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A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority

April, 1995

Mobilizing Against White Backlash

Where Prop. 187 Lost: Lessons from the San Francisco Campaign

JAN ADAMS

Although approved by California voters last November, Proposition 187 is currently enjoined thanks to multiple legal challenges making their slow way through the courts. Analysis of the electoral campaign suggests that the anti-immigrant measure won because its proponents were able to mobilize the racial anxieties of voting Californians. This overwhelmingly white group was largely unmoved by the "official" opposition campaign, which also used messages that played on white fears.

Where shifts in voter opinion did occur, they were the result of grassroots efforts that focused on organizing communities of color. Against electoral orthodoxy that assumes the highest returns come from courting liberal whites, the community-based campaigns in northern California organized Latino and Asian constituencies to lead a general progressive sweep against the measure. This article describes the "official" and grassroots electoral campaigns against Prop. 187, as well as the many successor resistance organizations that currently set the context for progressive activism in California.



In protest of Prop. 187, students from Parlier Middle School and Porterville High School stage an election-day walkout, Porterville, California. Photo: © 1994 Thor Swift/Impact Visuals.

During the nineties California will shift from having a white majority population to a majority of people of color, a result of both in-migration from other states and countries and higher birthrates in communities of color. As the Right intensifies its race-based rhetoric in almost every arena in the U.S., this change in population has come to be seen by a majority of white voters as a kind of menacing demo-

graphic earthquake. Meanwhile, the registered electorate (as opposed to the population as a whole) remains 76 percent white. Proposition 187 (the "Illegal Aliens" measure as the official ballot summary named the law denying health care, social services and education to undocumented residents and their children) served as the perfect tool to orga-

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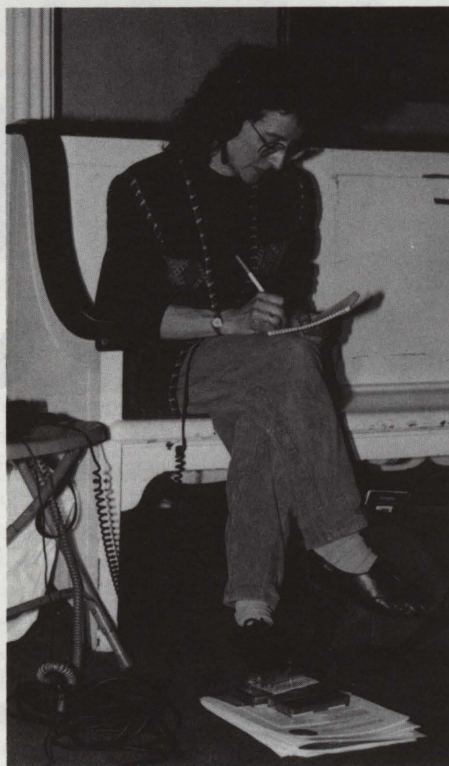
Goodbye & Thanks

Dear Resisters,

I'm writing from the snow-blanketed mountain retreat I've fled to, making my escape from another Boston winter of parking wars and ice-slush-sleet-salt streets. (Special thanks to newsletter volunteer Frank Adams for leading me to this place.) I left Boston and my job as the RESIST newsletter editor because I was facing near burn-out after too many years of too many jobs (I've worked as a freelance radio producer and had numerous other part-time jobs all the years I've been at RESIST). I hope that some time away and a chance to reflect will enable me to find renewed motivation for the work I love and which needs to be done.

I want to express my deep appreciation to all the RESIST readers and supporters who have made my job satisfying over the past eight years. It has been a great privilege to work for an organization whose principles I could so wholly support, and where I could fully express my own values and beliefs. I learned an enormous amount while on this job, particularly from all the authors whose articles I solicited. Their passion and commitment was a great source of inspiration, and our interaction was my alternative school for learning the ropes of the editorial relationship. I especially appreciate all those who told me they felt their articles were better as a result!

Looking through my file of 80 (count 'em!) back issues from my tenure, I am proud of most of them: the articles about women poultry workers organizing in North Carolina; the Jewish Left in Israel; the making of the prison magazine *Odyssey*; anti-war activists in Serbia; human rights organizing in Mexico; the context for the plebiscite on the political status of Puerto Rico; speaking up for children's rights; the Coalition for Positive Sexuality; and, though I can't take personal credit for it, the special issue on youth writing by guest editor Rachel Martin. I also had the opportunity to write several articles myself, including



Tatiana Schreiber. Photo: Lise Beane

those on community radio in Nicaragua, and on Jewish-feminist activists organizing against the occupation of Palestine. Finally, I co-authored several articles on issues close to my heart: women in prison, and breast cancer and the environment.

When I started I didn't think I knew how to be an editor, but Nancy Wechsler encouraged me to apply for the job anyway. She said something like, "Do you think white men don't apply for jobs just because they don't know how to do them?" So I applied, and it worked. I now know how to do it. I think. Anyway, it's onward to something else. I hope to do more writing, and possibly free-lance editing of longer manuscripts—and I'm open to ideas! Once again, I want to thank all the folks who've contributed to RESIST and the newsletter, as well as the staff, Board, volunteers, our able typesetter, Wayne Curtis, and my good friends at Red Sun Press. I hope to keep in touch with many of you as we all find ways to resist the truly illegitimate authority now in place in the land....

Peace,
Tatiana Schreiber

The War Against the Poor:

A Defense Manual

The Center for Popular Economics has produced a packet of accessible, lively readings about the current assault on poor women. Written by progressive, feminist economists, the packet debunks welfare myths, provides graphs and facts about poverty, wealth and welfare reform — and even includes a classroom quiz. The packet is selling for \$4.00, and all proceeds will be used to help finance a larger pamphlet project called *The War Against the Poor: A Defense Manual*. Send checks to the Center for Popular Economics, Box 785, Amherst MA 01004.




ILLEGITIMATE AUTHORITY

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nize the expression of white fear. Overall, Prop. 187 won with 59 percent of votes cast.

In a poll done by the *Los Angeles Times* last May, 64 percent of white voters supported the measure; exit polls on November 8 showed 63 percent of whites voting "yes." The nearly \$2 million spent by opponents, their lengthy list of "no" endorsers from mainstream religious, labor, community groups and both political parties, and negative recommendations by every major newspaper in the state had almost no affect on white voters.

Initially, no population group opposed the measure. Latinos came the closest, registering only 52 percent support. Both Asian Americans and African Americans heavily favored Prop. 187. On November 8, however, 77 percent of Latinos voted against the measure and were joined in opposition by 53 percent of Asian American and African American voters. Although turnout was not as high among people of color as among whites (81 percent of voters were white, exceeding the white proportion of the registered electorate), there had been a significant shift in communities of color.

Unfortunately, this shift alone does not point to any presently viable electoral strategy for defeating such an initiative. Ignatius Bau of the San Francisco Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights has calculated that even if every potentially eligible person of color were registered, and voted in concert with the 77 percent Latino "no" vote, Prop. 187 would still have passed! In the immediate term, even an unimaginably successful mobilization of communities of color in the state where numerically people of color are becoming the majority would not be enough to win an election.

Elections as an Arena of Progressive Struggle

Most progressive people in this country have opted out of organizing around electoral campaigns. In addition to being shut out by the right and center political monopoly (otherwise known as the Republicans and Democrats) and by the power of money we don't have, we also find election campaigns themselves dis-

Thousands of Latinos march against Proposition 187 in Washington, DC, October 22, 1994. Photo © 1994 Rick Reinhard/Impact Visuals.



tasteful. Most are ideologically ambiguous, staffed far more by the politically and personally ambitious than by people committed to advancing a progressive agenda. They are usually organized hierarchically and run with little concern for process: tremendous amounts of work are demanded with little explanation or discussion; tempers flare; those who shout the loudest tend to carry the day.

Indeed, for many progressives, elections seem to be scarcely about real politics at all. Instead of engaging people in dialogue and winning them to our point of view, election campaigns simply seek to get people to mark the right box or pull the right lever once, on one day, and then forget all about it the next. If this desired result can be achieved most cheaply by confusing voters, conventional electoral tactical wisdom treats that as just fine. Given that the majority of the minority who vote in U.S. elections actually seem to prefer to approach voting in

this shallow manner (studies show that most voters try to ignore the whole circus and make up their minds in the last two weeks), it is hard for progressives who care about education and empowerment to commit ourselves to electoral campaigns. By and large we haven't done much of this work and when a conjunction of necessity and conscience forces us to, as in the Prop. 187 campaign and in efforts to defeat anti-gay initiatives across the country, we have to learn a whole new playing field and set of rules.

Who Gets to be the Campaign?

In a huge state like California, the first question that arises in any defensive statewide initiative campaign is "who gets to be the campaign?" Strange as it may seem, even when the prospects for victory appear hopelessly bleak as in the Prop. 187 situation, the question is hotly con-

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tested because there is so much money and so much locally important political influence at stake. The usual result of this contest about legitimacy, in a pattern set in California as far back as the anti-gay Briggs Initiative in 1978, has been for there to be a conventional consultant-run, media-heavy, high dollar campaign sponsored by Democratic Party bigwigs

er Latino, Asian, civil rights and immigrant advocate groups in opposition; it had some success in forging a coalition effort in northern California, but was a much less significant force in other areas of the state.

All the grassroots campaigns suffered from lack of electoral expertise. At the simplest level, this meant that they didn't come to fight Prop. 187 with the under-

tactics of the Taxpayers' campaign, all were influenced to varying degrees by the Taxpayers' demand that opponents restrict themselves to whitebread messages. As a result, the grassroots campaigns vacillated, neither explicitly rejecting, nor ever fully adopting the messages that trashed their own communities and interests. On some days, they sounded like the Taxpayers and on others like the advocates for children, civil rights, and a multi-cultural California, which in fact they were.

For most voters the grassroots campaigns probably were invisible and inaudible, because California is simply so big and the mass media so pervasive. Yet it seems that what swing there was against the proposition occurred because of this work. Along with protest activity, the grassroots efforts energized communities of color. Between the early polls and the election, Latinos shifted from marginal opposition to more than three quarters against; Asians and African Americans both shifted from support to marginal opposition. In the limited geographical areas where a white gay vote is identifiable and somewhat measurable, the grassroots organizing to assert a human rights message demonstrably won this sector. Grassroots activity also deeply engaged white educators and social service providers. None of these constituencies add up to enough voters to win a statewide campaign, but they are the sectors where there was measurable activity and voters apparently changed their minds.

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Technical electoral "wisdom" maintains that campaign messages must be directed at convincing liberal whites; people of color are expected to jump automatically on the white progressive bandwagon.
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and some unions. Traditionally, such campaigns have coexisted uncomfortably with various grassroots efforts of wildly varying potency.

In the recent electoral season, the high end campaign was called Taxpayers United against Prop. 187. Driven by the sort of terrible polling I've outlined and by focus groups which showed that 90 percent of Californians believe that immigration is a serious problem, the Taxpayers conceded the problematic nature of immigration, but found something even more unpopular than "illegal" immigrants to blame, namely the federal government for failing to police the border adequately. A second set of Taxpayer messages played on the fears of anxious white voters: rampaging gangs of (brown) children would be pushed out of the schools; untreated "illegals" would spread tuberculosis; and, the staple of anti-initiative campaigns, it would all lead to bureaucracy and cost too much.

Naturally, many Californians found the Taxpayers campaign repugnant. In response, a large number of grassroots campaigns against the initiative sprang up in communities across the state. In Los Angeles, the Roman Catholic archdiocese did parish-level organizing, while SEIU 660 coordinated the grassroots Los Angeles Organizing Committee. The Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights attempted to coordinate statewide religious opposition. Californians United Against Prop. 187 aimed to bring togeth-

standing that what counts in an election is votes, not general popular opinion, and that the electorate is a very different set of people than either articulate opinion makers or all Californians.

These grassroots campaigns consequently could not envision how to carry their message beyond their core constituencies. A great deal of marching and protesting by opponents of 187 did not change voters' minds. On the other hand, there is no evidence to support the contention of the Taxpayers' campaign that marches and student walkouts "turned off" white voters. In addition, this kind of activism was an important way for threatened communities to express perfectly justifiable outrage, and it did raise the visibility of the threat in the groups under attack.

Recognition that Prop. 187 was motivated by racism certainly turned Latino opinion around. Winning huge majorities in this community doesn't add up to much, however, because the statewide Latino vote remains a tiny 8-10 percent of the electorate. (Hopefully the movement toward electoral engagement begun because of Prop. 187 will carry dividends for Latinos in the future; eventually sheer numbers have to weigh in—Latinos are 25 percent of California's population today and will be an absolute majority in 30 to 40 years, even if immigrants were stopped today.)

While the grassroots anti-187 campaigns did diverge from the "approved"

Where "No" Won: the San Francisco Experience

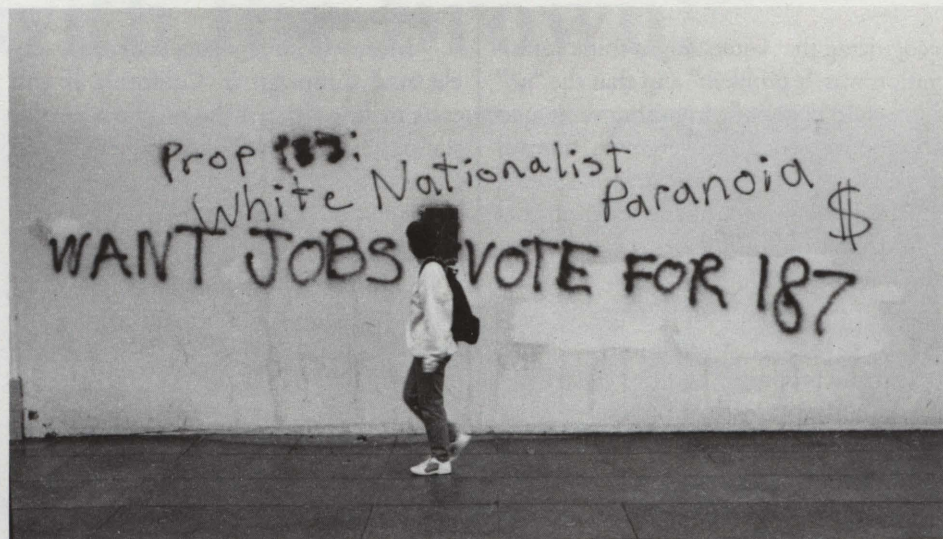
Given this extremely bleak analysis, it is surprising that Prop. 187 opponents carried the day anywhere. In fact, they won in eight northern California counties (Alameda, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Sonoma and Yolo) and pulled close in two others (Contra Costa and Humboldt).

The greatest success was in San Francisco, where "No on 187" won 71 percent of the vote. Ninety-five percent of those voting cast ballots on the measure, ahead even of the 94 percent who voted in the Senate race between Dianne Feinstein and Michael Huffington and

well above the percentage who voted on the Single Payer Health Security initiative, Prop. 186 (90 percent) and the "Three Strikes You're Out" measure, Prop. 184 (88 percent). San Francisco's 71 percent "no" on Prop. 187 was well ahead of the "liberal" vote on the other two controversial initiatives: Prop. 186 won only 55 percent and "No on 184" pulled only 57 percent. In fact, the "No on 187" position won in every neighborhood, including the more conservative Marina, Pacific Heights, Sunset and Excelsior districts, where 186 lost and 184 won. Besides doing extremely well in the usual white progressive areas (e.g., 84 percent in the Inner Sunset, 81 percent in the largely gay Castro), the "no" vote was extremely high in the heavily Latino Mission District (83 percent), Chinatown (70 percent) and the African American stronghold of Bayview/Hunters Point (70 percent).

These results suggest that something more happened in San Francisco than merely the city's ordinary liberal voting. In San Francisco, Californians United Against Prop. 187 mounted an electoral-focused campaign designed to maximize voter turnout against the proposition through the strategy of concentrating available resources on raising the number of "no" votes from the Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander (Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese and Japanese American) communities. The assumption underlying the San Francisco Californians United strategy was that "ordinary" progressive electoral sectors (straight white liberals, the gay community, and sections of the African American community) would be swept along by large amounts of novel and extremely vital activity in the Latino and Asian communities.

This was a strategic innovation even in this most progressive of cities because technical electoral "wisdom" maintains that campaign messages must be directed at convincing liberal whites; people of color are expected to jump automatically on the white progressive bandwagon. In San Francisco, where even usually-strong gay grassroots candidacies were very slow to take off, the Californians United campaign was so energetic and attractive that it helped lead a broad progressive sweep



Graffiti on a wall in Berkeley, California, a few days before the November 8 vote on Proposition 187. Photo: © 1994 Alain McLaughlin/Impact Visuals.

in the city.

Tactics used in the San Francisco "No on 187" campaign included:

- **Starting early.** The campaign kicked off on August 13, a full month before most other electoral activity.
- **Forming a large and diverse steering committee.** New members were continually invited as new potential allies emerged. As many subgroups threatened by Prop. 187 tried unsuccessfully to launch their own separate campaigns, the local Californians United steering committee created a structure to coordinate, support, and bring together these efforts.
- **Actively seeking and involving all kinds of people with experience in political activity, not just elections.** Early recruits were predominantly white and many were gay, accurately mirroring the currently strong progressive electoral constituencies in San Francisco. But the campaign also recruited many activists whose experience was not in elections, especially veterans of 1980s organizing in solidarity with peoples' movements in Central America. As the campaign progressed, more and more volunteers came from Asian and Latino communities, exposing hundreds of new people to the nuts and bolts of electoral work.
- **Putting over a thousand people to work doing extremely concrete tasks designed to reach voters (not the public at large).** At first much of this work must

have looked unfocused; for example, a four-evening-a-week phone bank spent over a month just recruiting people from the volunteer lists of previous campaigns to make additional phone calls to recruit more people. This base-building paid off by delivering a trained corps of some 700 people who delivered 60,000 doorhangers over the last weekend and staffed phonebanks to make some 30,000 calls.

- **Creating widespread visibility for the "No on 187" effort.** The San Francisco campaign distributed nearly 20,000 house signs and 8,000 "No on 187" buttons. Volunteers began tabling on the streets and at public events in August and gradually spread their efforts beyond the city to northern San Mateo County. "No on 187" speakers appeared at hundreds of educational, neighborhood and professional events. The successful visibility campaign made it easy for uninformed voters to feel they were joining a ground swell of opposition by voting no and reassured the communities most threatened by Prop. 187 that an organized opposition campaign existed.
- **Avoiding head-on conflicts about message between the Taxpayers and the grassroots campaigns, but refusing to actually promote negative images of immigrants.** San Francisco campaign literature and speakers' trainings adopted a "soft" version of the Taxpayers' messages,

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recognizing that voters might think immigration was "a problem" and that the "no" side would benefit from raising voter anxiety about costs and overgrown bureaucracy. However, volunteer trainings in the grassroots campaign made it clear that volunteers would not be expected to parrot an approved "line." Instead, they were urged to explain to people why they were willing to go out of their way to work against the proposed law. The theory was that volunteers are most persuasive when using the arguments that move *them*.

- **Distributing all written materials in multiple languages.** Not only were the basic written materials available in Spanish and Chinese, but explanatory flyers were prepared in Tagalog, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, and other languages. Having materials available in the languages of affected communities amounted to a statement of inclusion for all San Franciscans, implicitly counterbalancing the exclusionary Taxpayer-inspired messages in some of the written materials. To the extent possible (and it was great), phonebanks were conducted by speakers of Spanish to Latino voters and speakers of Chinese to Chinese voters. In overwhelming numbers, these voters responded positively to being called by someone they could talk with easily.

- **Supporting protest activity and using it as a means of attracting people to the electoral campaign.** Though well aware that marches alone contribute very little to an electoral effort, San Francisco organizers recognized that these protests were a legitimate response to the outrage and terror that Prop. 187 inspired. When people didn't know what else to do, they marched. Students marched; immigrants marched; it being San Francisco, gay men and lesbians against 187 marched. The marches raised the spirits of the already-engaged, large numbers of whom were not eligible to vote. San Francisco organizers became adept at collecting names at protests, assuring people that they didn't have to be able to vote to work on the election, and funneling marchers into the electoral effort. These efforts contrast dramatically with the usual posture of electoral campaigns of keeping as far as possible from popular protests.

Some Lessons

Most obviously, you can't win any electoral campaign in California if you can't make a dent in the southern part of the state. Two thirds of the voters live in the south; voters in Los Angeles County alone cast 23 percent of the total votes on Prop. 187. To come out ahead, progressives have to raise the margin of victory in populous Santa Clara County in the north (where only 52 percent voted against Prop. 187), win in Los Angeles County, and lower conservative margins in San Diego, San Bernardino, Orange, and Riverside counties.

Electoral experience helps in any campaign. The most committed and energetic grassroots opponents of Prop. 187 simply didn't know how to conduct an electoral campaign. These opponents were often the children of the immigrant generation, whether their parents came from Europe, from Asian countries, or from the Americas. They were feeling their way in the electoral arena. More experienced leadership, especially in the Latino and immigrant communities, could have used the huge numbers of committed campaign volunteers far more effectively than was possible this time out. However, the campaign against Prop. 187 did raise the level of electoral experience in communities of color, a significant benefit for future battles.

Toward a World without Borders

Most electoral campaigns do not lead to any ongoing organization. In the case of opposition to 187, however, an extraordinary amount of activity continues at full steam in many communities, and particularly among youth. In line with the changing demographics, California students (especially in the public schools) are already mostly from the communities of color; they are already living in the complicated, sometimes tension-filled, new multicultural society which can so frighten white adults. At least in Northern California, organizing among Latino students for more funding for schools had been going on for several years; throughout the state, the campaign provided a stimulus to push student activism into high gear. Today, this vital organizing moves forward at many schools.

Other groups and communities brought together against 187 are also pressing on. The Interfaith Coalition convened all the successor groups to hold a President's Day rally on the theme "Immigrant rights are human rights." In San Francisco, the Movement for the Rights of Immigrants (Movimiento pro Derechos del Inmigrantes) continues to work, especially in the Spanish-speaking communities. MDI is building toward a large human rights march in June—the same month when the annual gay pride celebration has adopted the theme "A World without Borders; No to 187." The Immigrant Rights Action Pledge, begun during the campaign as a vehicle by which teachers, social workers, and health providers could state their intention to disobey 187 if it passed, has taken on extraordinary life, adding the energy of large numbers of activists who are not social service workers in the wake of the campaign. Adopting the slogan "Human Rights for Everyone/Derechos Humanos Para Todos," the Pledge collected 1000 (!) new names of people who wanted to participate somehow in resisting Prop. 187 during a Bay Area wide street-tabling on December 17.

All this vigorous organizing for human rights in California is going to be vitally necessary in the coming period. While immigrants and their friends continue to organize themselves, another vicious initiative appears likely to confront defenders of universal human rights on the 1996 ballot. What some of us have labelled the "White Male Privilege Restoration Act" (proponents have successfully gotten it named a "Civil Rights" act for the ballot title) would outlaw state-sponsored affirmative action, even to correct admitted past discrimination. Time and ongoing organization will tell whether California voters can be convinced to uphold civil rights and to pass through the inevitable transition to a multi-racial society with some grace or whether once again racist fears will prevail. ◇

Jan Adams is Associate Director of the Applied Research Center in Oakland, California. She spent three months in 1994 working with northern California grassroots campaigns against Prop. 187.

“Be Down with the Brown!”

Thousands of Raza Youth Blowout of School to Protest Racism

ELIZABETH MARTINEZ

For ten days that shook Los Angeles, in March 1968, Chicano and Chicana high school students walked out of class to protest a racist educational system. The “blow-outs” began with several thousand students from six barrio schools, then increased every day until over 10,000 had struck. Shouting “Chicano Power” and “Viva la revolución!,” they brought the city’s school system—largest in the U.S.—to a total halt. As scholar-activist Carlos Muñoz, Jr., wrote in his book *Youth, Identity, Power*, “the strike was the first major mass protest explicitly against racism undertaken by Mexican Americans in the history of the United States.”

The blowouts sparked other protests including the first action ever by Chicano university students, at San Jose State College, and Chicano participation in the long, militant Third World student strikes at San Francisco State and UC Berkeley. All this took place at a time of youth rebellion nationwide and worldwide. Raza students stood out in the U.S. because the great majority came from the working-class and their central goal was affirmation of their culture’s values and history rather than a humanistic counter-culture.

Today Raza youth are repeating that history with new blowouts—but also with notable advances over the 1960s *movimiento* in terms of sexism, homophobia, and *chingon*-style leadership (strongman being a polite translation of that word). The level of organization already established by the youth says: they are in it for the long haul.

It’s All About Respect

Since the spring of 1993, Raza high



High School Walkout, April 22, 1994. Hayward, California. Photo: Gloria Najjar.

school students from Colorado to Los Angeles have walked for such demands as more Latino teachers and counselors; Ethnic Studies (not only Latino but also African American, Native American and Asian/Pacific Islander); bilingual education that is sensitive to students’ cultural needs; and Latino student retention programs. In California other issues have often been added: repressive new anti-crime laws; preventing the re-election of right-wing Gov. Pete Wilson; and above all fighting Proposition 187 with its brutal call to deny educational and health services to anyone, including children, merely suspected of being undocumented. (On the November ballot, Prop. 187 passed with 59 percent of votes cast.)

California’s blowouts focused on northern schools first, then spread south rapidly. The students, mostly of Mexican or Salvadoran background, came from high school, junior high and sometimes elementary school. Why a blowout, not just a march or rally? Because California’s public schools lost \$17.20 or more for each unexcused absence per day: that reality provided the economic centerpiece of the students’ strategy.

The first wave seemed to burst from nowhere when, on April 1, 1993, over

1,000 mostly Latino junior high and high school students walked out of a dozen Oakland schools and confronted school officials. On September 16, celebrated as Mexican Independence Day, over 4,000 blew out in Oakland, Berkeley, San Jose, Gilroy, and San Francisco. Arrests and violence were rare; the students worked to avoid them. But in Gilroy 19-year old Rebecca Armendariz was prosecuted for contributing to the delinquency of a minor, apparently because she signed to rent a bus that students used. In right-wing-dominated Orange County, 300 students clashed with police while some were beaten and pepper-sprayed as police stood by.

Another wave of student strikes unrolled in November and December. At Exeter, a small town in California’s generally conservative Central Valley, 500 high school students boycotted classes when a teacher told an embarrassed youth who had declined to lead the Pledge of Allegiance in English: “if you don’t want to do it, go back to Mexico.” It was the kind of remark that had been heard too many times in this school where 40 percent of the 1,200 students are Latino but

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only six of its 59 teachers.

At Mission High School in San Francisco, 300 Latino and other students blew out for the usual educational reasons and also for being automatically stereotyped as gangbangers if they wore certain kinds of clothing. The School Board agreed to their main demand for Latino studies and offered a class—to be held before and after the regular school day. The basic message: this class isn't for real.

On February 2, 1994, anniversary of the signing of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which made half of Mexico part of the U.S., over 1,000 high school students and supporters from various districts shook up the state capitol.

"The governor wants more prisons, we want schools. He wants more cops, we want more teachers. We want an education that values and includes our culture. We want all cultures to know about themselves," one participant said, as reported by the Sacramento paper *Because People Matter*.

For César Chávez's birthday nearly 400 Latino students from four city schools marched on district offices in Richmond. On April 18 half of the elementary school pupils in the town of Pittsburg boycotted classes with some parental support, because a Spanish-speaking principal had been demoted. They had their tradition: 20 years before, Pittsburg elementary school students had boycotted for lack of a Latino principal.

The spring wave climaxed on April 22 with a coordinated blow-out involving over 30 school in northern California. Some 800 youth gathered in San Francisco under signs like "Educate, Don't Incarcerate" and "Our Story Not His-story," with brightly painted banners of Zapata and armed women of the Mexican Revolution. Calls for unity across racial/national lines and against gang warfare rang out all day. "Don't let the lies of the United Snakes divide us!" "Latin America doesn't stop with Mexico," said a Peruvian. Another shouted "It's not just about Latinos or Black or Asians, this is about the whole world!" Some of the loudest cheers came for a 16-year old woman who cried "We've got to forget these colors!"

In the town of Hayward, where 1,200 high school and junior high students boycotted over 20 schools in nine cities, they took a historic step against gang warfare. Some 300 demonstrators turned in their red or blue gang rags for brown bandannas—brown for Brown Power and unity. Later some of them set up a meeting to help stop the violence. "You wear the brown rag, be down. Be all

ures come from a 1985 study; as of 1991, only 6.2 percent of Chicanos aged 25 and older had completed four years of college and only 9.7 percent of all Latinos 25 and over were college graduates. In many areas 50 percent continues to be a common high school dropout (pushout) rate. Along with the poverty that makes so many quit school for work, how can Raza feel encouraged to continue at schools

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By April 22, 1994 it seemed that the spirit of Mexican revolutionary hero Zapata had marched straight from the mountains of Chiapas to Dolores Park, San Francisco.
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the way down for every Raza," said Monica Manriquez, age 17.

Cinco de Mayo brought more blow-outs and then a June gathering in Los Angeles of 900 high school students—the first ever. Observers were amazed and the students themselves startled by their own success. Sergio Arroyo, 16, of Daly City, spoke for many: "People didn't think it could happen, all that unity, but it did." Lucrecia Montez from Hayward High said, "We're making history. Yeah, we're making history."

Why Now?

The current generation of Latino teenagers had seen little in their lifetime except the intensified reaction and racism established under Presidents Reagan and Bush, unchanged under Clinton. Attempts at multiculturalism, bilingualism and affirmative action had been ferociously attacked by those staunch defenders of eurocentrism and other bastions of White Supremacy. A prolonged recession had further eroded young hopes for a decent life. At the same time Raza today is identified as the cause of those economic problems by the current gang-baiting and immigrant-bashing campaigns.

Nationwide, Latinos have the lowest high school graduation rate of any population group. For every 100 Latinos who enter kindergarten, only 55 graduate from high school. Of those 55, just 25 enter college. Of those 25, seven finish. Of the shining seven, four go on to graduate school—and two finish. Those fig-

like Jefferson High in Daly City, which has a 47 percent Latino student body but no Latino studies and only two Latino teachers, or Christian Brothers High in Sacramento where a teacher called a student "dumb Mexican" to his face.

Small wonder then that Raza teenagers share the alienation if not despair of young people around them. African American youth influence them culturally and thereby politically, rapping a common rage; the process works both ways. Latino student activism has thus grown in a nationwide climate of youthful anger, especially among those of color. In Los Angeles racially mixed youth marched against the state's new Three Strikes You're Out "anti-crime law." Last May 18, 55 multinational students were arrested at Soledad Prison in northern California for protesting the construction of another prison there. New cultural and activist programs for youth of color have sprung up like multinational Education for Liberation in San Francisco.

Other regional and national developments also sparked the Latino blowouts. In 1992 the anti-Quincentennial celebrations of indigenous people encouraged a rapidly growing *indigenismo* that tells Latinos: you too descend from the native folk of these Americas and share their cultures, their spirituality. Here is a source of pride and identity for youth, to accompany righteous anger. The amazing January 1, 1994 indigenous uprising led by the Zapatistas in Chiapas further strengthened *indigenismo* and Raza pride. By

April 22, 1994 it seemed that the spirit of Mexican revolutionary hero Zapata had marched straight from the mountains of Chiapas to Dolores Park, San Francisco.

A new awareness of César Chávez following his death in 1993 added to the students' self-respect. Known to few teenagers until last year, César and the farm workers became an inspiration almost overnight. His birthday and the day of his death, both in the spring, provide occasions for major protest. Juanita Chávez of San Francisco, the 22-year-old niece of César Chávez and daughter of Dolores Huerta, has been a leading activist with much influence on teenagers.

Finally, to answer the question "why now?" high school students had an immediate example to follow: their slightly older sisters and brothers in college. In April 1993 a Latino occupation of the Chancellor's office at UC Berkeley protested a policy that would subvert Ethnic Studies. In May-June a strong, community-supported hunger strike by Latino students won department status for Chicano Studies at UCLA. This year four Chicanas at Stanford University held a hunger strike in May to protest the outrageous, without-notice firing of Chicana associate dean Cecilia Burciaga after 20 years of service, supposedly for budgetary reasons. Michigan State University, the University of Colorado-Boulder, Harvard, Cornell and the University of New Mexico have seen Latino student action on issues ranging from racist advertising by the campus radio station to the removal of racist murals glorifying the Great White Fathers and respect for murals celebrating Chicano/Mexicano history (at UNM this struggle goes back almost 25 years).

Little wonder, then, that the hour of Raza high school students had come.

How Did they Do It?

As usual the media have hounded everyone with their favorite question: "who organized all this?" One thing is clear: the blowout youth may have received information, ideas, contacts, resources, tips on security, or other important help from college students and experienced organizers, but in the end they did



High School Walkout, April 22, 1994. Hayward, California. Photo: Gloria Najjar.

it themselves. Rebecca Armendariz from Gilroy told me, "We organized our rally so that no adults would run it. The kids just jumped on the stage."

No single group organized and coordinated all the blowouts. At some schools certain existing structures helped pave the way. Especially in the Sacramento area, the 25-year old national Chicano student organization MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) played that role. At most schools it would be the local Raza club. There were also special situations that brought hundreds of high school students together from near and far, like Raza Day at UC Berkeley and UC Los Angeles, which is officially for recruitment but has obvious organizing potential. Several students told me that day woke them up to the need for Chicano Studies.

Members of a new group, Fund Our Youth, helped organize at many schools. It was initiated by young adults including Gabriel Hernandez and Adriana Montes of the Chicano Moratorium Coalition. (Adriana is a pharmacy technician who has done much to help the young women. Her husband, Gabriel, is a union organizer in Oakland.) Gabriel says, "It's pretty loose. We would go into schools at the request of the local Raza club or other students, and bring them together for workshops on issues like identity. We

would work with them breaking down the problems at their particular school, then talk about what to do. The students are really looking for someone who will listen to them. Once they hear, see and feel this concern, their dignity and power are unleashed."

Then students would set up their committees like outreach and publicity, and have 20-80 people coming to every general meeting. After their walkout they would get together to decide what next, and to develop a Student Empowerment Program (StEP) for their area with ongoing committees to do outreach, education, structure development, etc. Regional coordination came from a small number of hard-traveling UC-Berkeley students like Rosalia Gonzalez, Hernan Maldonado, and Benecio Silva; Gabriel Hernandez also did some of this work.

For the vast majority of students the walkout would be their first demonstration ever. It wasn't easy to organize. A Sacramento student spoke of tensions when they first started organizing, like one group wanting to run the show or distrust of college students. Or other problems, as described by Monica Manriquez of San Leandro High: "The guys in my high school are really still in junior high, they don't take things seriously. They are

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wannabe gangsters. I've been called a sell-out for organizing. If you're Mexican and not a gangster, you've sold out. At first I wondered what I was doing wrong, but I kind of understand. They are afraid to pick up a book, they'll let down their friends. Everybody wants to fit in."

A few important pockets of experience did exist. Ixtlixochitl (Obsidian Flower) Soto from Yuba City, age 18, is the daughter of a Chicano Studies instructor; she became president of MEChA and helped organize walkouts. Rebecca Armendariz's family goes back five generations in the Gilroy area; her

included nothing.

For the April 22 blowout, Elsa did two months of organizing, set up committees, made flyers, worked on outreach. "The principal called me in and asked if I knew anything about what was happening. I explained and he said 'a walkout is stupid.' Other teachers said the same. When the day came, the police were ready for violence at first but then they said 'you're very organized.' We're just taking baby steps now, toward bigger steps later."

Another key to walkout success: students organizing a blowout never announced the actual date and time until the last minute, so nobody could do any-

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At the April 22 rallies in San Francisco, the majority of the speakers were female—a sight never seen in the 1960s. Out of 15 people suggested as key organizers for me to interview, all but three were female. In Sacramento, security—long a super-macho domain—was female.
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father is a socialist who organized prison inmates. "He taught me how to organize," and she pulled together a small walkout against the Gulf War. At Christian Brothers High School in Sacramento, Kahlil Jacobs-Fantuzzi — half-Puerto Rican, half-Jewish — was elected class president on a political platform and organized many multi-cultural activities with another student ("not just food—history").

Another example is Elsa Quiroga of Hayward who dates her activism back to 8th grade when all but one of the Latino counselors were removed. She and three other students made a video about the need for counselors. "We showed it to the School Board," Elsa told me, "and they said they would keep the counselors. The newspapers said 'Students Save Counselors.' But it wasn't done." Since then Elsa (now 16) has attended various leadership conferences, worked on a summer youth program, served as a peer counselor, and become President of the La Raza club at school. "That club used to be just social"—a common problem—"but it should be more about issues." She even researched and taught a class on the Aztecs because her regular history course

thing to stop it. As a result, they took school officials by surprise and avoided cooptive moves, possible threats, or subversion through parents' concern. (For example, according to UC Davis student Marlene Molina, one counselor told parents that they had more chance of being deported if their children got involved with MEChA.)

Taking time to talk with parents about their worries also strengthened the walkouts, especially since so many protesters were young women. "We had a workshop for parents and explained that we aim to give back to the community," Marlene Molina told me. Gabriel Hernandez described how he and others had gone to visit Elsa Quiroga's Mexican parents, whom she described as strict and concerned about her, their youngest. Finally they agreed she could go on a two-day César Chávez march and later to a conference in Arizona. "Okay, but no slumber parties," they said.

It Ain't the 1960s

Today's Raza youth movement of northern California is breaking the patriarchal 1960s *movimiento* mold in several important ways. I first saw this when

speaking to about 1,000 high school students on the UC Berkeley campus for Raza Day last year. During what I thought would be my not-too-popular talk about Chicana feminism, I off-handedly said "Viva la mujer." The audience, quiet until then, gave those words a thunderous ovation.

At the April 22 rallies in San Francisco, the majority of the speakers were female—a sight never seen in the 1960s. Out of 15 people suggested as key organizers for me to interview, all but three were female. In Sacramento, security—long a super-macho domain—was female. No single over-arching organization has yet been formed from the walkouts but many groups observe a 50-50 rule: not only leadership but also committee membership should be half girl, half boy. So each committee in the East Bay area, for example, has two coordinators: one female and one male. MEChA, which voted down a Chicana caucus a few years ago at a California meeting, now requires a Chicana caucus in each chapter and chapters are often headed by young women.

Yet you hear about varied personal experiences. Maria Ines Carrasco, age 13, said "There's no respect. We get called 'ho' if we have sex, but for a boy it makes him a man." Another 13-year old, Maribel Sainez, put her finger on what might make a difference in male behavior: "On a regular day they sometimes don't show respect, they curse us and rule us. But we curse them back. In this protest we do not feel put down." Leticia Bustos, age 14, believed "Boys have not put down girls for being leaders." Her friends had been inspired by talking with participants in Mission Girls, a San Francisco program noted for its progressive mentors and activities.

Monica Manriquez also thought the walkouts changed young male attitudes. "At first they said about me, 'what does she know—a girl?' They wouldn't help me bring in a speaker. But when they saw I was serious, they changed." As back-up, perhaps, Monica belongs to a young women's club in town, Latinas y Que?—Latinas and 'So? UC Davis student Marlene Molina brought good news: "We had very successful skits in MEChA

on what to do about sexual harassment and abusive boyfriends. In Bakersfield the guys are creating their own caucus, to talk about how the men are messing up. There are few men like that!"

The problem of homophobia has hardly been eliminated but at least it is addressed and sometimes publicly criticized. Straight Latino students will tell you they have a responsibility to defend gay people against gay-bashing, with their lives if necessary, as they would any community under attack. As late as 1982, MEChA was openly anti-gay; today many chapters have moved away from such positions. At least one respected youth leader is openly bisexual ("no big deal") which would have been impossible in the 60s.

This embrace of "difference" which can be found among the walkout youth has roots, I think, in the spiritual force of *indigenismo* with its sense of linkage and inter-dependence among all living creatures. One student commented to me, "There is a lot more spirituality in our movement than in the 1960s."

Among the walkout Latinos, gone are the days when the ideal was a *cacique* type of leader with a tough style, preferably charismatic, and overshadowing all others. These youth avoid projecting individual leaders and still have no officers beyond the local school organizations. Some groups have a rule that no one can speak a second time at a meeting until all others have spoken. None of this means they have no rules. "No work, no talk" is one of them. But they decide by consensus, not by voting (MEChA does vote). And they don't go for what the inimitable Charlie of Berkeley described as the chilling effect of "John's Rules of Order — or who? Robert's? Anyway, they told me at that meeting that I was out of order so I fell asleep."

Some of this suggests an idealism that may face problems with growing numbers, pressure for more formalized structure, political differences, and the need for leadership training to guard against dependency on some experienced individual. There are already other contradictions to be faced and resolved. One is the Raza student relationship to African Americans and Asian/Pacific

Islanders. Societal conflicts between Latinos and Blacks happen at many schools. "They try to punk us but we punk them back," commented Maribel Sainez, who went on to say "but when we walked out about 20 Black students walked out in support." They have come together politically — to demand Ethnic Studies and to oppose the growing neo-Nazism and repressive new laws. No matter how difficult, unity remains the dream of many Raza walkout youth. "I want to see everyone together, all of the colors and races," Leticia Bustos told me. "I want other races to run the government, like a Black president." Anglos are also included when the students talk about who has helped them and who should be supported in return.

Building the Future

Over the summer of 1994 and into the fall, high school students from Los Angeles to Denver have gathered regionally or locally to plan for the future. A northern California rural retreat was attended by 70 youth. They discussed what they had done and how, and made plans for the coming year, all while living together peacefully in tents for four days.

Students in different towns of the greater Bay Area meet every week on different days. All have a structure that includes five committees: outreach, campaigns and events, policy, education (external and internal), and barrio warfare. Eventually the committee heads will probably form a general coordinating body. Immediate plans include 1) door-to-door campaigns and voter registration with emphasis on the anti-immigrant and other bad laws, 2) School Board races.

Organizing speeds ahead in southern California and the Valley, from San Luis Obispo to Bakersfield. At times students cite the Plan de Santa Barbara, from the 1968 blow-outs era, which called for the



Hayward students demand Chicano Studies. Photo: Gloria Najjar.

institutionalization of Chicano Studies and student organizing. In this profoundly ahistorical society, young people can remember history when they want to—and make history, too. ◇

Elizabeth Martinez began her political activism over 30 years ago in the Black Civil Rights movement, and continued in the Chicano movement. Currently living in San Francisco, she works with Latino and multinational youth and with the Women of Color Resource Center. She has published five books on social movements, most recently 500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures (Southwest Organizing Project, Albuquerque, NM).

• For more information or to send donations, write to: Chicano Moratorium Coalition, PO Box 2031, Berkeley CA 94702.

This article originally appeared in *Z Magazine*, November 1994.

Resources for Resistance E-Mail's "187resist" List

To send and receive e-mail information about fighting Proposition 187, write to LISTSERV@CMSA.BERKELEY.EDU with the following message: SUBSCRIBE 187-L <YOUR NAME>.

GRANTS

In each issue of the newsletter we highlight a few recent grants made to groups around the country. This month we feature grants to organizations working against racism in the U.S.. The information in these brief reports is provided to us by the groups themselves. For more details, please write to them at the addresses included here.

Rural Justice Project

c/o 325 S. 2nd Street
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

On January 25, 1994 a fight broke out between white students and students of color at the high school in Cottage Grove, Oregon (pop. 8,000). A small group of community members called an emergency town meeting to discuss the incident as well as a pattern of racism in the school and to demand action on the part of school administrators. A series of community meetings laid the basis for ongoing, organized response to racist activity in the area. Today, the group continues its work as The Rural Justice Project.

Since its inception, the Project has responded to other attacks on people of color in the town, including organizing community support for an interracial family whose home was threatened with arson. The Rural Justice Project is also protesting the town's recent passage of a measure prohibiting legal protections for lesbians and gay men. Their goals are to confront institutionalized bigotry in the community and school system, to educate about local hate activities, and to provide a support network

for victims of hate crimes. They are also currently building a local and regional network of anti-hate organizations.

The Rural Justice Project is particularly interested in involving the young people of Cottage Grove and is exploring theater and poetry workshops within the high school on issues of bigotry.

RESIST's grant went to cover expenses related to the group's monthly newsletter. The newsletter features articles by Cottage Grove students on discrimination and racial tension at the high school as well as reviews of multicultural events. The publication will report on local hate crimes and document the activities of the Oregon Citizens Alliance which is spearheading homophobic initiatives across the state.

The Media, Film and Video Group

P.O. Box 17
Mashpee, MA 02649

Founded in 1992, this project provides media resources that work to combat racism on Cape Cod. Last year, they responded to an outbreak of police brutality against men of color by producing a public service announcement for this area of Massachusetts. RESIST's grant helped to fund the PSA, which gave detailed information on how to document racially motivated police attacks and harassment, as well as suggestions on how best to protect yourself.

The Media, Film and Video Group is also developing a newsletter for organizations of people of color on Cape Cod. They sponsor "The Underground Film Festival"

that features short films by emerging film and video makers of color. In addition, they are organizing a program to teach video production to youth of color. The program will include camera operation, editing, scriptwriting directing, producing, etc.

The Media, Film and Video Group is part of the Martin Luther King Jr. Society of Cape Cod, which works toward the elimination of racism in education, housing, and employment.

Jews for Racial and Economic Justice

64 Fulton St., #605
New York, NY 10038

Jews for Racial and Economic Justice formed in 1990 in response to the increase in racial and ethnic tension, violence and economic disparities within New York. As its inaugural event, the group organized a Jewish welcome for Nelson Mandela when he was first released from prison. Some members of the Jewish community had protested the visit because of Mandela's embrace of Yasser Arafat. JFREJ sponsored a Shabat service attended by more than 1000 people, and raised \$30,000 for the Freedom Campaign of the African National Congress.

Since that time, the group has grown to a larger membership organization committed to enlarging and strengthening the community of Jews seeking social justice. Educational and organizing activities include forums on "Community Responses to Racism," featuring activists from Jewish communities and communities of color. The group has also created a workshop called "Understanding and Fighting Racism as Jews," which they conduct at synagogues and Jewish community groups throughout the city.

RESIST's grant went to support repair of the group's copier and purchase of a folding machine to assist in production of their monthly bulletin. Used as a vehicle for organizing, the bulletin includes a calendar of demonstrations, teach-ins, pickets and other events that are part of the struggle for social justice in New York, as well as essays on Jewish history and discussion of the group's own activities. It has also served to launch a letter-writing campaign about police harassment of Latinos, and has recruited members for discussion of gay and lesbian liberation.

Join the RESIST Pledge Program

We'd like you to consider becoming a RESIST Pledge. Pledges account for over 25% of our income. By becoming a pledge, you help guarantee RESIST a fixed and dependable source of income on which we can build our grant making program. In return, we will send you a monthly pledge letter and reminder along with your newsletter. We will keep you up-to-date on the groups we have funded, and the other work being done at RESIST. So take the plunge and become a RESIST Pledge! We count on you, and the groups we fund count on us.

Yes! I would like to become a RESIST Pledge. I'd like to pledge \$ _____,

(circle one)

monthly bimonthly quarterly
2x a year yearly

Enclosed is my pledge contribution of \$ _____.

I can't join the pledge program just now, but here's a contribution to support your work. \$ _____

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