

LA CULTURA

A celebration of Chicano and Latino cultures — in poetry, stories, artwork and photos

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October

memories of a chicano

Armando Vallejo
(excerpt from the novel)

October 21, 1985, 6:30 a.m., and it seems to me that every Friday leads to Friday, and that Saturdays and Sundays were made to contemplate one's own slow aging process.

I look at the mirror right in front of me at Gallagher's Bar and I do not recognize myself. What I am looking at now is a 36-year-old man, divorced and with two sons living at home and with the enormous responsibility of keeping them well, both mentally and physically.

■ glance once more at the man reflected in the mirror and I can barely make him out. If it were not because of his eyes, which are the same as mine, I would swear that the man in the mirror is not me.

The only other deep resemblance between him and me is that he also is a Latino. Not too small, not too tall, with Indian and Spanish features that do not reconcile with each other. As a matter of fact, they refuse to reconcile with one another. A thick, black mustache crosses the lower portion of our faces. Even the mustache is not the same any more. The mustache has become too thick and by now you can see one or two or three silver streamers making their way throughout the rest of the mustache. The youthful look of the mustache is gone.

When I was 20 years old I sported the same mustache. People used to wonder if it was real or a fake. "Are you wearing a real or a false one?" they would ask, while trying to pull on it to confirm its authenticity. Then I would answer: "I like it nice and thick. It tickles the girls to death when I kiss them."

"What would you like to drink sir?" the cocktail waitress asks me, ending my soliloquy. "Oh yes," I say. "Please, let me have a Budweiser Light," As I give my order I also notice that she has also aged considerably in only a few months. Too fast, as a matter of fact. Six months ago, when she first started to work in this place she must have been 23 or 24 years old. Her body gave notice to a very athletic past life. Well built but still feminine. Long, strong arms, a long and trim face with two-pitch black eyes and hair. She gives the impression of being Latina, but once you focus on her closely it becomes apparent that she is not.

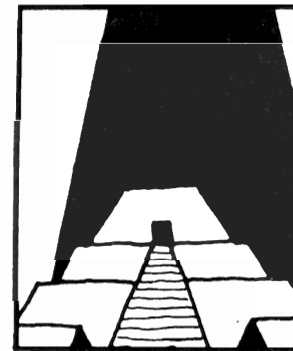
Six months later, probably because of the beer that she has drunk, first to quench her thirst and then because of the necessity to forget or to relax from the pressures of the day, the bad moments, or for the fun of it, her body has started to show her being constantly in beer's presence.

"It is \$1.75," she says to me while she holds a tray in her left hand. The tray contains two more Bud Lights, two Tecates, two slices of lemon, two napkins with a mountain of salt and a clear glass. The salt and the slices of lemon appeal to me and I ask the waitress for some. "But you're drinking a Bud," she says to me. "I know," and then I continue to tell her: "When it comes to Mexican beer I only like Corona. Tecate's taste is too strong for me. It tastes like German beer," I add to my semi-monologue, thinking that I have never had a German beer before in my life. I notice that she gives me a weird look and then walks away.

In the mirror this man who's supposed to be me continues to look at me every time I fix my eyes on him. Somehow I start to get irritated with him. Why doesn't he look at somebody else? "Salud," I say to him and proceed to bring my beer to my lips to have the first beer of the day, which probably will lead to six or eight more before the night's end. My eyes do not leave his and I note he raises his beer in like gesture.

"Hi, is this stool taken?" a lady asks me very politely. "No, it is not," I respond as she sits down without waiting for my answer. "It's nice to relax a bit after a long day's work," she tells me. I acknowledge her by nodding my head up and down in an affirmative motion without uttering a word. "Can I have a shot of tequila, a Budweiser, and a C.C. with

Seven-Up, please?" she asks the bartender who is mechanically making up about nine or ten different types of drinks all at once. I wonder if he has heard her order. One minute later she has in front of her a shot of tequila, a Budweiser and a C.C. with Seven-Up. Immediately she proceeds to drink them one by one, and apparently addresses herself to me as she picks up the C.C. and drinks it in two swallows: "This is to quench my thirst." Then she lifts up her tequila and drinks it as fast as she downed the C.C., followed by the by-now classical salt lick and lemon suck. "This is to warm up the body." Then she starts to drink little sips from her Budweiser. While fixing her eyes on me she says, "This is to chase the tequila down. Are you Mexican or Arab?" I look at the mirror only to find the reflection of myself with a wide smile on his face. I give this lady the same answer I have given people for the past 22 years. "Mexican." I keep my eyes fixed on the mirror image, which seems to be skeptical about my being "Mexican." And then it seems to me that the mirror image has caught me and it begins to establish an internal conversation with me.



He says to me while sporting a sly smile: "No you are not. You left Mexico 22 years ago as a teenager because you were dying of hunger; as a matter of fact, your whole family was on the verge of extinction. When you arrived in Santa Barbara you were taken to school — a world beyond your imagination

came to you and you felt very lonely. Then you felt something that you never felt before; you were discriminated against even by your own people. You sat in a classroom with other people who did not speak a word of English and as the years passed by your Spanish started to disappear due to its occasional use and nothing else. But you survived as well. But you fought yourself and everybody else to prove a point: that it was possible to go against all odds, to do something to be somebody. You became a well-known athlete right from the moment you stepped into junior high school and all the way into junior college; but you had to stop when you got to the university because there was no money or scholarships. You even avoided the teenage girls who preyed on young schoolboys with disproportionate muscular bodies and baby faces covered with pimples. The only satisfactory memories you have from those years are those of seeing your name appear in the school paper almost every week announcing you as having finished first, second, or last in this or that track meet or cross country (depending on the physical damage done by the previous weekend outing with the boys and by the amount of beer cans imbibed to please one another).

Once in college you committed yourself to social causes to "save" your people from injustice; you took to the streets shouting "Viva la Huelga" "Raza Sí, Migra No," "Chicano Power," "No More Vietnam . . . ," while others amassed diplomas, positions, real estate in the name of the Chicano Movement. You had so much to tell accumulated inside you and you had no choice but to become a poet. Words you turned into butterflies, people's faces filled your notebook's pages, green rivers appeared in every corner of your poems, cry-

ing grapes sang your people's plight for justice, silent eyes were a centrifugal force in your love poems. Each one of your poems was a song against injustice, injustice in our society, in our world, a pure cry to love.



There were many times when you cried, when tears fell down your face, when on the late news you saw Vietnamese children, women and men being blown up into pieces by American war planes. You cried when you saw American soldier (boys) being carried back to the States in wooden boxes or on stretchers. You could have been one of them. You were only 19 by the time they had tried to induct you three times into the Army and three times you were lucky enough to find a way out. First the student deferments, then by the time you graduated from junior college you had no choices but to enlist in the armed services, face a jail sentence, or be deported back to Mexico. By the time you had given up all hope of not going to Vietnam the Americans had no choice but to pull out of the war themselves. They were losing it along with all of their youth, and you were going to be one of them, regardless of whether you were an American citizen or not. You immigrated to this country to find a better life, "to be an American," and for that no price was too high to pay in spite of your political or religious convictions.

At the age of 21 you were darted by Cupid and you "fell" in love. You gave everything

you had in life. You gave every inch of your soul and body and there was not a single second awake or asleep that you worried about how to pay the rent, how to pay for the food, the bills, and how to keep on going to school, sacrificing everything possible. You believed in miracles. You believed in dreams come true. And believe me, they came true and true and you kept on dreaming and dreaming. You wanted to dream and dream but there is a limit to dreams. Once you make your dreams come alive you must also feed them to keep them well, but you decided to let them flower by themselves, and they did; but they also died young.

At the age of 21 Uncle Sam took you away and by the time you returned you were about to be a father. One morning when you opened your eyes, the year after your first son was born, you were told once more that you were going to be a father. You were so happy. You walked around downtown with your two sons, the one one year old and walking next to you and the other in your arms. "Are they yours?" people would ask. "Of course," you would answer, surprised at their inquiry.

But now that you glance through the photo album and see those pictures that depict the boys and you, now you know why they asked you that. (We look like three brothers, my boys and I.)

But all of this did not stop your dedication to helping people. You continued to go from prison to prison, from park to park, from labor camp to labor camp, from university to university, from community center to community center, from political meeting to political meeting, reading your social poetry, painting your socio-political-historical murals, singing

people's songs, and drinking beer with everybody.

Remember when you entered the university, thanks to people's sacrifices. You wanted to be a teacher to educate your people and all the people of the world. You wanted to let them know that people must learn to respect one another, or learn to love each other. You also found out that many like you were fighting for the same cause.



Remember one morning, many, many years ago, you woke up telling everybody that you were a Chicano and everybody was afraid of you or people like you because you had finally woken up from years of self- or imposed-subjugation. They knew that sooner or later, here or back in Mexico, you would claim equality and justice, that you wanted to live a normal life with the same commodities and opportunities as anybody else — that you had the right like everyone else to dictate your own political and economic future.

They were afraid that you would "steal" their "honest" accumulated riches away from them. But all you wanted was an opportunity to become somebody, to fully develop yourself, to not waste your mind and body on the corner of some dark street. Most of the time you fought alone, by yourself against anyone and anything, including your best friends who sometimes used you to get ahead or have a good time. And when you really needed them they were nowhere to be seen, or if they were

centage of the "Hispanic Student Dropout" in Santa Barbara, she is pictured right in front of a familiar local high school which I attended way back in the mid-sixties. "According to local school authorities, the Hispanic Student Dropout from our local schools is alarming," she says. In the background you see a good number of mainly Indian looking kids like yourself (even if you do look like an Arab).

Your eyes cannot believe what they are seeing on the local t.v., but as if it were the Chinese calendar, it's the year of the "Hispanic," as coined by the Republicans. Then you focus on the t.v. news and you see your friend continue with the interview. The school principal states, "One of the reasons for the high dropout amongst our Hispanic students is their culture." I cannot believe what my ears hear. It is just unbelievable to listen to this man who is supposed to be an educator and guider of young minds. For unknown reasons my mother's face comes into my mind, saying to me while walking me to school for the first time from Nopal Street the Santa Barbara Junior High School, "Tienes que ir a la escuela para que seas alguien." (You have to go to school so that you'll be somebody.) "In Mexico, we used to walk seven miles to go to school," she says.

"You know, I went to school at the university, here in Santa Barbara not too long ago. From say, let me think, from '68 to '76. I met a lot of Chicanos like you. Good people, they did a lot for your people," she says as she gives me a pleasant smile. "There you are sitting in front of me as if you wanted an answer, but I don't have any answer. The answer will be given to you by life." The mirror image says to me. Then you look at your watch and you realize it is time to go and fix

supper for your sons. You say good-bye to the bartender and the lady next to you. "Until then."



As you walk to your parked car, a man approaches you and asks you "Habla español?" "Sí," I say, like always. "Do you know where La Casa de la Raza is?" he continues to ask me. "Yes, I know." I ask him his place of origin since his Spanish accent is not Mexican. "I am from El Salvador. Most of my family was killed by the government because they said we were rebels, but you know when your own government kills your family, well then what are we going to do?" "Why do you want to go to la Casa?" I ask the man with the boyish look. "Well . . ." he pauses for a few moments, then he continues. "Some of my family lives in San Francisco and I need to get there . . . but you know . . . 'el Pasaje,' the fare." "Well," I say, "no need to go to La Casa." I drive him to the Greyhound station. He says good-bye and thank-you "compa." I manage to say to him, "Con cuidado (take care)," while I take a deep breath.

Armando Vallejo is a well-known Chicano cultural artist. He is executive director of La Casa de la Raza in Santa Barbara, California.

MY CHICANA DAUGHTER



JOE NAVARRO

My daughter came home from school one day.
And she really shocked me with what she had to say.
My Chicana daughter, with her dark brown skin,
long black hair and dark brown eyes
told me things about Indians that I know were lies.
So I sat her down and we had a conversation
and I could tell that she was confused about the whole situation.
I explained to her that we are Mestizo
that means Spanish and Indian ancestry.
And actually, there's more Indian heritage in our family tree.
So she should be clear that when she talks about Indians
that she's talking about we.
And it's important for her to understand our positive history.
My wife and I explained that bad things about Indians
come from racist white folks
who try to dehumanize people through telling lies and sick jokes.
We explained about the great leader Cuauhtémoc
who bravely fought for his people and for this land
to try and keep it out of the Spanish colonial hand.
She said that she understood, and I hoped that she had.
Because the stories that she was told were really bad.
At first she was confused and even cried,
but by the end of the conversation she felt better
and instilled with pride.
So my Chicana daughter, with her dark brown skin,
long black hair and dark brown eyes
who understands more about her Indian heritage and historic ties,
went on a trip, you see
with her grandmother to visit a friend in another city
when she met her grandmother's friend who was Anglo
my daughter told her something that shocked her, I know.
My Chicana daughter with her dark brown skin,
long black hair and dark brown eyes
couldn't be expected to know much because of her little size,
told that Anglo woman "Hi, I'm an Indian, my mama's an Indian,
my papa's an Indian, and my gramma's an Indian and we're good people."
It makes me feel a great sense of pride
when my daughter who was so young in years
made a statement about justice and equality
that I know has shocked someone's ears.
I'm so glad that she didn't fall victim to cultural genocide,
but instead, developed a greater sense of cultural pride.
Yeah, my Chicana daughter, with her dark brown skin,
long black hair and dark brown eyes
had an important experience in her life
which has made her just a little more wise.

Para ti que me diste una sonrisa

Hoy quiero darte un regalo
¿Pero qué?
Si te compro un pastel
. ni me alcanza.
Si te doy una flor
se te marchita.
Si te doy mi corazón
¿Lo entenderías?
Si te regalo un poema
¿Te gustaría?

¿Qué podré darte
a cambio de tu afecto?
¿Qué puede ser más valioso
que un pastel
una flor
un corazón
o un verso?

¡Ya lo tengo!
Eso es.

Quiero regalarte mi lucha
mis contiendas
para lograr un mundo
con pasteles para todos
con flores que nunca se marchiten
con corazones que amen
y con poetas
que tengan tiempo de cantarle
a la vida
al tiempo
a los recuerdos.
Un mundo donde muchos
puedan reír como tú
y darse mutuamente tanto
como tú me has dado a mí
con tu sonrisa.

Canción a los niños

Todos los niños del mundo
vamos una rueda hacer
y en mil lenguas cantaremos
en paz queremos crecer

Ese oso sin piedad
que es la guerra imperialista
se ha llevado a muchos niños
y hoy los vuelve amenazar

Pueblo unido en la batalla
no permitas más este crimen
pongamos fin a este monstruo
y viviremos en paz

Mundo lleno de miserias
y de hombres sin corazón
no te das cuenta que el niño
nació para ser feliz

Tomemos en serio estas cosas
y seamos justicieros
para que en tiempos venideros
los niños vivan en paz.

Enseguida, el poeta mexicano Enrique Cisneros y su *Poemario No. 2*, y B.A., un preso en Indiana, E.U., respectivamente, nos inspiran con valores positivos que en este tiempo navideño debemos reafirmar para entrar al año nuevo con la frente en alto pues solamente a través de la lucha podemos hacer valer nuestras aspiraciones y esperanzas.

Who is the wetback?

PIXOTE

(translated from Spanish)

I'm not a wetback, I'm not a wetback," Juancito cried, wiping away his tears.

Seeing him, grandfather was moved and sadly asked, "Now son, why are you crying?"

His dark little eyes still watering, the little one answered, "Granpa, at school, Smith called me a 'wetback'."

Grandfather smiled, softly stroking the boy's hair, and said with a sweet voice, "Oh, my little one, that's no reason to cry. Come, sit here, I will tell you a story."

The boy looked up and fixed his eyes on the old man's lips, who began to speak.

A long, long time ago in a very distant land lived a king who was very wicked and persecuted those who did not think like him.

The people from this land were very troubled and didn't know what to do. Some decided to leave their native land. So they got on a boat and set out to sea. The sea was furious because it well knew what the future held. And with storms it tried to stop them. But God is great and had mercy on them and let them reach their destination.

Cold and hungry, they reached land and to live here they stayed. In those times those in charge of control-

ling the immigration of foreigners to this country were more educated and humane than those of today. Could it be that "wisdom" had not brutalized them? Who knows, my son, but what is true is that they didn't go around asking them for a "green card," much less persecuting them, beating them and returning them to their place of origin where they could well be assassinated by the King.

Far from that, what they did was to find a way to help those poor people, who, for refusing to think the way their persecutors wanted them to, were forced to live in foreign lands, suffering cold and hunger and even to live off the charity of others.

And without thinking twice, the Native Americans gave their guests a place to live, taught them how to treat the land, to gain its friendship, how to talk to the rivers to get their sustenance, and offered them a shoulder to lean on.

But it is stated in a proverb, my son, "Raise crows and see how they'll take your eyes out." With time those claws protruding from white hands grew and grew, until they were long and sharp. And now, instead of caressing that shoulder upon which they once leaned, like vicious traitors, they tore it to shreds.

The American land had been raped and its mountains' rivers no longer ran with clear water.

What ran was blood, boiling blood, boiling with wrath, pain and anguish.

The American land had been raped, and its valleys no longer had buffaloes grazing in green pastures.

Instead, there were inert bodies drilled with white bullets.

Pain covered the Native Americans' faces.

Faces that later would be devoured by worms.

The white man laughed, the sun bathing his blonde hair, shining in triumph.

The winds no longer sang, as they had in the times of the green mountains, the clear rivers, the grazing buffalo. Now it wailed and could almost be heard saying, "Murderers, Murderers," as it caressed the bloodied skin of its children.

But the murderous hand did not stop there, that piece of stolen land was not enough.

Their pirates' thirst craved for more, and more and

more. And it was that barbarian thirst that led them to steal Mexico's lands.

Well, my son, now you know that the "wetbacks" are not those who swam across a river to come to their land that historically belongs to them, but those who crossed an entire ocean to come and steal the land of others.

The child smiled at his grandfather and said, "When I grow up I will fight to take back what belongs to us."

The grandfather laughed, took out his cigar, leaned back in his rocking chair and fell asleep.

This original short story was contributed to UNITY by a Salvadoran exile.

Land of volcanos
green mountains
and prehistoric roots

the spirit of Sandino
warms this tropical country
of simple folk
with a tremendous faith, spirit and will.

We came to share
the reality of the countryside
in the atmosphere of liberation
language and values
marching headlong towards life,
hope that we be united;

Winds of longing,
happiness, lunacy, artistry
drunk with intensity
and love.

We are witness
to the clarity of your soul
and the brush of your dreams
to the rainbow that is your revolution;

We weep with the Mothers of the Martyrs
because
there is neither sense, nor purpose
to so many atrocities
which this country has suffered,

except to always hold within
the reply
to protect the triumph of your sovereignty
against the corrupt imperialism
and bring to fruition
your memories, which affectionately declared:
"If Nicaragua won, the Chicano people will win."
¡Viva Nicaragua libre!

— Javier Pacheco

(The author was a member of the Chicano delegation that visited Nicaragua this July. He wrote this poem about the visit for Unity.)

Nicaragua, July 1986

"We move toward the sun of freedom"

Chicano artists, poets and musicians visit Nicaragua



PHOTO: KATHY GALLEGOS

Five Los Angeles artists united with Nicaraguan artists to paint this mural of Chicano solidarity in the Parque de las Madres in Managua.

Kathy Gallegos

Contributed

This July, a delegation of Chicanos went to Nicaragua to build solidarity with the Nicaraguan people and to celebrate the 7th anniversary of the revolution. Poets, painters and musicians made up a large part of the Chicano delegation to Nicaragua.

Being Chicano artists, we brought to Nicaragua the expressions of our struggles here in the U.S. and a desire to learn from the strengths and determination of the Nicaraguan people. We wanted to learn, in a very personal way, how Nicaraguan artists use their art as a weapon — how

they put into words, music or visual art the expressions of their people and the struggle to create a new society.

At a time when Nicaragua is forced into an unjust war by the U.S., and 40% of their material and human resources must be channeled into its military defense, Nicaragua is building a new and vital society. Art plays a key role in that development.

Everywhere we looked we saw beautiful murals telling of their sometimes brutal history or speaking of a love for the future of a free Nicaragua. We found art flowering in the midst of war and poverty.

We learned that culture is considered an essential part of everyone's

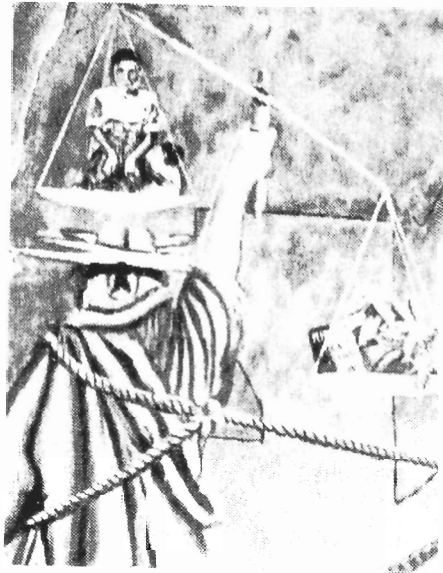
Chale con Hoover!

Elsa Tsutaoko

Contributed

To hell with Hoover — that's the message of a new mural painted in Casa Zapata, the Chicano theme house at Stanford University. The mural, titled *The Spirit of Hoover*, shows the destruction of the Hoover Institute, a right-wing "think-tank" housed on the Stanford campus. This most recent contribution to Casa Zapata's tradition of political murals has created a storm of controversy.

The centerpiece of the mural shows the Hoover Tower, defended by a grotesque skeleton, as it is shattered and pulled down into



rubble by a united front of Central Americans and black South Africans, aided by a multinational crowd of Stanford students. To the right, South African police beat black protesters, while a stream of gold South African Krugerrands pours into a Stanford piggy bank. At the left of the mural, a blindfolded figure of justice holds a scale. There coffee, sugar and oil, products of the exploitation of Latin America, tip the scales against a mother and her child.

The mural came out of a Stanford class, *Murals as social conscience art*, taught by José Antonio Burciaga, an artist and resident fellow of Casa Zapata. Students from the class painted the mural after researching the Hoover Institute and winning the approval of Casa Zapata residents.

Hoover scholars have attacked the mural in the press as "gross slander," "graffiti" and "unrelated to anything Hoover does." More than 40 Hoover scholars have served in the Reagan administration, promoting military intervention in Central America, "constructive engagement" in South Africa, cut-backs in social programs, and attacks on Third World people at home and abroad. One Hoover scholar, Edward Teller, is Reagan's head cheerleader for "Star Wars," and another, Milton Friedman, advises the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile.

Stanford MEChA (Chicano student organization) organized a rally of 150 students to celebrate the unveiling of the mural and to defend its message. "We're talking about war in South Africa and Nicaragua, and we have to make our statement with passion to match . . .," said John Sobraske, one muralist. Mike Arguello, another muralist, said, "Most of us . . . are angered at Stanford's role as an accomplice . . . we are proclaiming our rage and

anger and challenging others to join our cause.”

Third World students have a long history of struggle at Stanford. They fought to establish the Black, Chicano and Asian theme houses in the early 1970's to build a community for Third World students on campus. John Bunzel, a Hoover scholar and a Reagan appointee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, attacked the theme houses in a report issued last summer.

Today students are fighting to change the “Western culture” requirement. Stanford requires three classes on “Western culture” but ignores the history of Third World people. The campus has no Chicano Studies department or regular faculty. At the mural rally, David Romo of Casa Zapata said, “The feeling at Stanford seems to be that Chicano culture is for Chicanos, Native American culture is for Native Americans . . . but white culture, white culture is for everyone.”



Untitled

From their little book
on the style of the word,
they will tell you
this ain't no “Pablo Nerooda”
and the mural
ain't no “Dee-aygo Ree-vera”

B'cause they don't conform
to the aesthetic fun-mentals
sat up by Western Culture
or to the Truth
as dictated by the Great
White Father.

Them fellows will tell you
politics got no sanctuary
in the inner sanctums
of verses and stanzas,
muffled clouds,
reserved by the heavens
for the highest ideals
of what beauty is.

They will inform you
in *totacho abstracto*,
in abstract English,
that the rules
and standards
of aesthetics
were formulated
by the Greeks
and the Romans
and the Beatles
so as not to offend
but to please
and serve the refined.

They will tell you
the people deserve
Gongoresque puzzles
or subtle parables
because only then
will you exalt poetry
to the level of the gods
who inspire us away
from the oppression
of an illiterate people
who paint
or wash away
the screams
of graffiti.

— José Antonio Burciaga

Dopteño :

Music from the Chicano Nation

A

J. GONZÁLEZ

ccordion run bursts into the air. Immediately the rhythm of a *bajo sexto* begins to beat. The two instruments vibrate, complementing each other like horse and rider on the gallop. Two earthy voices singing in nasal harmony declare:

*Como arrogante criminal llego en septiembre,
con furia injusta sin compasión ninguna,
el huracán que ha destrozado al valle
y a Matamoros y se llamaba Beulah.*

*Like an arrogant criminal it arrived
in September
with unjust fury and no compassion at all
the hurricane which has destroyed the valley
and Matamoros was named Beulah.*

And Flaco Jiménez y su Conjunto continue telling the story of *Víctimas del Huracán Beulah* (Victims of Hurricane Beulah), a *corrido* (ballad) about the calamities which that hurricane caused the Chicano

people in south Texas. The song calls on all cities and rural areas where Mexican people live to unite and lend a hand to south Texas to lessen the pains of the disaster.

Flaco Jiménez is one of the best known *norteño* (northern style) accordionists in Texas. In 1965, a friend of mine heard him at a dance in Corpus Christi, Texas. He said that Flaco's music gave people so much energy that they danced to everything he played, from polkas to *cumbias*, without resting. El Rey de Texas (The King of Texas), Chicanos call him.

The *norteño* or Tex-Mex music played by Flaco Jiménez, Los Alegres de Terán, Los Tremendos Gavi-lanes, Los Pingüinos, Conjunto San Antonio and many more groups on both sides of the border is a product of the cultural give-and-take between the Mexican and the Chicano nations. It is a Chicano regional style, music that expresses the hopes, pains, humor and accomplishments of the working people.

Roots

The genuinely Chicano musical style of the South-west has its roots in the musical tradition and styles of the Mexican nation. The Chicano *norteño* style began to develop around the turn of the century. One of the main technical factors which contributed to its devel-opment was the introduction of the accordion by Ger-man and Bohemian settlers in south Texas.

The leading instrument in *norteño* music is the diatonic button accordion. This instrument suited very well the likes of the border area musicians. Not only was it inexpensive in relation to the larger piano accordion, but it also provided the right kind of sound, flexibility and harmony required in *norteño* music.

The basic elements in the Tex-Mex sound are the accordion and two harmonizing voices. The *bajo sex-to* provides the rhythm. But other instruments can also be used, like the saxophone, guitar, bass and others.

It was during the latter part of the 1930's that the *norteño* style actually defined itself. According to musicologist Chris Strachwitz, it was probably Los

Alegres de Terán who perfected the blend of the two voices and the accordion.

Because it is music by and for the common people, and due to its happy high energy sound, Tex-Mex music has become popular not only throughout the Southwest, but also in all parts of Mexico and in many countries in the rest of Latin America. A few years ago, Cornelio Reyna, who used to be part of the famous duet Los Relámpagos del Norte out of the northern Mexican city of Reynosa, was named number one singer in Mexico — a tribute not only to Reyna, but to the entire *norteño* southwestern sound.

History in songs

Corridos, polkas, *canciones*, *rancheras*, all of these are played by the *norteño* musicians, but it is the *corrido* (ballad) which has left a historical record of the daily lives of the people. For both the Mexican and Chicano peoples, the *corrido* has been a means to record and communicate those most heartfelt events in their lives.

The *corrido* has a long tradition of at least one hun-dred years among the Mexican people. It was during the Mexican Revolution that the *corrido* gained sweeping popularity among the masses. These ballads became one of the chief sources of information and a way to chronicle and pass on to future generations the glories, the tragedies, loves and hates of the masses and their heroes.



For the Chicano people, under the Anglo-American capitalist domination of the Southwest, the *corrido* is an even more important form of expression. Having been denied their history, the Chicano work-ing people have recorded their history, their points of view and social commentaries through the use of the *corrido*. The *corridistas* (*corrido* writers and singers)

sang in the market places of the Southwest the "literature of the poor," which eventually found its way into phonograph records and the radio, thus helping maintain the traditions and history of the people.

One of the most famous *corridos* written in the Southwest at the turn of the century, and which is still heard today, is the *Corrido de Gregorio Cortéz*. Cortéz, a so-called "bandit," became a symbol of resistance for the Chicano people of Texas. Dr. Américo Paredes, one of the foremost Chicano scholars, studied this *corrido* in the book *With a Pistol in His Hand*. This valuable study is an example of how the *corrido* is a rich source of historical information.

There is the *corrido*, *Registro de 1918 (The Draft of 1918)*. Written in Laredo, Texas, it expresses the sadness of the young man who will leave his family, his girlfriend and his city. He declares:

*Ya nos llevan a pelear
a distintas direcciones,
y nos llevan a pelear
con diferentes naciones.*

*Now they're taking us to fight
in different directions,
and they're taking us to fight
against different nations.*

There is a *corrido* about the California flood in the Santa Clara Valley when the St. Francis Dam broke.

*El martes trece de marzo
del novecientos veintiocho,
es una fecha de luto
pa'l mexicano y pa'l pocho.*

*Tuesday, the thirteenth of March
of nineteen hundred and twenty-eight,
is a day of mourning for
Mexicanos and Chicanos.*

Besides recording tragedies and commenting on them and besides celebrating heroes and protesting injustices, one of the main themes of *corridos* associated with the Southwest and the border area has

been the question of deportations of undocumented workers and the exploitation of the working class. In the 1930's, we had the *Corrido del Lavaplatos (The Ballad of the Dishwasher)*, *El Deportado (The Deportee)*, *La Emigración (The Emigration)* — this latter talks about a voluntary exodus of Mexicans back to Mexico due to the discrimination they suffered in this country.

More recently, a very popular *corrido* among undocumented Mexican workers has been the *Corrido de los Mojados (Ballad of the Wetbacks)*, sung by the famous Alegres de Terán, which says:

*Porque somos los mojados
siempre nos busca la ley,
porque andamos ilegales
y no sabemos inglés
la migra terca a sacarnos
y nosotros a volver.*

*Because we are the wetbacks
the law is always after us,
because we are illegals
and can't speak English
the migra stubbornly kicks us out
and we stubbornly return.*

There is the *Corrido de César Chávez, El Corrido del Troquero (Ballad of the Trucker)*, and hundreds and hundreds more of these gems of Chicano and Mexican popular culture. Singers and musicians in the Chicano Movement have much to learn from the *corridistas*, past and present, and from the original southwestern Tex-Mex style. Their material is always inspired by the actual conditions and events experienced by the working people, and expressed with powerful clarity and simplicity.

It is very important for Chicano musicians to continue singing about the struggles of *la Raza* in this country and to continue the development of a style born of our experience. This is of great political importance because no people can survive without their culture, and no one can lead the movement of a people without having a profound understanding of its popular culture. ¡Ajúa!

**Carlos
Morales:
Chicano Artist**

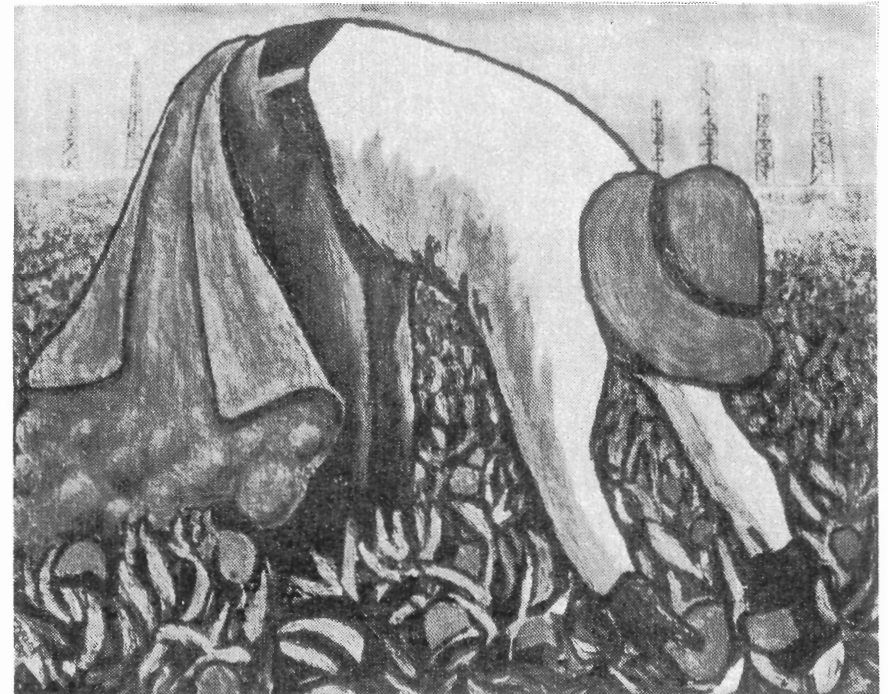


Carlos Morales is a Chicano painter and muralist who has drawn his inspiration from the experience of the lives of his people. He received his formal training at the California College of Arts and Crafts, and plans on teaching on a high school level. Speaking of his experiences in college, he says, "The whole concept of art is from a bourgeois perspective. The focus is on the principles and elements; balance, rhythm, order and composition. No attention is given to the subject, what the content of art is or should be. For example, my painting of migrant field workers was critiqued and the whole discussion was on the balance, order and arrangement, without any comment on the depiction of the workers and how the paintings reflect real life."

"But this is the state of art training in America. It is very alienating and racist. Self-expression is what is defined as creative and legitimate. The main weakness in today's mainstream art is that it speaks only to a minority of the people, many times only to the artist, him or herself. Third World art and artists are segregated and seen as peripheral."

"For instance, very little is taught of the Mexican muralists who were inspired by the Mexican Revolution and in turn generated a revolution in art. With their public murals they developed access for millions of people to creative expression of their own lives and history, as well as a glimpse of what the future might be."

"In teaching art I plan on giving students a perspective on art and painting, not just copying what I'm doing or someone else is doing."



Destinario: Patrón

Remitente: Un obrero en huelga

Patrón,
Usted sinceramente se pregunta
el porqué de los paros y las huelgas
concluyendo a sus dudas llanamente
que el motivo es mi inclinación
a la subversión y a la flojera.

Pero Patrón,
permítame decirle
que con esa simplista deducción me ha demostrado
que Usted
que trata de mostrarse a mis ojos infalible
a pesar de su infalibilidad
se ha equivocado.

Ha de saber Patrón
que la primera vez
la huelga no se hace por conciencia,
es el hambre y también
patrón
su intransigencia
lo que nos empuja a la acción
impreparados.

Yo creía
igual que Usted
que hacer huelga era dedicarse a la flojera.
Nada más falso.

Ha de saber Patrón que las tareas
son duras y pesadas
a veces más
que las de la fábrica en regular faena.

¿Porqué entonces en la huelga laboro con entrega?
Porque aprendí
que amo el trabajo
pero no el que Usted me usurpa día a día
amo el que construye mundos nuevos,
el que no me quitan
el que comparto
con mis hermanos de clase
los obreros.

Patrón
nuevamente ha fallado
al pensar que durante la huelga
comemos fácil
al andar "boteando".
No está Usted para saberlo
ni yo para contarle
pero con lo que se junta
a veces ni para frijoles da.
Ya le debo al tendero
a mi compadre y a mi hermano.

¿Entonces porqué hacemos huelga?
y yo respondo interrogando:
¿Conoce Usted lo que es vivir
rogando a Dios y con el mazo dando?

Ha de saber Patrón
que a pesar de las privaciones
amo ésta mi primera huelga;
triunfe o pierda yo ya gané

porque Usted
patrón
que me orilló a ella
me ayudó a tener conciencia de mi fuerza.

Sí, Usted
me ha descubierto mi valía;
yo
que no soy más que una pieza
de sus piezas
ahora tan solo porque estoy en huelga
valgo cientos, miles, millones.
¿No me entiende?

Patrón
¿cuánto ha gastado en esquirolas?
¿cuánto está dispuesto a pagar
para que traicionemos al colega?
Tan fuerte soy
que ha tenido que pagar cantidades millonarias
para que por mí se vendan

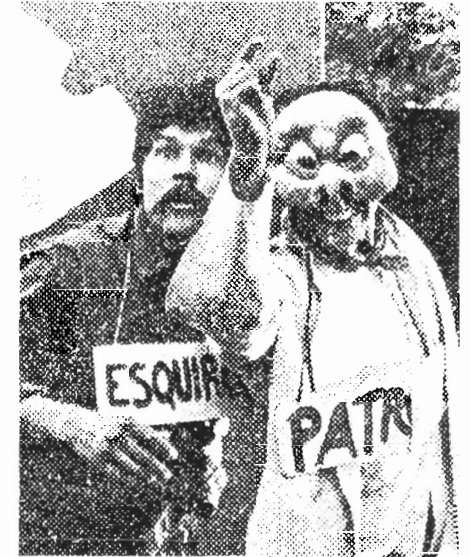
funcionarios, policías, sinvergüenzas.
 ¿Acaso no le han dolido
 el pago de miles y miles de palabras
 que contra mí ha tenido que editar su prensa?
 Tan grande es mi poder
 que Usted
 patrón
 preferirá cerrar la fábrica
 antes que permitir que los obreros
 ejerzamos nuestra fuerza
 con conciencia.

Patrón,
 seguramente Usted no sabe
 que con sus golpes, asesinatos y despidos
 he tenido que buscar la sombra que me ampare
 y ahí cauteloso como zorra
 he conocido a miles que conspiran;
 en su represión
 he aprendido a leer la palabra amigo
 a amar al compañero
 sin fijarme en sus ropas sucias y apariencias
 valorando su decisión de luchar, de sufrir
 de gozar conmigo.

Patrón
 la huelga me ha enseñado a faltarle el respeto,
 sí, a Usted . . .
 mejor dicho a ti
 que tratas de esconder tras ropas finas
 tras perfumes
 el olor que deja la putrefacción
 de tu cuerpo y de tu clase.
 Patrón
 sepulturero en vida
 autoenterrador de carroña
 tendrás que sucumbir
 ese es tu futuro
 no hay para ti,
 patrón,
 alternativa.

El Teatro Campesino

Two anti-war
 plays celebrate
 20th anniversary



El Teatro Campesino is probably the best known Chicano *teatro* group in the country. It had its birth on the picket lines of *la huelga*, and it was from the struggle of the farm workers and the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) that Teatro Campesino drew its inspiration. In the early 1970's, Teatro Campesino departed from the UFW and began to present plays and musical presentations on issues affecting the entire Chicano people. Its best known works are its most recent – *Corridos* and the film *Zoot Suit*. Opposition to the national oppression of the Chicano people remains the springboard for its works and the principal basis for its continued survival.

In recent years, Teatro Campesino has placed emphasis on the production of commercial plays, such as *Corridos*, which have broadened its appeal and base of support. At the same time, Teatro Campesino has received criticism from within the Chicano Movement for ignoring its roots and sacrificing the power and optimism of its earlier works for "professionalism." It is all the more significant that on the 20th anniversary of the Teatro Campesino, founder Luis Valdez has decided to return to earlier works which were written and performed at the height of the political movements of the mid-1960's.

The Dark Root of a Scream and *Soldado Razo*, written by Luis Valdez and directed by Tony Curiel, deal with the draft, an unjust war in a foreign land, and the daily oppression of the Chicano people. They are particularly timely today, as Reagan steps up military aggression in Central America. Once again, Chicano youth are faced with the possibility of the draft and of imperialist wars fought over the pretext of defending the country from the "dangers of communism." They underscore the tragedy of Chicano youth dying in a war allegedly fought to protect the "freedom and democracy" which are denied them in their own country.

Valdez explains the choice of these plays: "El Teatro Campesino remains committed to the ideals that brought it into being. We reaffirm the dreams of 1965, acknowledging that we have all changed, evolved and matured through the years, but we still believe that artists achieve their finest expressions in the context of social, political and cultural struggles."

Rubén Garfías is masterful as "Muerte" (Death), the narrator of the one-act play, *Soldado Razo*. Johnny (Ricardo "Slic Ric" Salinas) is the young Chicano soldier who wants so much to impress his girlfriend Celia (Oralia "La La" Polendo). Johnny proposes to Celia the night before he reports for duty.

His mother, Rosemary Ramos, worries that Johnny will not return from Viet Nam, a fear that turns to terror when she sees "Muerte" standing near the chair where Johnny proposed to Celia. Johnny's father, played by Juan Felipe Herrera, stumbles into the house drunk from "celebrating" the fact that his son is "becoming a man" by joining the Army. He wants so much to tell Johnny of the dangers of war, lessons he learned so well in Korea.

But he cannot communicate with his son. Johnny imagines himself a hero, returning to flags and music – maybe even wounded, with a Purple Heart. "Muerte" laughs, for Johnny will return – to the music of taps and a flag draped over his coffin. His mother and girlfriend weep at his funeral. Johnny has chosen the Army as a path out of the barrio, but his only exit is death.

In the second play, *The Dark Root of a Scream*, the same theme is pursued. This time the protagonist, "Indio," has already died. His coffin lies at the altar of his local church as his

family and friends prepare for the rosary. Indio was a Chicano activist, a leader of his community who was drafted into the Army. Indio's friends describe how he fought for his people.

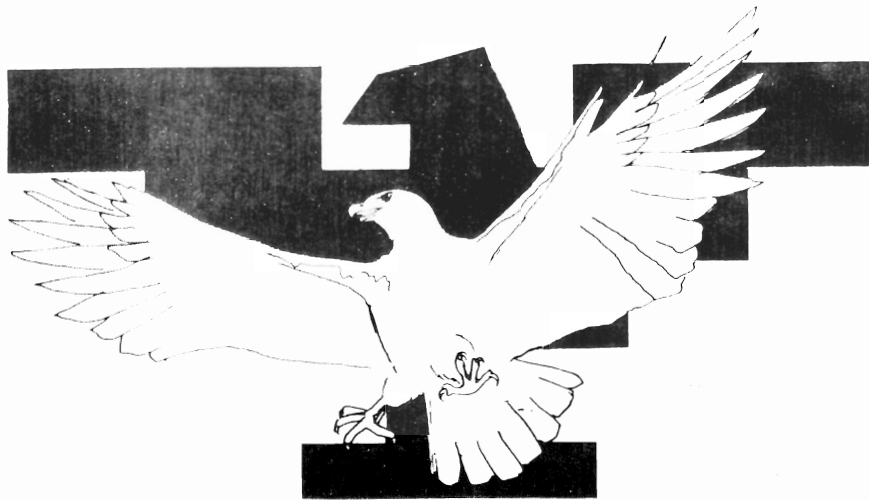
On the other side of the stage, Indio's girlfriend argues with the hypocritical Anglo priest, played by Ken Hicks, who tells her that Indio was a racist who preached separatism. Indio's girlfriend is angered and tells the priest that Indio had pride in his people and fought for his beliefs just as had Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec god for whom he was named. The play ends with a mystical reference to Quetzalcoatl's pledge to one day return to his people, as Indio's mother opens his coffin and finds an Aztec robe and Indio's heart sacrificed in a war that Indio opposed.

The plays are well-acted and powerfully presented. Their pace is heightened by the lighting, props and makeup. Although there was never any introduction to the plays nor parallels drawn to the current situation, the anti-war message of the plays comes through clearly.

Yet, the presentations could have been strengthened. The plays provide no explanation of the causes of the Viet Nam War. Imperialism is never targeted as the source of oppression of the Chicano people and the root cause of the war in Viet Nam. Also, the feeling of a strong Chicano Movement rising up is lacking, although both plays are products of that movement. There is simply death and the suffering of the loved ones left to mourn the dead.

Still, the plays are important parts of the history of the Chicano Movement. These plays are still of value politically and should be updated to make them even more powerful weapons in the struggle for Chicano liberation and socialism.

The best form of tribute is to continue to produce new plays, plays which not only point out oppression and exploitation but which offer hope and optimism, plays which inspire the people to take up struggle. It is to these roots which I hope Teatro Campesino will return to help train and inspire waves of activists as well as actors.



Es Nuestra Cosa / It's our thing

Bill Gallegos

An empty sky.

Eagle's solitary arc . . .
swoops/climbs, higher
higher towards the sun.

Strings of chiles hanging on porches —
wrinkled rubies blowing gently in the breeze of
Aztlán summer.

'buela putting up the wash, clothespins
in her teeth.

Slow
limping

steps . . .

repeating a ritual borne from four generations of children.
Grandfather. Worked on the railroad for 40 years.
He swung the pick. Cleaned the tracks.

Watched the switches as the piercing beam
of the engine broke the darkness before dawn in Aguilar.

Oh, how they worked that man. To them
he was not a man.

A mule maybe. A draft animal.
60 hours a week. 80 hours.

"He has a family." "He needs time to rest."

There is no rest. He was not put here to enjoy
the sounds of life. He cannot taste the bite and beauty
of his chile.

"this is a business we're running here!"

Goddamn guy don't speak no english anyway — so what the hell
does he know?

He knows.

He knows what life

is.

He knows what life

should be.

60 hours a week. 80 hours a week. 40 years.

A long time for hatred to burn.

A long, long time for hatred to consume the soul.

But he is bilingual now. He can hate in Spanish and English.

You cannot win. You cannot steal the essence of his life.
He has been here

for a thousand years. He has worn
the headress of war. He has spoken the magical words.

He has ridden with Mano Negra. Marched with Cortina.

He tore up your goddamn track with Las Gorras Blancas.

You cannot win.

We cannot lose. Thousands of years of hatred/resistance/struggle.
beauty and life run through our veins.

We are not the vultures. We don't sit atop a rotting empire hated
by the world. We are not the angels of death.

Corporate America, you can never know the power of the eagle.

A phantom

flashing across the sun.

It lives forever — a golden symbol that Aztlán will be free.

That all our children, all our 'buelos, all of us

will sing, all of us will fight.

You cannot win.

We cannot lose.



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