not give you? The strength of Blowouts lies in the effect it had on the people and on the fear it put in the power structure of Los Angeles, thus challenging the notion of Chicanos a docile people.

The Blowouts were successful in unifying the Chicano community of East L.A. under a just cause. For the first time in East Los Angeles, the community was empowered to fight the oppression under which they had lived for hundreds of years. The political consciousness of the community reached an all time high after the Blowouts, especially among the youth. The members of UMAS became more cognizant of the need to fight for the rights of Chicano people. Before the Blowouts, UMAS basically served as a social support network for students. After the Blowouts, UMAS became aware of the need to directly challenge the institutions which oppressed Chicanos. In the colleges, UMAS began to fight for Chicano studies programs and for increased admissions for Chicano students. Eventually, UMAS changed its

name to Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, as it joined a statewide network of Chicano student organizations with the goal of improving the lives of Chicano people within the universities and outside of them.

Also very important, the direct mass action undertaken by the Chicanos in East L.A. put fear into the Anglo power structure in Los Angeles. For the first time these so called lazy, docile, Mexicans took drastic action against the Anglo controlled schools. This put fear into the hearts of the power structure in Los Angeles and put them in a state of confusion. When they realized what hit them and of the potential dangers of an organized and powerful Chicano community, they reacted by arresting thirteen of its leader in hopes of quelling the movement. The power structure was successful in reshifting the energies of the East L.A. community into freeing the East L.A. 13, thus diverting the attention from the demand for community control. But, the Blowouts did make the Chicano community a forced to be taken seriously.

Conclusion

The Blowouts are a key event in contemporary Chicano history. They were made possible by a host of factors which included the objectively bad condition in the education system; the role models for Chicano students, like Gonzales, Chavez and Tijerina; the key organizations in the Blowouts such as UMAS, the Brown Berets, and the newspapers Inside Eastside and La Raza. Along with the movements of Chicano leaders Chávez, Tijerina and Gónzales, and the Black Civil Rights movements, the Blowouts created an atmosphere of change in the society so that Chicano students were empowered to fight their oppression in the schools, eventually leading to the formation of a powerful student movement that made substantial changes in the schools.

Appendix

This appendix should serve as a supplement to the material presented in the paper.

1967

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| Late 1966 or early 1967 | The YCCA, Young Citizens for Community Action forms. |
| Early 1967 | Inside Eastside, and underground newspaper aimed at high school students, begins publication. |
| May 13 | A student conference is held at Loyola University leading to the founding of the United Mexican American Students. |
| September | The first edition of La Raza, and underground community newspaper, appears.
La Piranya Coffee House is opened. The YCCA becomes Young Chicanos for Community Action, a change from Young Citizens for Community Action. |
| December 27 | YCCA pickets the East Los Angeles Sheriffs Station wearing brown berets. It is about this time that the YCCA becomes the Brown Berets. |

1968

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| January 16-17 | UMAS chapters at UCLA and Cal State L.A. demonstrate against Governor Reagan's suggestion for tuition in California higher education. |
| May 1-8 | Students walk out of East Los Angeles high schools. This activity centers around Wilson, Lincoln, Roosevelt and Garfield High Schools. |
| March | The Educational Issues Coordinating Committee is officially formed. |
| March 11 | A special meeting of the Los Angeles Board of Education is held at Lincoln high School in East Los Angeles. A list of proposed educational reforms is presented to the Board. |
| April 4 | First demonstration sponsored by the EICC is held to protest lack of action by the Board on student proposals for educational reforms. |
| May 31 | Grand jury indictments against thirteen Chicano activist on conspiracy charges relating to the walkout are made public as the arrests are in progress. |

June	200 San Jose State students walkout of commencement ceremonies, protesting the conditions of Chicanos on campus.
September 16	EICC begins several days of demonstrations at Lincoln High School protesting the refusal of the Board to return Sal Castro to the classroom.
September 27- October 2	A sit-in at the Board of Education begins in order to pressure the Board to return Sal Castro to the classroom. The sit-in is under the sponsorship of EICC, but UMAS, Brown Berets, and others, lend supports
October 4	Board decides to reinstate Sal Castro to the classroom
	1969
February 20	The Los Angeles Board of Education creates the machinery for a Mexican American Education Commission.
March	Corky Gonzales organizes the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver. The conference draws from all over the country. Out of the conference comes El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán which outlines the goals of the Chicano student movement.
April	El Plan de Santa Barbara further outlines the goals of the Chicano student movement. The Chicano student movement is consolidated into one statewide organization, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). ⁴³

⁴³Gerald Rosen, "The Development of the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles From 1967-1969," *Aztlan* vol 4 no. 1(Spring 1973): 175-179.

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