

Chicano/Mexicano Freedom Movements

1. In the opening to the section in the film on the Chicano/Mexicano movements, the narrator gives a very brief summary of the taking of a large part of Mexico by the U.S. military during the U.S. Mexico war from 1846–1848, which followed the annexation of Texas by the U.S. in 1845.

“Much of the Southwest, including Texas, California, Colorado and other states were part of Mexico until the Mexican-American war in the late 1840s. When the US military stole the land from Mexico. This history of conquest, the idea of an occupied land and a culture of resistance have played a central role in the ongoing struggles of Chicano/Mexicano peoples.”

2. Briefly explain the idea of “manifest destiny” as a justification used by the U.S government and press for US territorial expansion. In the 1840s the term sought to justify westward expansion into such areas such as Texas, Oregon, and California. It was used with the chauvinistic sense that of a divinely inspired mission and was later applied to American interests in the Caribbean and the Pacific, as an apologia for imperialism. Critics past and present see “manifest destiny” as a thinly veiled attempt to put an acceptable face on taking lands from other peoples. While the “mission” was often described as improving the lot of “backward peoples,” primary motivations were (and are) greed for natural resources, domination, and control.

Optional: You could mention that some early anti-imperialists opposed the war—most famously Henry David Thoreau who refused to pay poll taxes, received a jail sentence, and wrote his famous essay "Civil Disobedience" in protest of the Mexican War. Emerson, Lowell and other Northern abolitionists saw the war as an attempt to expand territory of the Southern slave power, though others who opposed it also harbored racist attitudes toward Mexico and Mexicans. Joshua Giddings led a group of dissenters in Washington D.C., calling the war "an aggressive, unholy, and unjust war," and voting against supplying soldiers and weapons. He said: “In the murder of Mexicans upon their own soil, or in robbing them of their country, I can take no part either now or here-after. The guilt of these crimes must rest on others. I will not participate in them.”

3. Bring the discussion up to recent history, from the 1960s on. The film’s narrator summarizes:

In the 1960s, amidst demands in the farm worker fields for immigrant rights, on campuses, and in city barrios, the movement gathered strength and gave birth to dynamic leaders. Less well known than some of the other crimes of COINTELPRO are those committed against the Chicano/Mexicano movements.”

4. Explain that for the Chicano/Mexicano movement the rise in social protest during the 1960s was quite diverse, a panorama of different organizations and settings. Probably the most well known is the establishment of the United Farm Workers Union, led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. You may want to add that while many California farmworkers at that time were and still are of Mexican descent, one of the most important forces in the early establishment of the union were already organized Filipino workers.

5. Point out that although the film focuses on FBI, police, and rightwing attacks that have received very little attention, including explosions that killed six student leaders in Boulder, Colorado and the assassination of Ricardo Falcon, COINTELPRO, as well as other government

agencies and allied police “red squads” exercised all the elements of their illegal tactics against the full range of Chicano/Mexicano movements, including more moderate organizations and famous leaders, such as the United Farm Workers Union, led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, and the Colorado Crusade for Justice, led by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales.

5. Assign students research projects on the diversity of Chicano/Mexicano movement. When they are done, have a full class discussion on the diversity and accomplishments of the various organizations and the accomplishments of the movement. Consider making a class dramatic presentation to other classes, designing a website, or some other involving class project.

6. Ask the class to consider how what they have learned relates to current issues of immigration, especially relating to people from Mexico and Central America. You could discuss how, when economic crisis and depression deepens in the US, there has been a tendency to scapegoat immigrant workers, and to use racist slurs against Mexicans to divide poor and working people. You could explain and discuss the current odious example of mis-rulers of the state of Arizona.

7. Below is a list of possible individuals/topics/organizations. You may want to add some that relate especially to your region or your students’ interests. We provide some selected web links for some of the possible topics, but there are many others, as well as many excellent books and articles, among them the works of Elizabeth “Betita” Martinez, one of the people students could research, and an advisor on the film. Particularly helpful might be her *500 Years of Chicana Women's History*, the bilingual *500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures*, and an educational video *¡Viva la Causa! 500 Years of Chicano History*. The Wikipedia entry is an excellent one: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Mart%C3%ADnez For advanced students, an article on the New Mexico movement: <http://monthlyreview.org/0702martinez.htm>

Here are suggestions for online resources and information on organizations, topics, and individuals. There are many more, as well as many excellent books, poems, novels, and plays by people whose lives were changed by the rise of the movement.

General entry on the Chicano movement, many links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicano_Movement

Another encyclopedia-type entry:

http://wapedia.mobi/en/Chicano_Movement

Chicano movement timeline—Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project

http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/mecha_timeline.htm

Concept of protest lesson plan, also from this site:

http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/teach_protest.htm

This site includes this good summary introduction: “Civil rights activism by people of Latin American descent dates back to United States conquest and annexation of northern Mexico in 1848. In response to severe racism and forms of segregation that rivaled the Jim Crow South, Mexican Americans in what is now the American southwest used the courts, labor unions, and defense organizations like the League of United Latin American Citizens to fight for basic rights. In the late 1960s, these struggles took new forms as young activists organized themselves into a movement that asserted new “Chicano” and “Chicana” identities, that united Mexican Americans and Mexicans, Indian and Hispanic heritages into a common, transnational culture and community, or “Raza.” Taking inspiration from Caesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers movement, but linking farmworker struggles with movements for justice in cities and schools, the Chicano/a movement developed strong and uncompromising tactics that brought it visibility and important victories.”

- Good general summary of COINTELPRO and the Chicano movement. The article begins:

“The FBI records that have been released do not indicate the extent to which official COINTELPRO operations were deployed against Chicano and Chicana organizations. Yet the history of the most prominent and militant groups of the Chicano/a movement of the 1960s and 1970s is marked by a systematic campaign of intimidation and disruption by FBI operatives. In fact the vast majority of if not all prominent Chicano and Chicana civil rights and political organizations were subject to FBI surveillance.

<http://www.jrank.org/cultures/pages/3731/COINTELPRO.html>

The above site also states: “COINTELPRO also initiated illegal infiltration and surveillance of the United Farm Workers Union and its founder, César Chávez, beginning in 1965. The UFW, which was locked in a battle for survival with California growers, was infiltrated by FBI agents, who generated field reports to discredit the organization and sought to link it with Mexican Communist organizations. The FBI shared information with the growers and purposefully failed to investigate the criminal actions of the growers against the union and its impoverished members. The aggressive and extensive covert actions of the FBI and police authorities against dissident Chicano/a organizations severely weakened the vibrant Chicano/a Movement and made its dream of achieving social justice for this portion of the American population elusive.”

- The United Farm Workers Union (UFW):

There is of course a great deal of information available on Cesar Chavez and the UFW, and Dolores Huerta remains an active participant in many struggles. Students could: learn more about the life and accomplishments of Dolores Huerta; find out about the unity between Filipino and Mexican workers (see “What happened when Mexicans and Filipinos joined together” at <http://www.ufw.org/page.php?menu=research&inc=history/04.html>); learn about the grape boycott; find out more about the current struggles against pesticides in fields. This is the official website for the UFW is: <http://www.ufw.org/>

This is a link to a pdf on “The FBI’s secret file on César Chávez”

www.farmworkermovement.org/ufwarchives/FBI-CEC/fbi_chavez.pdf

NOTE: The FBI has online for pdf download a number of its Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) files on individuals and organizations, including of course numerous redactions (darkening out information so it cannot be read). Here is a link to a page that shows what is currently posted on César Chávez and the United Farm Workers.

<http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/chavez.htm>

- Seis de Boulder, Ricardo Falcon, and Chicano Student Movement in General

Los Seis de Boulder:

<http://www.colorado.edu/StudentGroups/UMAS-MECHA/los6.html>

Summary of some of the circumstances of Los Seis by librarian Carol Taylor

http://www.dailycamera.com/ci_13121120?IADID=Search%20%3Ca%20href=

Interesting article, from Greeley Colorado newspaper, Ricardo Falcón and other history

<http://www.greeleytribune.com/article/20010404/WORLDSAPART/112310252>

University of Texas at El Paso, Interview # 91.2, of film participant Priscilla Falcón, press conference transcript, about the murder of her husband, Ricardo Falcón

<http://www.google.com/search?hl=&q=the+day+ricardo+falcon+died&sourceid=navclient-ff&ie=UTF-8&aq=3&oq=>

The Death of Ricardo Falcón, excerpt from *The Crusade for Justice*, by Ernesto Vigil

<http://www.judybaca.com/dia/text/falcon.html>

Commemoration of Ricardo Falcón:

<http://labloga.blogspot.com/2005/08/movement.html>

Wikipedia article on Chicano student movement with many links:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MEChA>

The National Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán (M.E.Ch.A.)

<http://www.nationalmecha.org/>

- The Crusade for Justice and Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales
(Ricardo Romero—a film participant was one of the founders of Crusade for Justice)
Wikipedia article on Corky Gonzales
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodolfo_Gonzales
Information on the history of the organization and its activities:
<http://www.jrank.org/cultures/pages/3763/Crusade-Justice.html>
Gonzales biography and some Crusade’s alliances:
<http://www.jrank.org/cultures/pages/3918/Rodolfo-Corky-Gonz%C3%A1les.html>
Chicano activist Luis Martinez, killed in a police raid on Crusade offices:
<http://raind.wordpress.com/2009/03/28/remember-luis-junior-martinez/>

Extension Idea: You may want to have the class listen to and then write an essay about a famous poem by one of the Chicano leaders of the 1960s—Corky Gonzales, who headed The Crusade for Justice in Colorado. His poem “I Am Joaquin” is one of the most powerful cultural expressions of this movement. The class could hear a recitation of the two parts of this poem, with graphics and music on YouTube:

Part 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6M6qOG2O-o>

Part 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sCae3qYm9Y&feature=related>

- Reies López Tijerina and Alianza Federal de los Mercedes, land grant movement. (See an autobiography, *They Called Me "King Tiger": My Struggle for the Land and Our Rights.*)
Brief biography:
<http://www.jrank.org/cultures/pages/4511/Reies-L%C3%B3pez-Tijerina.html>
Another brief biography:
<http://borderzine.com/2009/07/reies-lopez-tijerina-a-chicano-leader%E2%80%99s-lifetime-of-achievement-is-honored/>
The Tierra Amarilla Courthouse Raid, with video, and information on William Kunstler as one of the attorneys for Tijerina:
<http://www.examiner.com/culture-events-in-albuquerque/little-known-fact-controversial-attorney-kunstler-represented-reies-lopez-tijerina-new-mexico>

- La Raza Unida Party
Wikipedia entry:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raza_Unida_Party
Article by Professor Emeritus Carlos Muñoz (UC Berkeley) on the 40th Anniversary of La Raza Unida Party in Texas.
<http://doscentavos.net/2010/01/18/celebrating-40-years-la-raza-unida-party/>

- Chicano Moratorium/Rubén Salazar
 - Wikipedia entry, includes information on the four people killed during this famous Chicano protest of the war in Vietnam
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicano_Moratorium
 - Fortieth anniversary website:
<http://chicanomoratorium.org/>
 - Wikipedia on Rubén Salazar
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rub%C3%A9n_Salazar
 - Democracy Now Salazar remembrance:
http://www.democracynow.org/2005/2/24/remembering_latino_journalist_ruben_salazar_who
 - Uprising Radio, on 40th anniversary calls for investigation of the events
<http://uprisingradio.org/home/?p=15388>
 - YouTube: Questions Cloud Salazar Slaying
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CK6ABYHBTHA>

- MALDEF (The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund), now described as The Latino Legal Voice for Civil Rights in America
<http://www.maldef.org/>

- Brown/Black Berets
<http://www.jrank.org/cultures/pages/3667/Brown-Berets.html>
Excellent interview with Carlos Montes, co-founder of the Brown Berets in 1967:
<http://www.fightbacknews.org/2003winter/brownberets.htm>
The symbol of the beret and The Brown Beret 12-point program:
<http://blogs.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendId=314916154&blogId=369454519>

- Concept of Aztlán
<http://science.jrank.org/pages/7521/Aztl-n.html>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztl%C3%A1n>

- El Teatro Campesino
<http://www.elteatrocampesino.com/>
Interview with founder of ETC, Luis Valdez
http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/09/el_teatro_campe.php
Video interview:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gt-T5MEaKaw>

- El Grito del Norte, newspaper in New Mexico
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88084211/>

- Review of the film: Chicano! *History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*.
Video. NLCC Educational Media, 1996.
<http://www.albany.edu/jmmh/vol3/chicano/chicano.html>