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**Student Movements in the United States and Mexico: A Testimony**

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**Abstract:** The author reflects on his experiences teaching and going to graduate school in Mexico City in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I discuss my participation in Chicano Movement organizations before moving to Mexico, and the reasons that propelled me to go to graduate school there. I highlight lessons learned teaching as a volunteer at a *normal popular*, or people's teachers college, and as a professor at the Universidad Autónoma Chapingo (UACH). I also describe my graduate studies at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). The conclusion focuses on the impact that these experiences had on the author's professional life in the United States.

**Key words:** Graduate school in Mexico; movimientos de rechazados; Becas para Aztlán Program; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM); Chicano Movement organizations.

## Introduction

In this essay, I discuss my participation in Chicano Movement organizations in California in the late 1960s and early 1970s before moving to Mexico City to attend graduate school. When I was in high school, I became a leader of MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) and the Brown Berets. These experiences helped me to develop a political awareness that was critical of U.S. society, as well as to question the relevance of graduate training in the social sciences in this country. Shortly after moving to Mexico City, I volunteered to teach at a *normal popular*, or teachers college. The school had been organized by students who had not been accepted into a regular teachers college; it was housed in an abandoned government building that the students had taken over. Next, I describe my experiences teaching at the Universidad Autónoma Chapingo (UACH) and getting a close look at leftist politics among students and faculty at the university. This is followed by my comparison of graduate studies in economics at the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN) and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). After teaching and studying in Mexico for two years, I received a scholarship through the Becas para Aztlán Program that allowed me to continue with my graduate work. The essay closes with a discussion of the ways in which my experiences in Mexico influenced my professional life in the United States.

When I was a sophomore in high school in 1966-1967, Bert Perez, a community organizer in the barrio where I grew up in Union City, California, initiated me into Chicano activism. This city is located in the San Francisco Bay Area, which at that time was a hotbed of Chicano social and political activism. Bert Perez recruited me to distribute literature to patrons at the local Safeway supermarket asking them not to buy grapes in support of the United Farm Workers' (UFW) grape boycott. The union had launched the boycott to force the growers to negotiate with them for better wages and working conditions for farm workers. I identified with the farm workers' struggle because, by then, I had been working year-round for more than three years in the fields with my father. I had also started attending meetings in support of the farm workers and regularly reading their newspaper, "El Malcriado." This helped me gain a better understanding about the main reason that drives Mexicans to migrate to the United States: the lack of adequate employment in their home country. It was the same reason that prompted my family when I was eleven years old to migrate to the United States. I thus became aware that the farm workers' struggle was my family's struggle as well.

By the end of my sophomore year, I had joined MAYO (Mexican American Youth Organization) and was elected president. The following year, we decided to become a MEChA chapter (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán). One of our first activities was to organize Chicano Week, a weeklong event that included speakers, workshops, films and a dance. The highlight was our keynote speaker, Luis Valdez, founder and director of the Teatro Campesino. He gave an inspiring speech about Chicano culture, which he described as a culture of resistance against white domination. Workshop topics ranged from the benefits of bilingual education to Chicana liberation and the struggle against the Vietnam War.

Our MEChA group became more politicized as we read movement literature and increasingly came into contact with militant, Chicano college students. We soon learned about the Chicano student walkouts in Los Angeles' high schools. Precipitated by the schools' neglect of Chicano students' academic needs and insensitivity to their culture, the walkouts inspired many high school students around the country to take action. It did not take us long to realize that we were experiencing the same level of institutional neglect as the students in southern California. We decided to organize a walkout and scheduled it for mid-September. That summer, with the help of Manuel Hidalgo, a teacher who strongly supported Chicana/o students, I took the lead in drafting a list of demands that was to be presented to the school administration. Our list of demands included the creation of courses in Chicano history and literature, hiring of bilingual Chicano teachers and counselors, and a cultural center. We also called attention to the poor academic achievement of Chicano students and their high drop-out rate. The walkout was a resounding success. By the following quarter, classes on Chicano history and literature were offered, a Chicano counselor was hired and we were given the keys to our own cultural center. We also took the initiative in creating and running our own tutoring program, for which we recruited students from the University of California at Berkeley. For the rest of the school year, I met one-on-one with the school superintendent to discuss ways to improve Chicano students' educational outcomes.

Earlier that year, I co-founded the Union City chapter of the Brown Berets. Originally founded in Los Angeles, California, this organization appealed to young men and women because it advocated direct action. Brown Beret chapters around the country were by-and-large autonomous and varied quite a bit in terms of their ideological orientation. While some chapters focused on cultural nationalism, others were inspired by Che Guevara and the Cuban revolution and others considered themselves Maoists. Although my association with the Berets was short lived, my interest in Chicanismo grew beyond cultural nationalism. As a leader in the Berets, I organized a study group on political economy for chapter members; regrettably, it met with little success. Nonetheless, my interest in the topic grew and would eventually influence my decision to do graduate work in Mexico.

In December of 1969, the Los Angeles Brown Beret chapter organized the first moratorium against the Vietnam War, which preceded the national moratorium that took place the following year on August 29<sup>th</sup>. I participated in both moratoria. In fact, at the second moratorium I helped Manuel Delgado, one of the leaders of the Third World Strike at UC Berkeley, carry a banner that he had brought to the march. Delgado had founded Casa Joaquin Murrieta, a Chicano-themed house, which was located one block from the Berkeley campus. Little did I know then that I would live at Casa Murrieta for about a year when I became a student at Berkeley.

I arrived on the Berkeley campus in the fall of 1970 and was quickly disappointed by lack of political awareness among Chicano students. I limited my activities to participating in the San Francisco Bay Area Farah Strike Support Committee, which was supporting workers who had gone on strike against Farah Manufacturing Company, a large clothing producer in El Paso,

Texas. Farah employed over 4,000 workers, most of whom were women of Mexican descent. They went on strike demanding recognition for their union and better wages and working conditions. The union launched a national boycott of Farah products that proved to be very successful. During this time, my interest in political economy deepened as I took courses in political economy in the Department of Economics and the Chicano Studies Program.

After I graduated from college, I knew that I wanted to go to graduate school. But I was not sure that I wanted to go to graduate school in the United States. I was deeply interested in economic inequality, because I knew that my family and other relatives had migrated from México to the United States to improve their economic situation. I wanted to have a better understanding of the historical processes that had blocked economic development in México and consequently of the social and economic forces that propelled people to leave their country. After having taken more than enough courses to satisfy the requirements for an undergraduate degree in economics at Berkeley, I was not convinced that pursuing graduate work in the United States was going to give me the answers I was looking for. I felt that there was an alternative to graduate training in the United States and I began to imagine an alternative to graduate school in this country. I began to consider doing graduate work in México.

### **Crossing the Border: Lessons from my Teaching Experiences at Normal Popular Rubén Jaramillo and Universidad Autónoma Chapingo**

Moving to Mexico City for graduate school was not easy for me, as I had no institutional or financial support. It would be two years after moving there in 1979 that I received a scholarship through the Becas para Aztlán Program. To finance the move, I had multiple jobs in California to save enough money to support myself in Mexico for at least one year. But this would not have been possible if it had not been for my parents' help. Although they could not directly help me financially, there were countless emotional and material ways in which they supported my education. Perhaps the most important material assistance was welcoming me to live with them for extended periods of time. Needless to say, I was expected to contribute to the family budget. And I did so happily. Without their support, I would not have been able to save enough money to go to graduate school in Mexico.

When I arrived in Mexico City, I knew only two people, Hilda Muñoz and Eduardo Román Morales. Hilda, who years later would become my wife, was attending summer school at UNAM. We had met in California five years back. The other person was Eduardo whom I had met earlier that year. He was a teacher at the Colegio de Ciencias y Humanidades (CCH). While I familiarized myself with the application process for graduate school, Eduardo asked me if I wanted to teach as a volunteer at a *normal popular*. He explained to me that a *escuela normal* was a teachers college for elementary school teachers. It was called a *normal popular*, or peoples' teachers college, because it lacked official recognition. The school was run by students who had applied to a *escuela normal*, but were not accepted due to poor grades or lack of space. Having been denied admission, students organized themselves and took over an abandoned

government building in downtown México City. It seemed odd to me that the students referred to themselves as “*los rechazados*,” or the rejected ones, but they said it with much pride.

The school was appropriately named after Rubén Jaramillo, a revolutionary who at the age of fifteen joined Emiliano Zapata. After the Mexican Revolution, Jaramillo continued to struggle for social justice and land reform. He would spend most of his adult life eluding death threats from corrupt government officials until 1962, when he, his pregnant wife and three sons were assassinated by government forces.

I accepted the invitation to teach an algebra class, because I felt that my language skills in Spanish were adequate to teach at that level. And, fortunately, they proved to be. The class had about 25 students, most of whom came from working-class families. All the teachers at the *normal* were volunteers who had full-time jobs at other schools. A few weeks after I had started teaching, the students invited me to participate in a “*domingo rojo*,” or Red Sunday. Because I had no idea what they were asking me to do, I asked them what it entailed. A *domingo rojo*, I was told, was periodically organized by the students to do repairs to the school and clean it. All students were expected to participate. The following Sunday I showed up and was impressed by the turn out. Students and teachers were cleaning classrooms, offices and bathrooms. They were painting and doing other maintenance work, including doing minor plumbing repairs in the restrooms and replacing broken windows. I was assigned to a painting brigade. For these students, school spirit took a completely different meaning compared to what I had experienced in the United States where school spirit was associated with sports.

As a volunteer teacher, I was eligible to take classes at the school. And I took advantage of this opportunity. I took a class on teachers’ unions in Mexico. The class met at night and attracted students and teachers. The instructor was a man in his fifties but seemed much older. At the first class meeting, I noticed that his hands were disfigured. The fingers in his right hand were gnarled, while the other was almost completely paralyzed. Soon I was to learn from one of my classmates that the teacher had been incarcerated and tortured by the police during a teachers’ strike a few years back. As the class progressed, I came to admire the instructor’s knowledge and passion for the topic. But, above all, I came to admire him for his modesty: not once did he mention his prison experiences and torture.

The other thing that struck me about the students is that they would stay overnight to guard the school against a police raid. I learned that since the first day that they took over the building the police had been threatening them with taking it back. The students were aware that if the police came it would most likely be at night; they would be arrested for trespassing, prosecuted and incarcerated. They struck me as a group of courageous students who were willing to put themselves at risk of being arrested and possibly beaten in order to keep their school open. Their only crime was that they wanted to be elementary school teachers.

Although there has been much discussion in the United States about the negative stereotypes that Chicanos hold about Mexicans and Mexicans about Chicanos, I did not experience that working with the students and volunteer teachers at the *normal popular*. On the contrary, Mexican students and teachers were interested in learning about the lives of Mexican

immigrants and Chicanos in the United States. I attribute this to the level of political sophistication of the students and teachers.

After teaching at the *Normal Popular* for about six months, I resigned—a very difficult decision—to take a full-time teaching position in the Preparatoria Agrícola at the Universidad Autónoma Chapingo (UACH). I had come to realize that if I were to stay in Mexico, I had to work. I was hired to teach English reading comprehension to would be scientists and engineers. Chapingo is one of the most prestigious schools of agriculture in Latin America; it is located near Texcoco about one hour's drive northeast of Mexico City. The university offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in technical areas ranging from irrigation engineering to plant sciences. Chapingo, a generously supported public university, trains Mexico's leaders in agricultural and environmental research, teaching and policymaking.

I was greatly surprised when I learned about my salary and benefits at Chapingo. Prior to moving to Mexico, I had been working as a math instructor at the Center for Employment Training (CET) in San Jose, California. Not only was my salary higher at Chapingo, but I also received a housing subsidy, a vacation salary supplement, and an end-of-year bonus equivalent to forty days of work. Of course, none of this compared to my work experiences in the United States. For the first time, I was seeing the benefits of having good union representation. I would come to know that Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917, provides some of the most progressive labor protections and benefits found around the world. For instance, it guarantees the eight-hour day, maternity leave, and equal pay to men and women.

Another thing that made Chapingo a very special place was La Capilla Riveriana, the Rivera Chapel, located on campus. The chapel has some of the most impressive murals produced by Diego Rivera—Mexico's most prominent muralist. The frescoes in the Capilla depict motifs from nature, indigenous culture and class struggle in México.

My colleagues in the department elected me to represent them at the *Consejo de la Preparatoria*, or Preparatory School Council, which was the policymaking body for the school. There I was to experience firsthand the aftermath of the student movement in Mexico and its influence on democratic governance in colleges and universities. Before it became a university, Chapingo had been the Escuela Nacional de Agricultura, a military school. In the late 1960s, students struggled to convert the school into a public university. Their efforts came to fruition in the mid-1970s when it became an autonomous university. The *Consejo* was made up of faculty and student representatives from all the departments of the *preparatoria*. Faculty and students had an equal voice in all decisions. The major political groups on campus were well represented at *Consejo*. Two of the major leftist groups were Vpered, a Russian word that means forward in English, and the Bolcheviques, which belonged to the Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Bolcheviques. These two groups had very different conceptions about the direction that the *Preparatoria* should take. Both groups, however, would come together when delegations of *campesinos*, or farm workers, would come before the *Consejo* seeking financial support for their political mobilizations, which typically revolved around land tenure issues and community development. There I witnessed firsthand the struggle that Mexico was going through in several

educational institutions in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as the direction that the country was going to take had not been defined. There was much optimism that a new society could emerge from the social movements of the 1960s. Mexico was going through a transition from a single-party authoritarian regime, PRI, or Partido Revolucionario Institucional, into a multiparty system. Such changes planted the seeds for the construction of a more open and democratic society.

### **Propedéuticos in Economics at Instituto Politécnico Nacional and UNAM**

My initial plan for going to study in Mexico was to get a master's degree in economics at UNAM. But when I began to inquire about graduate training at UNAM, I learned that prospective students who did not have an economics degree had to take a *propedéutico*, or preparatory course, which was scheduled to start three months later. While I waited for the *propedéutico* to start, my friend Eduardo suggested that I should enroll in the *propedéutico* in economics that was about to start at the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN). And I did so. Once a student successfully completed the *propedéutico*, admission into the master's program was guaranteed.

I was very excited to be attending the *propedéutico* at the most important science and technology university in Mexico. The curriculum, however, turned out to be a major disappointment. The required courses for the *propedéutico* were two courses: economic theory and statistics. The book used in the economic theory class presented a standard approach to neoclassical economic theory, which emphasizes the power of markets in allocating scarce resources. It was the same theoretical perspective that I had been exposed to in the United States. In fact, in many of the graduate classes, the books used had been translated from English into Spanish or were books in English mostly from the United States.

Not long after enrolling at the Politécnico, my friend Eduardo informed me about another *propedéutico* in economics that was about to start at UNAM. We registered for the *propedéutico* but were not accepted. Eduardo suggested that we should attend the seminar as *oyentes*, or auditors. We were allowed to attend the classes offered in the *propedéutico*: economic theory, economic history and statistics. There were stark differences between the two programs: while the theory course at the Politécnico provided a standard neoclassical economics approach, the theory course at UNAM was focused on Marx's *Capital*. The class on economic history was also taught from a Marxist perspective. The ideological bent of the economics department was unquestionably to the left. So much so, that even the statistics professor had trained in the Soviet Union!

Although I had become aware of the role that progressive ideology plays in the design of the curriculum, I had not experienced anything like this in the United States. The exception was perhaps courses taught by graduate students in the Chicano Studies Program at Berkeley, who had been influenced by the various New Left political currents. In the United States, generally speaking, students and professors engage in discussions that, at best, reflect variants of reformist



approaches to social change. Moreover, identity politics in the United States tends to ignore a basic source of inequality: social class.

However, with Mexico's shift to *neoliberalismo*, or neoliberalism, in the late 1980s, there was a concomitant change in the curriculum of the Department of Economics at UNAM. At the core of neoliberal economics is the notion that the market is the best mechanism available to allocate the factors of production—land, labor and capital—and should do so with minimal government intervention. *Neoliberalismo* informed public policy, providing the rationale for privatizing state-owned firms and eventually Mexico's entry into NAFTA, or the North American Free Trade Agreement, which rescinded protectionist trade policies. NAFTA has had a devastating effect on some sectors of the Mexican economy, particularly in the countryside where thousands of farmworkers have been displaced, fueling undocumented migration to the United States. Today, the graduate curriculum in economics at UNAM resembles that of any graduate program in the United States; it emphasizes neoclassical economic theory and econometrics, the statistical analysis and mathematical modeling of economic processes. Taking these two *propedéuticos* taught me the role that political ideology plays in shaping curriculum.

As I came to realize that getting admitted into the master's program in economics was going to be difficult due to the competitive admissions process, I decided to enter the master's program in Latin American Studies in the Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales (FCPyS) at UNAM. There, I had finally found a home.

### **Graduate Work at UNAM**

Toward the end of 1979, I met a group of Chicano students who were in graduate school in Mexico. They were from different parts of the United States and were participating in the Becas para Aztlán Program. This group of students shared a large house not too far from UNAM, which was called Casa Aztlán. As I needed a place to stay, I asked them if I could move with them and they took me in. This took place at the same time that I started working at Chapingo and was officially accepted into the master's program in Latin American Studies at UNAM. I had a full-time job at Chapingo and did not become a *becario*, or scholarship recipient, through the Becas para Aztlán Program until two years later.

The program in Latin American Studies offered many classes and seminars on the political economy of Latin America. The program had attracted some of the best young scholars from many Latin American countries. Invariably, they had earned their doctorates in European universities or were finishing their dissertations. Their areas of expertise covered the social sciences: history, economics, sociology and political science. They were in Mexico because they could not return to their home countries where repressive military dictatorships were in power, such as the case in Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina. I had professors from each of those countries. Years later, some of them returned to their countries of origin and launched successful academic careers, while others opted to remain in Mexico. Their presence in Mexico was a bonus for me as they offered the best thinking at the time from elite European universities.

My master's thesis advisor was Jorge Lanzaro, an Uruguayan who was completing his dissertation in political science at the University of Paris VIII, where he had studied with Nicos Poulantzas. I took a seminar from Lanzaro on the relationship between the economy and the state that ran for three consecutive semesters. His lectures were engaging. The students in class came from diverse social science disciplines: political science, sociology, and Latin American studies. The first seminar focused on cutting-edge readings on the political economy of the labor process developed by European and U.S.-based social scientists. The second seminar was oriented to the study of the state, particularly *el estado corporativo*, or the corporatist state, a state that seeks to represent the interest of major groups in society such as business, labor, and agriculture. The last seminar emphasized more clearly the relationship between the economy and the state.

My participation in these seminars came to influence my research on the labor market participation of Mexican-origin workers in the United States. Since then, I have been particularly interested in the causes and consequences of underemployment; regrettably, without paying much attention to the role that the state has played in regulating employment outcomes. It is ironic to me that while I read widely about economic marginality in Latin America I would come to better understand it in my research on marginal labor-force participation of workers in the United States

A major obstacle working with Lanzaro, as with many other professors, was that he worked part-time at UNAM. Consequently, we could only meet to discuss my thesis project before or after class. Despite this drawback, he was very supportive and helped me design a research project on the response of labor unions in Mexico and the United States to undocumented Mexican migration.

My work was also supported by Javier Aguilar García, one of the few Mexican professors that I had in graduate school. He was a political scientist with expertise on labor unions in Mexico. Discussions in his class were very animated as there were advanced doctoral students who unapologetically advocated for one or another leftist current in Mexico. Too often these discussions were not substantive but merely political; that is, they were stating their party or political organization's position on this or that topic in Mexico. I gained a very good sense of the connection between graduate training and social activism at that particular time in México. Unlike many other professors, Aguilar was a full-time researcher on campus and was readily accessible. I was very impressed with a symposium that he organized on labor unions in México. I was particularly impressed with the level of sophistication of the papers that were presented by my fellow graduate students.

In Aguilar's class, we read his book *La Política Sindical en México: Industria del Automóvil*. In the second seminar that I took from him, he asked the students to recommend readings for the seminar. Among the books suggested was José Revuelta's *El Proletariado sin Cabeza*, which presents a scathing critique of the Mexican left. As an undergraduate at Berkeley, I had taken a course taught by Revueltas when he was a visiting professor in Chicano

Studies in 1974. Without question, this was the most inspirational courses that I took at Berkeley.

As part of the required coursework in Latin American Studies, I took a two-semester sequence on methodology taught by a Mexican professor who had trained in philosophy in Europe. This course turned out to be one of the most intellectually stimulating classes that I took in Mexico. The reading list was quite impressive. But two of the works that stood out were Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, which we read and discussed, followed by Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. I had imagined that a course on methodology would teach students how to put together a research project, including how to formulate testable hypotheses. Although I completed the course work not knowing how to properly formulate a hypothesis, I did gain an appreciation for the relationship between philosophy and methodology.

The level of discussion in the methodology seminars was very sophisticated, as several of the students themselves taught social science or methodology courses at the college level. The class met at 7:00 a.m. because the professor had a full-time job working for a government think tank that focused on issues related to public administration. His research center was directly tied to the office of the President of the México. In seminar discussions, the students were often drawing parallels between Hegel's conceptions of civil society and the current situation in Mexico. Of particular interest was the argument that Hegel presents about the training and requirements for state employees. Often, my classmates would lament the inadequate training in ethics of students who were contemplating a career in government.

As I was getting ready to return to the United States and continue my work in Latin American Studies, I discussed my plans with Marcos Winocur, a historian from whom I was taking a seminar on the Cuban revolution. Winocur had published a book with a provocative title: *Las clases olvidadas en la revolución cubana*. He was an engaged intellectual as I would often read his articles in major newspapers in Mexico about Cuba's past and current situation. He suggested that I should visit Tulio Halperín Donghi, who was teaching at UC Berkeley. Winocur volunteered to write a letter of introduction for me. Halperín gave me the best advice about pursuing a doctorate in Latin American Studies. He persuaded me that getting my doctorate in a traditional social science discipline such as or sociology, and specializing on Latin America, would better serve my goals. I took his advice to heart: when I returned to the United States I pursued a doctorate in sociology.

### **Seminar on International Migration and Conference on Capital and Labor**

Two of the most important activities in which becarios played a leading role were the organization of a seminar on Mexican migration to the United States and the organization and participation in an international conference on the migration of labor and capital. The seminar was the brainchild of Juan Manuel Sandoval, a U.S.-trained Mexican anthropologists. He invited Carlos Quirino, Eric Romero and myself to help create the Seminario Permanente de Estudios Chicanos y de Fronteras (SPEChF) in Mexico City in late 1982. The mission of the SPEChF was to bring together researchers on international migration, border studies, and the Chicano

community. The Seminario was housed in the Departamento de Etnología y Antropología Social, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (DEAS, INAH), one of the most important research centers in social anthropology in México. Seminario members often granted interviews to some of the most important mass media outlets in Mexico on immigration issues and Chicanos and Mexicanos living in the United States. Members also collaborated in drafting several documents critical of U.S. immigration policy in the 1980s that were widely distributed to social organizations and the mass media. Today, the Seminario continues to be active.

My participation in the migration seminar turned into one of the most gratifying teaching and learning experiences as a becario. The seminar would meet once a week in the DEAS building, a beautifully preserved 16<sup>th</sup> century former convent, called Ex Convento del Carmen in San Angel. The seminar participants decided what readings to discuss. All the participants were working on master's theses or dissertations focused on issues related to Mexican migration. In very few other venues have I encountered comparable levels of sophistication in materials discusses and, more importantly, the participants' level of dedication. This made me realize that for education to be meaningful it has to be relevant to real issues. As we discussed a variety of theoretical approaches to the study of immigration, we were also involved in criticizing the immigration proposals put forth by, then, President Carter and his successor Ronald Reagan. Our critiques of immigration policy proposals were disseminated to the press and political organizations.

After living in Mexico City for more than four years, I returned to the United States in 1983. Within a year after of my return, I participated in a conference in Mexico City on Transnational Labor and Capital. There were participants from both sides of the border, including well-known labor leaders and scholars like Bert Corona. Many of the becarios participated as session facilitators at the conference, which was held at the Centro de Estudios Económicos y Sociales del Tercer Mundo (CEESTEM), a center that was founded by President Luis Echeverría Alvarez.

### **Final Reflections**

I went to study in Mexico because I imagined an alternative to graduate education in the United States. My experience in México surpassed my expectations. Not only was I exposed to different theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches but, more importantly, I learned that for graduate education in the social sciences to be meaningful, it has to be relevant to society's needs. In graduate school, there was a clear sense of urgency among students to change Mexican society; there was a sense that theory mattered—that it informed what steps to take to bring about desired social change. I was never to experience that again in a U.S. classroom. On the contrary, the teaching of the social sciences in the U.S. is very bland and too often devoid of any relevance to concrete social and political issues.

My participation in the Becas para Aztlán Program provided me with an opportunity to study at a premier institution of higher education in Mexico, UNAM. It helped me come in contact with professors that I would not have the opportunity to interact with in the United

States. But, more importantly, I was exposed to different political perspectives that at that time seemed relevant alternatives to the social, economic, and political situation in Latin America. It also helped me realize that the Chicano and Mexicano community in the United States has a strong connection to México and the rest of Latin America.

After my teaching experiences at the Normal Popular Rubén Jaramillo and the Preparatoria Agrícola at Chapingo, I decided that I wanted to be a teacher-scholar. Above all, I learned from those experiences that teachers had to care about learning and be close to their students. As a graduate student at UNAM, I learned that for education to be meaningful it had to be relevant to the needs of students and their society. I also learned the meaning of being a committed scholar—one engaged in research to bring about social change.

My graduate education in Mexico had a major influence on my career decisions for further graduate training in the United States. I decided that a doctorate in sociology would allow me to focus on economic inequality among Mexicans and Chicanos in the United States. At first, I wanted to continue doing research on the interrelation between the economy and state. However, the program in sociology at the University of Arizona was weak in this area; consequently, I focused on the economic consequences of labor market inequality, particularly underemployment, of Mexicans and Chicanos in the United States. That I ended up doing quantitative analysis can be attributed to chance, as sociology at Arizona was eminently quantitative at that time. My education in México also led me to develop an interest in migration studies, particularly in the work of Ernesto Galarza, a México-born labor leader, educator and community activist in the United States.

My secondary area of doctoral work focused on bilingual/bicultural education—a direct outgrowth of my experiences in Mexico. My schooling in Mexico allowed me to improve my speaking and writing abilities in the Spanish language. I also learned about diverse Mexican cultures. I would not have been able to do this from afar. These experiences have allowed me to write and publish in Spanish, and to encourage my college students to submit their work in Spanish.

Given the growing share of two important segments of the Mexican-origin population in the United States (Mexican immigrants and their native-born children), it is becoming increasingly important for Chicanos and Mexicans to have a better understanding of our shared history and future. At the same time, the increasing economic interdependence between the United States and Mexico calls for enhanced relations between the two countries. I believe that a step in the right direction for meeting these needs is the establishment of a program similar to *Becas para Aztlán*, a program that provided me with an opportunity to gain a more critical perspective of U.S. society and a better understanding of Mexico. Furthermore, such a program would lead to *un acercamiento*, a coming together, between Chicanos and Mexicans just as I witnessed in Mexico.

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