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Walking Out: The Success of The Edcouch-Elsa Student Walkout of 1968 Through The Media

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WALKING OUT: THE SUCCESS OF THE EDCOUCH-ELSA STUDENT WALKOUT OF
1968 THROUGH THE MEDIA

A Thesis

by

DAVID ROBLES

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2012

Major Subject: History

WALKING OUT: THE SUCCESS OF THE EDCOUCH-ELSA STUDENT WALKOUT OF
1968 THROUGH THE MEDIA

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DAVID ROBLES

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August 2012

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ABSTRACT

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This study demonstrates how the success of the Edcouch-Elsa walkout of 1968 was brought upon not only by its organization, non-violent tactics, land mark victory in federal court, and support from several of Mexican American organizations. What also aided the student movement in Edcouch-Elsa was the media attention and how it influence the Rio Grande Valley community not only to question the tactics being used towards Mexican American students in the local educational institutions, but also created public discourse over the issues of race, equality, and students' rights. Using various academic books of the subject, newspaper clippings of the time period, and video sources of the walkout, this study details what transpired during and after the student walkout and how the media portrayed the events.

DEDICATION

*En memoria de mi madre,
que siempre tendré en mi corazón.
11/30/1940 – 10/23/2011*

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents Juan and Andrea Robles who left everything behind and came to this country so their children could have a future. With their unconditional love and support, I achieved many great things. To my brother Abram Robles, who never stopped believing in me and was always there through the good and bad times. To my other siblings Juan Martin, Virginia, Juan Alberto, Joel, Sandra, and Andrea, who influenced me in some form or fashion throughout my life. To my nieces and nephews, who made me laugh when I needed to and distracted me from my work for their own amusement. Lastly, this is for all of those who I lost chasing this crazy dream. Thank you all for everything, I will never forget.

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I would also like to thank my colleagues Veronica Duran, Rene Rios, Maria Guadalupe Vallejo, Jose Flores, Stephanie Brock, and Ruben Baldazo from the History and Spanish Departments. They helped me edit, translate, locate documents for my research, and gave me motivation to finish my thesis. Also, I would like to acknowledge Special Collections located at the University of Texas-Pan American library, and the archive staff at the South Texas Museum in Edinburg.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Edcouch-Elsa walkouts of 1968 were part of a greater movement that occurred in the Southwest during this turbulent period. In schools, many Mexican American youths demanded better education, equality, cultural understanding and other demands which they strongly believed would benefit them in their aspirations to go to college and establish their cultural identity as a valid part of the American experience. In the fields of California, Cesar Chavez led farmworkers in a strike to improve their wages and working conditions. Other leaders across the Southwest formed a political party which delineated the Mexican American vote and challenged the Democrat's monopoly to the Mexican American vote, forcibly tried taking back stolen land, and formed organizations in support of greater civil rights for Latinos. Among the many school walkouts or blowouts that occurred in the different Southwestern states, the Edcouch-Elsa walkout was the only one that happened in the community of the Rio Grande Valley.

Other than this study and one by James Baldemar Barrera, "historians and other scholars have published works examining Chicano student protests, most only briefly mention the Edcouch-Elsa High School walkout and none has produced a comprehensive or detailed study."¹ However this thesis does not examine or give a detailed study of the walkout, but it focuses on the media's portrayal of the movement and its success. To understand why the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts were successful the students' demands, actions, and struggles are presented in this

¹ James Baldemar Barrera, "The 1968 Edcouch-Elsa High School Walkout: Chicano Student Activism In A South Texas Community" (Master Thesis, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, 2001), 3.

research, as well as the media's portrayal of the walkout. The media's presentation of the student walkout to the public contributed to its success because the community involved itself in public discourse of what was occurring in the educational system during the late 1960s in the Rio Grande Valley. The involvement of the community was a positive element during the Edcouch-Elsa student walkout because of the fact that this event brought out what was occurring in the educational system.

The historical significance of this research demonstrates how the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts of 1968 commenced public discourse within the community about the educational practices as well as racism occurring in schools, and opinions over whether or not these students were in the right. Mexican American students that participated in the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts did so in order to contest against the Anglo dominated education system and demanded greater cultural understanding. Knowing that there would be consequences for their actions, the student walkouts merit local and national historical significance alongside countless of other student walkouts throughout the Southwest.

Cultural, economic, and physical conflict has always been a way of life along the border between Mexico and the United States, and it was in the strip between the Nueces–Rio Grande where this pattern was first established.² After the Texas Revolution, the newly found republic was white in all aspects and though it was not legally American, the influence that many Anglos incorporated made it so. The Republic of Texas was spiritually, attitudinally, politically, socially, economically, and demographically white; an American entity all to itself.³ This became possible due to land grants given to Anglo settlers given to them by the Mexican government in the mid-1820s and as a consequence thousands of Americans entered Texas

² Americo Paredes, *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*, ed. Richard Bauman, (Austin: The University of Texas at Austin, 1993), 19.

³ De Leon, Arnold, *They Called Them Greasers*. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), 13.

outnumbering Mexicans 25,000 to 4,000 by the 1830s.⁴ The border dispute between the United States and Mexico after the annexation of Texas into the Union prompted the two nations to war. When Texans achieved their independence from Mexico, they contested that border between the Texas territory and Mexico was the Rio Grande River, however Mexico countered that the territory had been separated from the country by the Nueces River.⁵ Unlike its northern counterparts, the area between the Nueces River and Rio Grande River was predominately Mexican due to its location. Under the control of Spain, this disputed region was considered to be the northern boundary of New Spain's state of Tamaulipas and now as part of the new republic's disputed southern boundary.⁶ The end result of the Mexican American War of 1846 was the loss of half of the national territory, accepting the humiliating loss of Texas, and less than one percent of the population with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.⁷

Many Mexicanos living in the surrendered lands became United States citizens with the signing of the treaty.⁸ Given the option of returning to Mexico or staying in the United States, many of those who did not return to the motherland influenced what would be known as the American Southwest. Mexican residents of the newly conquered lands were guaranteed "all the rights of citizens of the United States" including, "free enjoyment of their liberty and property" according to Article IX of the treaty.⁹ The Treaty of Guadalupe not only allowed the United States to expand westward and created the border between Mexico and the United States; it also created a Mexican American minority. Decades after the war with Mexico, many Mexicanos in

⁴ Gonzalez, Manuel G. *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans In The United States*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 70.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶ Calvert, Robert A., Arnoldo De Leon, Gregg Cantrell. *The History of Texas*. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2002), 110.

⁷ *Ibid.* 80.

⁸ The term Mexicanos is used in Manuel G. Gonzalez's work to identify Mexican citizens who lived in the Southwest before/after the war between Mexico and the United States. Mexican citizens who decided to stay in their lands after the war became citizens of the United States and therefore Gonzalez calls them Mexicanos.

⁹ *Ibid.*

California, New Mexico and Texas were expropriated from their lands and driven out of business by Anglo lawyers and unfavorable economic conditions.¹⁰ The Mexican population of the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas was not affected by “the land erosion” of their lands, political and economic dominance by Anglos like others in the northern republic.¹¹ Mexicans in the Rio Grande Valley were able to maintain their economic and political power much longer due to the fact that Anglos did not enter the region until later on; which prompted racial subjugation, violence to dispossess Mexicans from their lands, and hindered them economically by making them second class citizens.¹² Some examples of these practices Anglos used to subjugate Mexicans in Texas were litigations, taxes, violence, land sales below market prices due to economic downswings, reduced ex-landowners to wage laborers, and financially crippled Tejano merchants by breaking their trading monopoly after the Cart War of 1859.¹³ However, these forms of subjugation that Mexicans experienced were not the only methods in which Anglos controlled the politics, the economy, and way of life in Texas.

Tejanos concerned themselves with education in the early 1800s and supported it locally through various fund raising drives which allowed them to open various schools in the south; however education fluctuated up and down due to the economic conditions and declined as the turmoil of the 1830s began.¹⁴ By the latter part of the 1800s, schools throughout Texas were segregated by law and inadequate schooling forced the state to take control of the education issue.¹⁵ Segregation in the public schools hindered the level of education that many Mexican and African American students received. By the 1900s, the eradication of the Mexican culture within

¹⁰ Rodriguez, Olga. *The Politics of Chicano Liberation*. (New York, NY: Pathfinder Press, 1977), 22.

¹¹ Gonzalez, 107.

¹² *Ibid.*, 108.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Calvert, et al., 74.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

public schools became more evident. Arnaldo de Leon best describes this form of subjugation as “the educational system wanting eradicate vestiges of un-Americanism and the notorious ‘no-Spanish rule’” because real Americans only spoke English.¹⁶

In the first part of the 20th century, there was a substantial increase of Mexican immigrants entering the United States due to economic hardships, war, and lack of opportunity in Mexico. With the exception of the 1930s, each decade of the early 20th century experienced a dramatic influx of Mexican immigrants mostly in the Southwest and many “Chicano” historians labeled this movement as “The Great Migration.”¹⁷ According to Gonzales, “World War II altered life in the Mexicano community profoundly.”¹⁸ After the war, the rising middle class comprised mostly of children of immigrants were ready to win the acceptance of Anglo society. The middle class successfully improved the lives of those in the Mexican American community as well as their working conditions. The rise of a middle class and the increased urbanization of the Mexican American community in the late 1940s and 1950s assisted in the rise of militancy in the 1960s.¹⁹

For many years, the Mexican American people were considered the forgotten minority due to their plight not being in the national spotlight.²⁰ This changed drastically in the mid and late 1960s when the African American and student movements were joined by the new power movement; those who called themselves Mexican American, Hispanos, Latin Americans, and Spanish-speaking people.²¹ The newly found sense of awareness prompted Mexican Americans to follow the rising trend of protesting for equality. In this new epoch, the “Chicano” movement

¹⁶ De Leon, 105.

¹⁷ Ibid., 113.

¹⁸ Ibid., 163.

¹⁹ Rodriguez, 27.

²⁰ Ibid., 31.

²¹ Ibid.

saw the rise of many leaders that lead the way for change and equality.²² California saw the rise of Cesar Chavez, supporter, organizer, and crusader for farm workers. New Mexico had Reies Lopez Tijerina, a militant and believer in the *reconquista* of the lands that were stolen after the Mexican-American War of 1848. Colorado had Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, poet and militant angered by “the Anglo’s rape of the Chicano culture.”²³ Texas had Jose Angel Gutierrez, “founder of a Chicano political party, *La Raza Unida*”, which changed the political spectrum in Crystal City, Texas.²⁴

Hundreds of organizations from the barrios, schools, and prisons focused on various issues that comprised the Mexican American movement.²⁵ Leading farm workers to strike against growers in Delano, California in 1965, Cesar Chavez’s actions set forth the beginning of the “Chicano” movement. Resigning from the Community Service Organization in 1961 after he was denied to use the CSO to support Chicano farm workers, Chavez formed the Farm Workers Association a year later.²⁶ This social movement of farm workers organized to bargain against growers and deal with other problems farm workers faced.²⁷ In conjunction with Filipino farm workers in 1965, Chavez and his new union participated in a strike against local grape growers in Delano, California. With superior numbers and his determination, Chavez became the acknowledged leader of the movement.²⁸ Due to his organizational skills and efforts, his reputation as a great leader and organizer spread throughout the Southwest. Preferring union interests over issues of race, Chavez’s farm labor movement played a major role in creating the

²² The term Chicano is used in this research to describe Mexican Americans fighting for Civil Rights and recognition in the 1960s. These Chicanos are comprised of student groups, activist, and militants.

²³ Hammerback, John C., Richard J. Jenson, and Jose Angel Gutierrez, *A War of Words: Chicano Protest in the 1960s and 1970s*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985),53.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁵ Gonzales, 199.

²⁶ Rodriguez, 35.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 201.

Chicano movement and became the most prominent, revered and nationally recognized leader of the Mexican Americans.²⁹

Other leaders emerged to take up the banner of justice and equality for their people's plight. The rise of "Chicano" Nationalism assisted the new generation of young militant men and women wanting change for the community. The antiwar movement, the student movement and the "Chicano" movement were not only inspired by this new found nationalism, but also because of the successful and unsuccessful tactics in of the African American movement. The land grant movement in New Mexico derived from a violation of provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the war between the United States and Mexico in 1848 which property of the Mexican inhabitants was not respected.³⁰ Tijerina and his followers forcibly attempted to re-take the lands, but failed to do so. In Colorado, an urban civil rights and cultural movement was formed in Denver in the mid-1960s.

Known as "The Crusade for Justice" and led by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, this organization supported demonstrations against police brutality, anti-war protests, and high school strikes.³¹ Gonzales attempted to live up to Joaquin Murieta, the first Californian revolutionary who fought against Americans after the acquisition of the territory, and immortalized him in the poem, *Yo Soy Joaquin*.³² Though it was a tribute to the late revolutionary, Gonzales' poem described the "Chicano" experience and identity during this time period; making it an important piece of "Chicano" literature. According to Tony Castro, *Yo Soy Joaquin*, "reflected many of the conflicting ideas of urban Chicanos, *barrio* youth, and the poem's wide circulation made

²⁹ Hammerback et al., 35.

³⁰ Rodriguez, 37.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Castro, Tony. *Chicano Power: The Emergence of Mexican America*. (New York, NY: Saturday Review Press, 1974), 141.

Gonzales one of the most influential voices within the movement.”³³ The poem not only described Gonzales’ life and the struggles he had faced throughout his life, but it also appealed to many Mexican Americans who faced similar struggles. Gonzales also organized two Chicano Youth Liberation conferences in 1969 and 1970 that organized thousands in the Southwest made this organization vital to the “Chicano” movement. The development of “Chicano” parties in the Southwest changed how Mexican Americans influenced the political spectrum. Formed by Jose Angel Gutierrez, *La Raza Unida* Party influenced many Mexican Americans to defect from supporting the Democratic Party, which in turn weakened it. Without the “Chicano” vote, Democrats would be unable to carry whole sections of the Southwest.³⁴ Cutting ties with old alignments, the *La Raza Unida* Party promoted and protected the survival of Mexican American people.

Holistically, these organizations used the media to their advantage by expressing their dissatisfaction and complaints against unjust manner in which they were treated. The farm worker movement and the Tijerina revolt made national news which either aided or condemned the cause these Mexican Americans were fighting for. With the assistance of various individuals throughout the Southwest as well as the media, the farm workers’ movement achieved great success from California to Texas. Tijerina’s actions in New Mexico prompted a national response due to the level of violence that occurred. Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’ and Jose Angel Gutierrez’s used the media to express their ideologies or just to go on record affected their movements. One instance in which Gonzales used the media to express his dissatisfaction of the Denver Police Department occurred when members of his Crusade for Justice organization had an altercation with the police. Known as the St. Patrick’s Day Incident, the Colorado press

³³ Ibid., 142.

³⁴ Ibid.

wanted an interview with the organization, but turned down requests for interviews until called by *Rocky Mountain News* reporters.³⁵ Gonzales and his organization agreed to give the newspaper full coverage of their version of events only if a “Chicano” reported the story.³⁶ However, as noted by Enersto B. Vigil, the story was not published on the date they were told, the “Chicano” newspaper reporter’s name did not appear on the byline and the article that was published only focused on one of the officers’ account of the event.³⁷ The Crusade for Justice’s attempt to tell their side of the story through the media was not affective due to the preference of the newspaper. The *Rocky Mountain News* newspaper constantly published articles of the event that favored the Denver Police Department and ignored Gonzales and his organization.

Jose Angel Gutierrez’s used the media in a different way than Gonzales and Chavez. Gutierrez did not trust the “gringo” and accused him racism and cultural genocide against the Mexican American.³⁸ He was known well for his controversial rhetoric which at times would create dissention not only from Anglos, but also well-established Mexican Americans. In the Spring of 1969, Gutierrez gave a press conference in which he stated, “We have go to eliminate the gringo, and what I mean by that is if the worst comes to the worst, we have got to kill him.”³⁹ His words not only affected him, but also affected his organization at the time, MAYO, which lost its financial support from the Ford Foundation due to pressure from U.S. Representative Henry B. Gonzalez.⁴⁰ In this case, Gutierrez’s use of the media hindered his cause due to the misinterpretation of what he said and what he really meant.

³⁵ Vigil, Ernesto B. *Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government’s War On Dissent*. (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 220.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Castro, 148.

³⁹ Ibid., 149.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 156.

During the first few years of the 1970s, Cesar Chavez's methods of using the media to calm the Mexican American community after cases of violence were extremely effective. One incident in which he urges the community to practice non-violence was in the Texas town of Pharr after a clash between police officers and Mexican American demonstrators left one man dead on February 1971. Chavez's address to students at the local university stressed that non-violence was "a very powerful method of struggling" and that they were "non-violent not because they were afraid, but because they were trying to build, not destroy."⁴¹ His message to the Mexican American community was the same in every newspaper that covered his three day tour of the State of Texas and became very effective.

The "Chicano" student movement in the late 1960s mobilized many Mexican American students in the Southwest for equal education. Other grievances among the students throughout the region resonated similar grievances. The prohibition of speaking Spanish on school grounds, blatant racism from Anglo instructors, corporal punishment for speaking Spanish, inadequate funding, and being "pushed" out from school. Many Mexican American students staged walkouts, also known as blowouts, from their perspective schools in protest and demanded reform. California and Texas were the states mostly impacted by these blowouts due to the high population number of Mexican Americans. The most famous blowout occurred on March 3, 1968, in which "Chicano" students walked out from many East Los Angeles schools in order for their grievances be addressed by school administrators.⁴²

As the movement became more prevalent throughout the mid to late 1960s, Mexican American women began to fight against the subjugation of oppression in which they faced due to race, gender, and class as the movement transcended into the 1970s. Within the organizations,

⁴¹ "Chavez Stresses Non Violence," *The Laredo Times*, February 9, 1971.

⁴² Gonzales, 212.

“Chicanas” were discouraged to actively participate and were relegated to subordinate positions that females usually held due to Mexican American traditional views of women.⁴³ Many “Chicanas” were assigned as cooks, secretaries, or to clean after the male members of the organizations and at times were sexually harassed. Since the beginning of the movement, many female activists were not entirely satisfied with the rhetoric and attitude of their male counterparts, their call for women’s issues to be placed in the collective agenda and ending gender tasks were met with ridicule.⁴⁴ During the National Chicano Youth Conference in Denver in 1969, these Chicanas encountered a significant amount of resistance when wanting a greater role and voice in the movement.⁴⁵

The outcome of the conference did not aid Chicanas in their cause for liberation due to the resolution that many of the delegates came to an agreement that “Chicanas” did not want to be liberated; which was not only concluded by male delegates, but also other “Chicanas” attending the conference. This was a considerable blow to those who wanted to break away from gender specific tasks within the organizations, but to go along with the men was the best thing to do at time according to one participant.⁴⁶ By the 1970s, the rise of feminism in the “Chicana” movement divided into two categories which hindered it. The “loyalist” recognized that women were oppressed in their ethnic communities and blamed the Anglo institutions while the “feminist” argued that this oppression stemmed from their cultural roots which glorified machismo and the subjugation of women.⁴⁷ Even though “Chicanas” were divided on the issue of supporting their male comrades or liberating themselves from their oppression due to cultural

⁴³ Ibid., 218.

⁴⁴ Ruiz, Vicki. *From Out Of the Shadows: Mexican Women in the Twentieth-Century America*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ González, 219.

practices, the movement was fairly new in the early 1970s and according to Manuel G. Gonzalez survived the hard years ahead much better than the “Chicano” movement.

As the 1960s came to close, the rise “Chicano” militancy influenced many of the younger Mexican American student protestors which concerned not only the Anglos, but many in the movement who practiced non-violence. Also, at the time period, Richard Nixon had won the presidential election of 1968 and began reforming domestic policies of the United States in order to appease the “Silent Majority” and minorities. Yet, the issue of race had an impact in the movements led by Mexican Americans, especially the youth and the student movement.

In *They Called Them Greasers*, Arnolando De León addresses “how whites felt about Mexicans in the state of Texas in the nineteenth century and what beliefs whites held to discover the genesis and roots of those attitudes.”⁴⁸ De León’s work focuses on the perceptions that Anglos had towards Mexicans in the state of Texas after its acquisition in 1836 and Mexican-American War of 1846. In a general sense, this work explains the relationship between Anglos and Mexicans in the mid to late 19th century in which “white society attempted the debasement of Texas-Mexicans.”⁴⁹ The relationship and attitudes that De León describes in his work explains the disfranchisement of the Mexican people in Texas, especially in South Texas. The belief that Mexicans were “degraded, pilferers, scavengers, vagabonds and a complete pest to humanity”⁵⁰ was expressed by many Anglos, especially in the Rio Grande Valley. De León’s work however demonstrates that the relationship between Anglos and Mexicans in the mid to

⁴⁸ De Leon, ix.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

latter part of the 19th century caused several uprisings along the border and lays the foundations for the fight for equality in the 20th century.⁵¹

Manuel G. Gonzales' *Mexicanos: A True History of Mexicans In the United States* focuses on the history of that traces "the history of Mexican-origin communities in the United States."⁵² Gonzales separates his research into ten eras which start from prehistory-1521 and end in the era of 1994-present. In each era of history that he explains in his work, Gonzales divides them into eras of significant importance which facilitates the understanding of material. The latter part of his work, Gonzales focuses on the rise of Mexican American activism from the 1930s to 1975 in great details. This entire history entails the creation of the Mexican people from the arrival of the Spanish and their struggle for equality in the United States. The information that Gonzales provides in his work contributes to this study by focusing and analyzing the movements occurring in the Southwest that contributed to the movements in South Texas.

Vicki Ruiz's *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*, focuses on the Southwest during the twentieth century and women's experiences along the border and the internal migration they endured. Living in the United States, these women transformed, created, resisted and accommodated the "physical and psychological" surroundings in their everyday life.⁵³ However, I focus on Ruiz's chapter in which she explained women's role during the "Chicano" movement. In the 1960s, many "Chicana" women were involved in the movement, however they were not actively participating in the organizations in the manner they wanted to. Instead, they experienced three forms of oppression which prompted them to

⁵¹ The term Mexicans is used here to describe both Mexican Americans and Mexican citizens in the State of Texas in the mid to late 19th century. Even though citizens of Mexican origins living in the state were considered Americans citizens under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, many Anglos did not distinguish the difference between them and actual Mexican citizens. In the Anglo perspective, they were all Mexican.

⁵² Gonzales, 2.

⁵³ Ruiz., xiii.

take action not only against the Anglo establishment, but against “Chicano” men by forming the “Chicana” movement. Yet, their struggle against the inequality of race, class, and gender divided the movement in which feminist wanted liberation while those loyal to the culture did not.

Edited by Olga Rodriguez, *The Politics of Chicano Liberation* focuses on the struggle of the Mexican American people in the Southwest in the 1970s. This collection of works begins with a brief historiography of the Mexican American people from the Spanish conquest to after World War II. The information presented in the work explains the formation of many “Chicano” Civil Rights groups, the rise of “Chicano” nationalism, the development of a “Chicano” party, and the direction in which the movement headed in the 1970s.⁵⁴ This short work assists in understanding the movement and how it affected the communities in the Southwest, especially in the State of Texas.

In John C. Hammerback’s, Richard Jensen’s, and Jose Angel Gutierrez’s *A War of Words* focuses on the rhetoric in which leaders of the movement used their influence and speeches to affect their respected communities. Reies López Tijerina, Cesar Chávez, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, and José Ángel Gutiérrez contributed greatly to the movement in the actions they took to better the situations their communities faced. In the work, each chapter is dedicated to one of these leaders in which their biographical sketch is given and their contributions to the movement. Hammerback et al. detail each leader’s course of action and the effects these actions had within the community. The research provided in this work helps analyze each individual movement and incorporate the research into my own work when comparing two local movements.

⁵⁴ The term Chicano is used here to describe Mexican American youth involved in the betterment of themselves and their community during this era. These youths delineated from the traditional terms of Mexican American, Hispanic, Latino, etc.

Chicano Power by Tony Castro is not a work written by a “Chicano” historian. Instead, “it’s a newsman’s look at the whole spectrum of the Chicano movement from the *barrio* militants to the Emerging Brown Middle America.”⁵⁵ Castro’s method in detailing the movement’s progress in the late 1960s to the 1970s in an unbiased approach shows the level of importance in which the Mexican American movement changed the politics, education, social class and ideology in the United States. One main topic in which Castro focuses on is the emergence of a Mexican American middle class in the late 1960s and 1970s. His work from a newsman’s perspective “neither apologizes for the Chicano movement nor attempts advocacy journalism for the cause.”⁵⁶

James Baldemar Barrera’s thesis, “The 1968 Edcouch-Elsa High School Walkout: Chicano Student Activism in a South Texas Community” focus on the causes for the student walkouts and the events that transpired afterwards. Barrera’s work detailed the account in which the students from Edcouch-Elsa walked out of class and peacefully protested while leaders of the movement presented their demands. He also mentions the issue of race and identity along the South Texas border which contributes to the students association with the term “Chicano”. Barrera’s work is short and focuses on the student movement that changed the educational system in the school district of Edcouch-Elsa. This thesis work is used in the research for background information along with other secondary and primary sources which assists in explaining why the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts are remembered in the Mexican American community while the Pharr Riot is not.

⁵⁵ Castro, ix.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Miguel A. Guajardo's and Francisco J. Guajardo's article, "The Impact of Brown on the Brown of South Texas: A Micropolitical Perspective on the Education of Mexican Americans in a South Texas Community", is a work that describes personal experience of Mexican American students in South Texas during the 1950s and the community's reactions to the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts. In the first few pages of Guajardo's and Guajardo's work, they focus on the desegregation of southern schools due to *Brown vs. Board of Education*, however, that was not the case in South Texas after the court ruling due to the fact that many Mexican American students were discriminated due to being brown. In the second half of their article, they focus on the Edcouch-Elsa walkout and its implications in the school system. However, the issue within the article that is used in this research is the topic of outside agitators influencing the student body. Guajardo and Guajardo explain how some teachers, both Anglo and Mexican American, as well as students who did not participate called the walkout a disgrace and lead by rebel rousers. These ideas from teachers and students contribute to the section of this research that focuses on the issue of outside agitators.

The methodology for this research employs using a bulk of primary sources which include various newspaper clippings which focused on the walkouts between the months of November 1968 and January 1969. These clippings come from *The Monitor*, *The Corpus Christi Caller*, *The Edinburg Daily Review*, *The Brownsville Herald*, and *The Valley Morning Star*. Also, a CBS national news broadcast is used as well to demonstrate how the walkouts were reported to the nation. Secondary works include books and one thesis work that chronologically details why and how the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts occurred and the conclusions of the event.

This study focuses mainly on the newspaper clippings because the media influenced the public's opinion by accepting and printing their letters easily making them accessible to the

reader. Chapter one briefly introduces the Edcouch-Elsa walkout of 1968 as well as other movements occurring in the Southwest during the 1960s. It also provides a historiography of the Mexican American experience that started after the Texas Revolution to the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement, literature review and methodology. In chapter two, a chronological account of why the students walked out from class, the actions they did afterwards, and the repercussions that they faced from the school board. Yet, the most important incident that occurred after the walkout is described in this chapter as well and various newspaper clippings are used in this chapter as well as Barrera's thesis work. The five student leaders' victory in federal court against the school board propelled the walkouts into history. Chapter three features what occurred at Edcouch-Elsa as reported by the local, regional, and national media. These newspaper clippings represent how the walkout was reported to the community and how public opinion was formed in favor of the students' actions. In the last chapter, the conclusion is made that the Edcouch-Elsa student walkout of 1968 was successful due to the media coverage. Rio Grande Valley newspapers extensively covered the event from the students' draft of demands to their re-admittance into school. The media's reports attributed to the success of the walkouts because of the public discourse that came after these Mexican American students walked out from their classes. Many examples of these public discourses are found in *The Valley Morning Star*, *The Monitor*, and *Edinburg Daily Review*. Many Mexican American groups and organizations across the Southwest used the media to voice their discontent with the system and appeal to not only the Mexican American community, but to the nation as well became crucial to the movement's success.

CHAPTER II

THE 1968 EDCOUCH-ELSA WALKOUT

“Chicano” activism and protest trickled down to the Rio Grande Valley from other parts of the nation. In 1968 the Rio Grande Valley made national headlines as students from Edcouch-Elsa walked out of their classes in organized protest. The Edcouch-Elsa walkouts of 1968 paved the way for educational reform in the Rio Grande Valley and have become an important piece of local history because they are still remembered. The city of Edcouch-Elsa was a small, rural, farming community with a population of less than 10,000 in 1968 as it was thrust into the spotlight of the student movement of the 1960s.¹ Located in Hidalgo County, Texas, the cities of Edcouch-Elsa are in the area known as the Rio Grande Valley which comprises other cities along the Texas-Mexican border. Due to its warm weather year round, this area of Deep South Texas has always been a farming community because of its suitable land for agriculture; however, Edcouch-Elsa was also developing a strong industrial sector which employed men, women and children.² Vhal’sing Packing Shed contributed to the economic growth and prosperity of the area.³ At time, the independent school district’s enrollment consisted to almost 940 students, of whom over 90 percent of them were Mexican American.⁴

¹ James Baldemar Barrera, “The 1968 Edcouch-Elsa High School Walkout: Chicano Student Activism In A South Texas Community” (Master Thesis, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, 2001), 21.

² Ibid., 22.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 2

During the troublesome decade of the 1960s, many Mexican-American youths took part in the “Chicano” student movement to fight for educational reform and equality in the classroom. The demands presented later on in this chapter were similar to those used throughout the Southwest as students walked out from their classes. By the mid-1960s “the ferment youth movement influenced “Chicanos” who eagerly embraced militant forms of protest like. The intellectual sources of student militancy among Chicanos were varied and almost any form of resistance to oppression was appealing.”⁵ According to Manuel G. Gonzales, the youth movement looked up to militant elders such as Chavez and Tijerina as well as the Black Power movement, heroes of the Mexican Revolution (Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata) and socialistic icons as Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Karl Marx and Mao Zedong who influenced their actions.⁶ College and high school “Chicano” students demanded a bicultural education which focused on the influence Mexican culture and people had in the formation of the Southwest. The student movement emerged at the same time of other “Chicano” efforts throughout the Southwest to combat oppressive school systems and conditions. The youth movement focused on the idea of regeneration, which emphasized the native blood of their ancestors and history rather than the *conquistadores*, who were white and oppressors of their culture.⁷

According to Tony Castro, the Anglo culture always regarded Mexican Americans as a separate group. The curriculum and language that was represented in most of the schools in the Southwest reflected Anglo culture which enforced cultural exclusion.⁸ The lack of understanding of the Mexican American culture throughout the Southwest prompted many “Chicano” students to take action. In the case of Edcouch-Elsa, Mexican American students

⁵ Gonzales, 211.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Castro, 66.

walked out of class in protest against oppressive behavior from Anglo educators, (for example, the use of corporal punishment towards students who spoke Spanish on the school grounds) and for educational reform and cultural understanding from the Anglo controlled school system.

Days before the walkouts began, the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) contacted EEISD board president Billie Cellum to present students' complaints.⁹ A list of demands and recommendations were discussed by students, organizers and sympathizers in Elsa before the walkout occurred.¹⁰ The Edcouch-Elsa walkouts began on the Thursday morning of November 14, 1968, when 192 Chicano students rose from their desks, walked out of class and out of school.¹¹ The decision by student leaders to walkout and not attend classes in Edcouch-Elsa High School came after the school board failed to hold a special session requested by organizers of MAYO to discuss the student demands and other topics.¹² After walking out many student protesters assembled across the street from the school, while walkout leaders and their parents met with Principal Melvin Pipkin and Juan B. Tomassini who served as Pipkin's Spanish interpreter because many parents did not speak English.¹³ Throughout the day, leaders of the movement and parents met with school officials as the protests continued outside the school. Student leaders presented these 15 demands which were printed in *The Valley Morning Star* on November 16, 1968:

One: That no disciplinary action be taken against any student or teacher that has taken part in this movement and that all suspended students and teacher be reinstated to their previous post or office and that any mention of such action be omitted from school records. Also, all intimidations should stop.

Two: That no threats, intimidation or penalties be made against any student or teachers

⁹ "Mexican-American Youth Group Drafts 15 Demands On School," *Valley Morning Star*, November 13, 1968. 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Barrera, 43.

¹² "Professional Agitators Stirring Mass E-E School Fuss, Is Charge," *Valley Morning Star*, November 14, 1968. 1.

¹³ Barrera, 44.

or administrators for membership or attendance of meeting of any club or organization outside of school.

Three: That the students be allowed to select their own candidates for student council.

Four: That excessive and unfair penalties and punishments stop being given students for minor infractions of completely ridiculous reasons, for example: student suspended for three days for failure to keep appointment with teacher after school; student suspended for three days for failing to stand at school pep rally; if something (shorts, tennis shoes) are stolen from lockers the students are punished (paddled or sent to do manual labor) for not being able to suit up. Likewise, that due process be followed in the case of suspension or expulsion of students, that is, that a student be given opportunity to defend himself and that evidence be presented to both administrators and parents. Also, no paddling should be given student until explanation for punishment be given to parents, if students request such explanation.

Five: That no teacher or administrator shall use profanity or abusive language in presence of students and in no case shall any teacher or administrator lay a hand on a student.

Six: That in a case of tardy or absent students, the students be allowed to reenter class and no points taken off until his excuse is verified or not. Students should not be kept out of class till parents call school.

Seven: That either the price of the cafeteria lunch be lowered to a more reasonable price or that more and better foods be served.

Eight: That as Chicano students, we be allowed to speak our mother tongue, Spanish, on school premises without being subjected to humiliating or unjust penalties.

Nine: That courses be introduced, as a regular part of the curriculum, to show the contributions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to this state and region. For instance, factual accounts of the history of the southwest and Texas, courses in Mexican history and culture. Also, that qualified, certified teachers be hired to teach these courses.

Ten: That all college preparatory courses be singled out for students by the time they enter high school.

Eleven: that more effective counseling be given to students from understanding counselors that are able to relate to students. Present student counselor ratio is too great, we need more counselors. Likewise, more assemblies on career opportunities, availability of scholarships, grants, loans, college entrance requirements, etc.

Twelve: Finally, the blatant discrimination against the Mexican American students in this school stop immediately. We demand justice.

Thirteen: That regulations for passes be set down clearly and defined so that no question remains as to when passes are needed or not. The present system, or lack of it, is ridiculous.

Fourteen: That special attention be given the situation a great number of Edcouch-Elsa students find themselves in-that is, they are migrant workers. Student choices of subjects in spring registration be respected and adopted in the fall term. These subject forms are often disregarded. Migrants leave school early they take part in an accelerated program. Advance test are supposed to be given before they leave. Often teachers do not let migrants take test or do not send tests to students up north after them. All tests should be given to migrant students before they leave.

Fifteen: That school facilities be improved, renovated, replaced, or installed where appropriated. For example: Fans-Teachers often use fans only for their own discomfort, ignoring students. Heaters-The heaters are for the most part outdated and not in working order. We need new heaters. Restrooms-Some of the restrooms and toilets are not cleaned and are inoperable; constantly out of repair. Windows-Fix broken windows [sic]. Walls-Repair holes in wall. Give school building a face lifting. How about hot water for the showers [sic]. We want to be proud of our school.¹⁴

As indicated by the findings of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights¹⁵ investigations: Chicanos were instructed in a language other than the one which they were most familiar, the curriculum consists of textbooks and courses which ignored the Mexican American background and heritage, Chicanos were usually taught by teachers whose own culture and background was different and whose training left them ignorant and insensitive to the education needs of Chicano students, and when Chicano pupils seek guidance from counselors they rarely can obtain it and even more rarely from a Mexican American counselor.¹⁶ These findings correlate with what Mexican American student leaders, organizers and participants around the United States, and in Edcouch-Elsa protested against. Mexican American students wanted the understanding and incorporation of their cultural heritage, and history in the classroom. However, this lack of understanding of the Mexican American experience by Anglo teachers and board members was not the only problem that prompted many Mexican American students to walk out from their

¹⁴ "Here Are the 'Demands' Of the Striking E-E Students ," *The Valley Morning Star*, November 16, 1968. A4.

¹⁵ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights was a bipartisan agency established by Congress to investigate allegations of denial of equal protection of the law because of race, color, religion, sex or national origin as defined in *Mirande, Alfredo. The Chicano Experience: An Alternative Perspective*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 93.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

classrooms. Mexican American students typically attended inferior, under-financed, segregated schools, isolated by school districts and by schools within the districts.¹⁷

The commission U.S. Commission on Civil Rights also found that the quality of interaction between teachers and students favored Anglo students. In comparison to Mexican American children, Anglo teachers encouraged, developed contributions, responded positively and directed questions to Anglo children.¹⁸ Mexican American students in Edcouch-Elsa experienced this practice first hand as many who wanted to go to college were discouraged by Anglo counselors and advised to seek jobs in the labor sector. School counselor Gretchen Sorensen was accused by many Mexican American students in Edcouch-Elsa that she discouraged them from seeking higher education.

Two former leaders of the walkout Raul Arispe, Freddy Saenz, and student Norma Cuellar indicated that many Mexican American male students were advised by Sorensen to join the military instead of going to college. Saenz states that Sorensen told him that he “had a good arm and would be good for [serving in] the army”¹⁹ and Arispe commented that Sorensen did not inform him or other Mexican American male students that attending college would exempt them from the military draft.²⁰ Another Mexican American student interviewed by Barrera recounts how Sorensen advised him to enlist into military rather than go to college, and described how Sorensen’s office was the favorite hang-out place for Anglo students.²¹ The alleged accusations that many Mexican American students made against Sorensen demonstrate the how male students of Mexican descent were seen as expendable and only good for the armed forces.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Barrera, 28.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Though many issues transcended gender lines, all students wanted a revised curriculum, more Mexican American teachers, the removal of racist teachers and the discontinuation of pushing out and advising Mexican American students into vocational jobs. Yet, female Mexican American students became subjugated to typical gender roles by Anglo teachers in class and in school events. As Olga Rodriguez states, “Most Chicanas were brought up in Catholic families and thus had to cope with a reactionary morality which rationalizes subordination of women in the family and in society.”²² This expectation of subjugation and oppression of female Mexican American students not only by men in the movement, but also by the establishment, prompted them to fight against a patriarchal society that focused on race, gender and gender roles. Within the student movement, many female Mexican American students participated in the walkouts across Los Angeles. Anglo teachers exploited the traditional gender role of Mexican American female students and applied them in the classroom and extracurricular activities. In Los Angeles, one female student who walked out related this issues to what she was being taught in her home economics class. “You little Mexicans, you better learn and pay attention.....most of you are going to be cooking and cleaning for other people.”²³ In Edcouch-Elsa, female Mexican American students were subjugated in the same manner.

Maricela Rodriguez Lozano stated differences she noticed between the treatment of Mexican American and Anglo girls when she was an eighth grader, student council member, and cheerleader. According to Lozano, she and other Mexican American cheerleaders had to clean up for themselves and the Anglo cheerleaders after every football game.²⁴ Another instance in which a female Mexican American student was pushed out and advised to drop out of school by

²² Rodriguez, 42.

²³ Ruiz, Vicki. *From Out Of the Shadows: Mexican Women in the Twentieth-Century America*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 103.

²⁴ Barrera, 24.

school counselor Sorensen occurred when she became pregnant.²⁵ These two incidents described in interviews demonstrate the attitude in which female Mexican American students were oppressed due to being a minority and female. In the 1968 CBS news broadcast report with Walter Cronkite that aired on November 29, the Edcouch-Elsa student walkouts were the main focus. Female subjugation is seen as news reporter Ed Rabel interviews a female student. He asked her, “They want you to say, well I regret what I’ve done and I won’t do it again. They want you to do that in order to get back into school. Will you do that?”²⁶ She replied with a simple “No I won’t.”²⁷

This unidentified female student demonstrated with her response that she rejected acting in a certain manner and say what was expected of her. The response this student gave Rabel after he asked why she would not succumb to the administration’s demands in order to be reinstated into class exhibited a new self-awareness of her ability to make her own choices not only as a Mexican American, but as a female. She responded, “Because, well I don’t feel sorry for what I did. I think it’s right.”²⁸ Edcouch-Elsa administrators wanted students, male and females, who were expelled for their participation in the walkout to admit their wrong doings in order to be allowed back into class. However, Ed Rabel did not ask these lines of questions to male students he interviewed as demonstrations were occurring. Rabel asked one male student, “Why is it very important to you that you be allowed to speak Spanish on the school ground?”²⁹ The student answered, “Well that’s our mother tongue, I don’t see why it should be taken away from

²⁵ Ibid. 25

²⁶ *Edcouch-Elsa Student Walkout school boycott 1968 CBS News Broadcast Walter Cronkite*, reported by Ed Rabel (CBS News Report, November 29, 1968) YouTube URL: <http://youtu.be/xU-zQBvgn-k>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

us.”³⁰ Asking the same question to another male student in the demonstration, the student responded, “We’re born of Mexican American parents and we have to speak Spanish to them, and they want us to forget our native tongue. I don’t think that’s fair for us.”³¹ The manner in which both male and female students were represented in the national news media by the questions they were asked demonstrated the double standard in which female students were held to.

Another example of this double standard occurred when six students were arrested for demonstrating near the school grounds. Take to account that female Mexican American students involved in the walkouts participated due to the double discrimination they experienced on the campus. One of them, Mirtala Villarreal, a 17 year old junior at Edcouch-Elsa High school was arrested along with five male students on a Friday afternoon, November 15, 1968.³² Villarreal was one of the leaders that led the demonstrations and walkouts along with her male peers prompting Principle Pipkin to sign complaints against them.³³ In an interesting note, Freddy Saenz, Xavier Ramirez, Homer Trevino, Arnulfo Sustaita, and Artemio Salinas were released from the county jail after securing bonds while Mirtala Villarreal, the only female student arrested was released immediately under her own recognizance.³⁴

Yet, Principle Pipkin’s unwillingness to compromise- with the students yielded no results. He issued a statement that said... “We [school system] will not yield one iota as long as I am principal. The students will not dictate the policy.”³⁵ Pipkin even stated that his faculty,

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² “E-E Campus Quiet Saturday After Six Arrested,” *The Monitor*, November 17, 1968.

³³ “Jailed Protestors Released, November 17,” *Edinburg Daily Review*, November 17, 1968.

³⁴ Ibid.

It is unknown why Mirtala Villarreal was released immediately under her own recognizance while her male counterparts were released only after they had made bail.

³⁵ Barrera, 45.

which included 22 Mexican American teachers out of 53, was “more unified than ever before.”³⁶ Students who walked out and participated in the protest were suspended for three days, not including time off because of the legal action that the school board took against them. Students who participated in the protest acted civilly and orderly so the movement would not be hindered. The 15 demands presented to the school board from student leaders and members from MAYO were commonly used by other “Chicano” students throughout the Southwest.

In the Rio Grande Valley, MAYO gained influence in the Texas towns of San Juan, Pharr, Edinburg, Elsa, Edcouch, La Villa, Weslaco, Mercedes, and Mission, with the exception of McAllen, the largest city in Hidalgo County at the time.³⁷ The MAYO chapter in the Rio Grande Valley was comprised of college, junior high and high school Mexican American students.³⁸ Other than being responsible for drafting the demands of the students, demanding a special session with the Edcouch-Elsa school board to discuss Mexican American students’ complaints, MAYO also focused on uniting the Mexican American people not only in Edcouch-Elsa, but the entire Rio Grande Valley. A college graduate and member of MAYO, Jose Angel Gutierrez expressed this ideology of unification in order to fight against the establishment. “We will join forces as soon as Mexican Americans stop trying to become gringos.”³⁹ MAYO not only contested the punishment and humiliation students experienced when using the Spanish language in the classroom, members also questioned other forms of oppression occurring in other districts in the Rio Grande Valley. The actions these students took to bring reform into the educational system in Edcouch-Elsa held dire consequences. The day after the initial protest started, many students continued boycotting class until their list of demands was met.

³⁶ “Principle Fears More Demonstrations Will Take Place Monday At E-E School,” *Valley Morning Star*, November 17, 1968.

³⁷ “MAYO Gets Valley Foothold,” *The Monitor*, November 24, 1968.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

With claims that classes were being disrupted due to noisy demonstrations by the student instigators, Pipkin and Assistant Principal Bill Thompson filed the misdemeanor charges of loitering on the school grounds with the Hidalgo County Sheriff's Department in nearby Edinburg.⁴⁰ Student protestors had assembled across the front of the school on the other side of U.S. Highway 107 when the demonstrations began days before the arrests took place.⁴¹ The action that administrators took against the students was the beginning of the struggle for those who were involved in the student protests, especially the leaders of the movement. After the arrests of the six student leaders, Principle Pipkin figured that many would return to protest again when classes resumed that Monday, November, 18, and planned to take every possible legal action against "outside agitators" and students "loitering" on the campus grounds.⁴² He reminded the media that student protestors would have the opportunity to present their list of demands and their complaints at a scheduled school board meeting that Monday night. Two key issues during the board meeting were the students' demands and the three day expulsion against those who participated in the walkout.

Between late November 1968 to early January 1969, students that walked out and boycotted classes experienced the repercussions of their actions. Members of the school board voted to suspend students from class until a conference happened between the administration, students and their parents.⁴³ Originally, three days suspensions were given to students who led and participated in the walkout, however temporary extensions of the suspensions became effective until each student, their parents, and their attorney had an opportunity to go before the

⁴⁰ Barrera, 46.

⁴¹ Ibid., 44

⁴² "More Student Demonstrations Expected Monday In Mid-Valley", *The Valley Morning Star*, November 17, 1968.

⁴³ "Parents , Officials to Confer," *The Corpus Christi Caller*, November 19, 1968.

school board and show reason why he or she should not be expelled for the remainder of the semester.⁴⁴

Yet as individual hearings began, an injunction in federal court was sought by the students' attorneys due to the unfair treatment of the students by the school administration. It was presumed by the school board that the students who participated in the walkout were guilty until proven innocent.⁴⁵ A week after many Mexican American students walked out of their classes and presented themselves to the individual hearings with the school board, students began attending classes once more. Superintendent Bell declined to name the number of students who had been readmitted until the school board had finished their interviews with rebel students.⁴⁶ By November 24, 1968, 81 students out of 175⁴⁷ had appeared before the school board for individual hearings. Two of these students were immediately reinstated due to lack of evidence, 31 were expelled for the rest of the semester, and 47 returned to classes under probation which required good behavior; yet 94 students remained under the regular suspension.⁴⁸ However, these 94 students were ordered to return to class by Federal District Court Judge Reynaldo Garza of Brownsville who believed that the school board should have given the students a hearing before their expulsions and not after.⁴⁹ The hearing at Brownsville, Texas, came after five students requested an injunction against the school board days before. Judge Garza did not want to interfere with school operations, thus allowing students to return back to classes while

⁴⁴ "E-E High School Suspensions: Hearings Start This Afternoon," *The Valley Morning Star*, November 19, 1968.

⁴⁵ "E-E Injunction Rumored," *Edinburg Daily Review*, November 20, 1968.

⁴⁶ "Some of Suspended Students Reinstated," *The Monitor*, November 21, 1968.

⁴⁷ Total number of students who participated in the walkout and suspended fluctuates among various news media sources. The correct figure of those who walked out from the classes comes from James Baldemar Barrera's research due to numbers gathered by school officials during the meetings they held after the walkouts. According to Barrera, the official number of students who walked out was 192. The total number of 175 students is used here because this source breaks down the number of students who were reinstated, who were expelled indefinitely, and those who still had not made an appointment for an individual hearing with the school board despite the inaccurate number.

⁴⁸ "Many Empty Desks At E-E," *Edinburg Daily Review*, November 24, 1968.

⁴⁹ "Expelled Students Come Back," *The Corpus Christi Caller*, November 27, 1968.

individual hearings were given to those who still had not made an appointment with the school board. These school operations that Judge Garza refused to interfere without any proof of wrongdoing by the school board was the statute that stated that any student who participated in any form of demonstration would be expelled from school immediately.⁵⁰ The school board had placed this rule into effect weeks before the walkout occurred to curtail any students involving themselves with “outside agitators.”⁵¹ However, he thought it was “foolishness for students to want to tell the board how to run the schools” and did not intend to set policy unless the board’s actions were unconstitutional.⁵²

Students who were expelled indefinitely were presented with an unusual problem in continuing their education. Some sought to enroll in classes at neighboring school districts such as Edinburg, Weslaco, Donna, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo, and McAllen but these districts refused to admit the expelled students for fear of a walkout or other protest spreading to their high school campuses.⁵³ Some parents and students took interest in the Edinburg School district due to the city being located next to Edcouch-Elsa. Lauro Guerra, who was the director of pupil services for the Edinburg District was contacted by students and their families seeking enrollment for the expelled students.⁵⁴ Three other families contacted Edinburg High School Principle Elmer Grounds to admit their sons or daughters, but it was only an “exploratory move.”⁵⁵ According to Superintendent Arthur Medina, 20 of the students who were expelled from Edcouch-Elsa because of their participation in the walkouts inquired and were seeking admittance into the La Joya School District. Students who made inquiries to Medina had to be cleared by the Edcouch-

⁵⁰ Barrera., 70.

⁵¹ Ibid., 37

⁵² “Expelled Students Come Back,” *The Corpus Christi Caller*, November 27, 1968.

⁵³ Barrera, 58.

⁵⁴ “E-E Students Seeking to Enroll Here,” *Edinburg Daily Review*, December 3, 1968.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Elsa School District, meaning the school fees had to be paid and any books returned.⁵⁶ Students who had requested their transcripts for enrollment into the La Joya School District were supported by Hidalgo County's Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASO), which was led by Abel Ochoa of Edcouch.⁵⁷ PASO planned to transport students to La Joya in order to continue their education.⁵⁸ Principle Luis Gonzalez confirmed that some of expelled students were already attending classes and that others could enroll.⁵⁹ Superintendent Medina stated that, "these kids deserved a chance to get an education without any publicity and to leave them alone."⁶⁰ Students were received by the La Joya School District without encountering any major complications, but the distance that students had to travel each day presented a problem.

To help with transportation to La Joya, parents of two student protesters purchased a bus from an Elsa man who used to transport *braceros* and parents pitched in for fuel.⁶¹ Many students who were expelled woke up and left to school very early in the morning and returned at night. Reactions to the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts were mixed among students, parents, and administrators. According to Barrera, the students' struggle became widely known and supporters throughout the state and nation sent telegrams praising them for their actions and wished them well. The students of Edcouch-Elsa who walked out did so in belief that they deserved a better education and an understanding of their Mexican culture. However, five

⁵⁶ Expelled E-E Students Seek Admittance In La Joya School," *The Valley Morning Star*, December 10, 1968.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ "Student Transcripts Are Sought," *The Corpus Christi Caller*, December 10, 1968.

⁵⁹ "Ousted Students Now In La Joya School Classes," *The Valley Morning Star*, December 1, 1968.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Barrera, 58-59.

student leaders out of the six and their parents took action against the school board's conduct in reference to the punishment given to student protestors.⁶²

These five students and their parents filed a damage suit in Federal Court against the school district asking for \$50,000 in damages from the school board and administrators.⁶³ In the trial that began on December 18, 1968, in Brownsville, Texas, Principle M. L. Pipkin was questioned by U.S. District Judge Reynaldo Garza who asked Pipkin what criteria the school used in the "selective enforcement" of the rule against demonstrations.⁶⁴ In other words, Garza questioned the manner in which the school board decided who was expelled and who merited reinstatement. The manner in which Pipkin answered Garza's question affected not only the school board's stance against student rebels, but also the defense of their actions. Pipkin stated that "they took into consideration the pupil's attitude toward the school and how the pupil felt he had been treated by the school."⁶⁵ Garza then asked, "In other words, if they kowtowed to you and said you were a nice principle they got back in?"⁶⁶ After a long pause, Pipkin answered that there was no written criteria.⁶⁷ State Senator Jim Bates, who represented the school officials asked for a 15 minute recess during which he approached defense attorney Bob Sanchez to discuss a settlement for both parties.⁶⁸ The agreement was made by the attorneys that the Edcouch-Elsa school rule against student demonstrations was unconstitutional and violated the students' civil rights.⁶⁹ Two weeks before the walkouts began the school board passed a rule that any student taking part in a demonstration was subject to immediate expulsion, which in turn

⁶² Barrera, 61.

⁶³ "Pupil Suit Hearing Set For Monday," *The Corpus Christi Caller*, December 13, 1968.

⁶⁴ "Expelled Students Will Be Readmitted: School Board Policy Ruled Unconstitutional," *The Corpus Christi Caller*, December 19, 1968.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Barrera, 71.

Judge Garza deemed unconstitutional because it violated the students' inalienable rights of free speech and to assemble peacefully.⁷⁰ Certain provisions were established as the case came to a close.

The judge ordered that the plaintiffs and all other expelled students could return to school on January 6, 1969.

Expelled students were required to make up schoolwork they missed when serving their expulsions.

The plaintiffs receive nominal and actual damages of \$240.00 for school transportation expenses and additional tuition costs to attend classes outside the Defendant school district.

The Defendants pay Attorney Bob Sanchez all money damages in serving as trustee for the Plaintiffs.

The Defendants notify by mail all Plaintiffs and other expelled students of their reinstatement in school.

The Defendants pay all taxable cost of money damages.⁷¹

Agreeing to these provisions, the students and parents who sued the school district waived their right to obtain \$50,000 for damages and instead agreed to defer for another date for a trial by jury.⁷² News of the victory was received with elation by supporters of the students, student leaders and their parents. Lawyer for the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, Mario Obledo stated that, "the Edcouch-Elsa case is the first major victory for the Ford Foundation-sponsored organization."⁷³ Indeed, the victory represented a significant change in which Mexican Americans, especially students, used civil disobedience, nonviolent tactics and the court system to achieve not only equality in the classroom, but cultural understanding. Like those in Edcouch-Elsa, thousands of other Mexican American students across the Southwest involved themselves in how their future was dictated and demonstrated that they were the ones who would control

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 71-72.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ "Expelled Students Will Be Readmitted: School Board Policy Ruled Unconstitutional," *The Corpus Christi Caller*, December 19, 1968.

their own destiny. “The movement itself expressed the disenfranchisement of Mexican Americans in the Valley which in turn altered the social and economic landscape for years to come.”⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Barrera, 2.

CHAPTER III

STUDENT ACTIVISM: COMMUNITY AND MEDIA ATTENTION

The extensive local media coverage of the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts along with national coverage from the CBS news network exposed the student movement occurring in the Rio Grande Valley. Many in the community, especially parents and law enforcement officials, were shocked, bewildered and horrified as they arrived at the scene; wondering how such an incident could have occurred.¹ Publicly calling themselves “Chicanos”, the media portrayed these young Mexican Americans as defiant, rebellious, and self-assertive due to participating in marches, boycotts, and sit-ins in response to the unjust conditions occurring in mainstream American society during the 1960s.² Locally, the media reported the student’s acts of rebellion and defiance against the school board, however, they were portrayed as mere pawns that were controlled and misled by outside influences. In this chapter, I argue that the success of the students’ protest was due to the media’s exposure which prompted many in the community, both Anglos and Mexican Americans, and regional and national civil rights organizations to support their cause. While some in the community supported the walkout, there were others who did not agree with the manner or the reasons why these students walked out of their classes and their demands.

Eight months prior to the Edcouch-Elsa walkout, Mexican American students from Los Angeles walked out of several local high schools due to dissatisfaction with the school system.

¹ Barrera, 21.

² Ibid., 1

The Los Angeles strike received national attention and stimulated student activism in other cities in the Southwest.³ The influence of the Los Angeles walkouts prompted activism in the college level by Mexican American students; beginning with San Jose State students who walked out of their graduation and other Mexican American students who held massive strikes at San Francisco State and UC Berkeley.⁴ Many of the demands these Mexican American students had, especially those in the high schools, “included the hiring of Mexicano instructors, counselors, and administrators; bilingual and bicultural education; and closer cooperation between schools and the barrio.”⁵ The Edcouch-Elsa walkout had been one of the many movements that occurred in the Southwest after the Los Angeles walkout and the media attention that it received was immense not only nationally, but locally as well.

Beginning with the news report that propelled the students’ course of action in Edcouch-Elsa to the national spotlight, news reporter Ed Rabel of the CBS news network stood along the Rio Grande River and began his report:

This is the Rio Grande, which flows the length of the Rio Grande Valley. It is a lush valley of citrus groves, where Mexican Americans attracted by the agricultural industry outnumber the Anglo population. The practice here has been one of domination, the Anglos dominating the Latins. But the Mexican-Americans say that that day has ended, that they are on the move, that they will have a piece of the action.⁶

The image of the valley represented in the start of this report describes it as an agricultural utopia filled with “lush citrus groves” which are tended by Mexican Americans. Standing next to the river, Rabel established himself on the Texas side of the border between the United States and Mexico, indicating that the incident was occurring in the United States. Since the valley is an

³ Gonzales, 212.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Edcouch-Elsa Student Walkout school boycott 1968 CBS News Broadcast Walter Cronkite*, reported by Ed Rabel (CBS News Report, November 29, 1968) YouTube URL: <http://youtu.be/xU-zQBvgn-k>.

agricultural utopia, Rabel deduces that this was the reason why Mexican Americans outnumbered the Anglo population and disregarded the history of the Rio Grande Valley which demonstrates the presence of Mexican Americans and Mexicans long before Anglo domination. The term domination used by Rabel expressed the attitude of how Anglos saw themselves as compared to Mexican Americans. Yet, his tone of voice changed to more of a serious tone as he states the last part of his introduction to his national audience.

As Rabel continued his report, he interviewed a number of students outside of the high school and asked for their reasons for walking out. The news did not provide the students' names or educational level during the report, so in order to prevent confusion on who said what, I will label each student male or female, as student number one, two and so on. Rabel asked male student number one, "Why is it very important to you that you be allowed to speak Spanish on the school ground?"⁷ Male student number one answered, "Well that's our mother tongue, I don't see why it should be taken away from us."⁸ Asking the same question to male student number two, he responded, "We're born of a Mexican American parents and we have to speak Spanish to them, and they want us to forget our native tongue. I don't think that's fair for us."⁹ With this, the CBS news report that aired nationally on November 29, 1968, described the sentiments held by many Mexican-American students in Edcouch-Elsa towards the school board and educational system in the Rio Grande Valley. Demonstrating that there was a problem within the Edcouch-Elsa school system, these students' peaceful demonstration on national television expressed their discontent. The students' goals for the protest were quite simple; they wanted reform in the educational system and an understanding of their cultural heritage.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

While the local chapter of MAYO (Mexican American Youth Organization) focused their efforts in rallying the student walk out and demanding the school board to be heard, another chapter located in San Antonio, Texas, supported the local chapter by sending them a telegram during the entire ordeal. “Los MAYO’s de San Antonio are with you all the way for the better education for *la raza* (the people). Viva (long live) Edcouch-Elsa.”¹⁰ The Brown Berets¹¹ and *La Raza Unida*¹² demonstrated their support to these students and their struggle for better education through telegrams as well. The disenfranchisement of the Mexican American people brought frustration and awareness within the community. Organizations formed by youths such as MECHA, the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), the Brown Berets and other groups in the mid-1960s helped many movements throughout the Southwest.¹³ MAYO members played a major role during the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts and as indicated above, other chapters of the organization supported the students and their actions for education reform. During the Edcouch-Elsa walkout, MAYO became the only organization in the Valley that consisted of Mexican American youths which spread rapidly through South Texas and acquired a strong foothold in the area.¹⁴

Chairman of the Brown Berets’ chapter in San Francisco, California, Tony Medina, noted in his telegram, “Congratulations for your most courageous attitude on the blow-out (walkout) for it takes heroic *carnales* (brothers) like you to ascend up for *la causa*.”¹⁵ Miguel Barragan, who at the time was the consultant of *La Raza Unida* in Phoenix, Arizona, gave his praise to the Edcouch-Elsa Chicano student movement by saying; “We are proud of young Mexican

¹⁰ Barrera, 60.

¹¹ Mexican American militant organization .

¹² Mexican American political party formed in 1970 in Crystal City, Texas. Rodriguez, 36.?

¹³ Hammerback et al., *A War of Words*, 5.

¹⁴ “MAYO Gets Valley Foothold,” *The Monitor*, November 24, 1968.

¹⁵ Barrera, 60.

Americans like you who are willing to make the sacrifice to organize and lead the community in its efforts to rectify the educational policy that hurt *la raza* in Texas. We commend you for your courage and fully endorse your list of demands to the Edcouch-Elsa Independent School District officials. *Viva la causa.*”¹⁶

In the *Letters to the Editor* section in the local newspaper *The Valley Morning Star*, various people of different backgrounds supported the students who walked out. Ken Schroeder, a first year law student at The University of Texas at Austin and San Benito native sided with the students when on the issue of education. “To further deny these students from proper education hardly seems more than turning our backs on the real problems of society and specifically that of the rebellious generation.”¹⁷ He stated in his letter that schools were the problem because institutions fell into a routine once teachers finalize their lecture outlines and how the students were moved in or out without any attention being focused on the goal of education.¹⁸

Mrs. G.W. Bernet’s statement re-enforced that there is discrimination along the border, especially when it comes to speaking Spanish. “The problem is that racial discrimination is a very real thing in the Rio Grande Valley and along the USA in states bordering Mexico. It does make a difference whether your name is Garza or Smith.”¹⁹ In the same issue of *Letters to the Editor*, H.F. Saldivar responded to a negative comment made by a previous submitter about speaking English and Spanish in the United States and clearly supports the movement. Excerpts from his letter are provided in the next few lines demonstrated the attitude of many Mexican Americans who supported the walkouts. “Who founded Southwestern U.S.- organized it, Christianized it, and married into it? None other than the Spanish speaking people, of course.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “Letters to the Editor,” *Valley Morning Star*, November 24, 1968.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Letters to the Editor,” *Valley Morning Star*, December 1, 1968.

We bathe in our culture and love it and yet, we are definitely All-American. Look at our military record: WW II, Korea, and now Vietnam! Comprende! Nah! And the Texas Education Agency continues to ignore its citizens. Viva! The e-e boycott!”²⁰ Sentiments like this one from Mexican Americans demonstrate how a majority of the community supported the movement because they saw there was a problem. Even some Anglos saw the injustices that occurred along the border due to the issue of race and language. The *Letters to the Editors* column in the local newspapers provided citizens from the Rio Grande Valley to express their sentiments, whether for or against the student movement.

However, not all were at ease with organizations coming to the students’ aid by supporting their actions of walking out and their discontent is not hidden from the media or other sources. The administrators of Edcouch-Elsa believed that “outside agitators” were responsible for the student walkouts and for influencing the student population. In some of *The Monitor* newspaper clips of November 1968, principal Pipkin and Superintendent A.W. Bell blamed these “outside agitators” for the disruption. These “outside agitators” to him were older leaders of the group MAYO and other organizations that helped stage the walkout. However, he (Pipkin) was not the only one who believed this. As mentioned before, many other valley school districts were in fear of the same incident happening in their schools. Knowing that many of their students attended the meetings held by MAYO in the area, they believed that it was only a matter of time before or if it happened in their district. Many teachers felt that the students were misled and that the actions they took were not in their best interests.

Though some teachers, administrators and individuals from the community expressed their concerns that “outside agitators” influenced protesting students, arguments against outside influence were not successful in discrediting the movement. One major reason for this was the

²⁰ Ibid.

peaceful nature of the student walkout. According to a statement made to *The Monitor*, Elsa city police man Jake Foley who kept an eye on the developing situation informed the newspaper that for the most part students acted in an orderly manner.²¹ “Outside agitators” were seen as leftist militants who were pleased to be known as revolutionaries; who in part “implied that they used communist in the same fashion as communist have used others in the past to do their dirty work, all the while despising their pawns as hopelessly stupid.”²² MAYO and other civil rights organizations that came to the aid of the students before and after the walkout were portrayed by those who did not agree with the students’ actions as such. As the walkout ensued, many organization workers were identified and “well known for their left-wing and labor union activities.”²³ However these descriptions of what “outside agitators” were, it did not deter many the movements’ cause due to it being peaceful. Secondly, though there were some who did not support the students’ actions and demands, there were many in the community who supported them for wanting a better education as seen in the *Letters To the Editor* section of the Valley’s newspapers.

Reverend Collins Wickham of the Elsa Mexican Baptist Mission said it was the work of “professional agitators” and neither he nor his people approved of the gathering.²⁴ In the same article, Elsa city councilman Mario Leal addressed the group offering to act as a go-between with the school board for the students and urging them not to go through with the class boycott.²⁵ Both movements experienced resistance from the community, but from different forms of authority. However, those who blamed “outside agitators” were not only Anglos, but members of the Mexican American community. In a letter he wrote for *The Valley Morning Star*, Efrain

²¹ “140 Students Boycott,” *The Monitor*, November 14, 1968. 1.

²² “A Familiar Ring,” *Valley Morning Star*, December 12, 1968.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ “Professional Agitators Stirring Mass E-E School Fuss, Is Charge,” *Valley Morning Star*, November 14, 1968. 1

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Cid Dominguez of Mission, Texas, described the students who walked out as “little infants” who did not know what they were doing and their approach to solving their quarrels was “immature”.²⁶ In an effort to convince students that they were wrong by listening to these trouble makers, he wrote the following, “Don’t listen to those imported goons that are schooled in the creation of chaos?. They are communist trained to divide and conquer.”²⁷ In a second letter that he submitted on November 29, 1968, Mr. Dominguez still did not agree with the students’ actions. “I have not objected to the students’ reasonable desires, but I do object to the manner in their behavior. We are human beings; not senseless beasts.”²⁸ On November 24, 1968, Mrs. Helen (Boyle?) wrote that these students were not “poor misled youths”. Their rebellious actions went beyond common sense and that the demands they drafted were justifications the walkout. “Youth or old, we will do what we want to do and then seek ‘cause and reasons’ to justify rebelliousness against good sense and authority of others.”²⁹

A long time educator at Edcouch-Elsa, Mrs. Anderson believed that the walkout was one of the worst experiences in the community’s history.³⁰ Due to the results of the walkouts, she stated that “we (the school) lost some very good people because of that boycott.”³¹ What she referred to was that many Anglo teachers left the school some years later due to the results of the walkouts and court trial, including her for political reasons. Ms. Garcia, who was a high school teacher at the time, did not agree with the students’ boycott. She claimed that the students were misguided rabble-rousers who were misled by outside agitators.³² Another teacher, Willie Rae

²⁶ “The People’s Voice,” *Valley Morning Star*, November 18, 1968.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Letters to the Editor,” *Valley Morning Star*, November 29, 1968.

²⁹ “Letters to the Editor,” *Valley Morning Star*, November 24, 1968

³⁰ Miguel A. Guajardo and Francisco J. Guajardo, “The Impact of Brown on the Brown of South Texas: A Micropolitical Perspective on the Education of Mexican Americans in a South Texas Community,” *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 3, (Autumn, 2004): 519, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3699437>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Fisher believed that the walkouts were “unfortunate” and “unnecessary”, though she was aware of some trouble with “discrimination against the Latins, but it wasn’t bad enough” to merit a massive walkout.³³

Those who did not approve the students’ actions included some Mexican American teachers. For example, Ms. Garcia voiced her opinion in *Guajardo and Guajardo’s* article about how outside agitators influenced the student population. In the *Valley Morning Star*, the idea of outsiders being responsible for the unrest in Edcouch-Elsa was clearly shown in the rhetoric. “Student unrest in colleges and high schools were caused by professional agitators that called themselves revolutionaries. The flurry of excitement at the Edcouch-Elsa school was more than faintly reminiscent of what is going on at universities throughout the country. It is remarkable that during the height of the excitement, the students themselves were good natured and, apparently, far from revolutionary.”³⁴ The involvements of outside agitators in Edcouch-Elsa were a concern, but many of the students acted peacefully rejecting the violence expected from revolutionaries. The negative stereotype that student organizations were militant and caused trouble where ever they went did not affect the support that these students received. As mentioned in Ernesto B. Vigil’s book, “Militancy, activism, or whatever word you choose, has begun to grow in stature among Chicano youth as a tool for advancement of their people.”³⁵ The students at Edcouch-Elsa were not militant according to the article “A Familiar Ring” from the *Valley Morning Star Newspaper* because of their “good nature.”

On November 13, a day before students walked out of their class rooms, the *Valley Morning Star* printed the story of how the Mexican American Youth Organization drafted 15

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “A Familiar Ring,” *Valley Morning Star*, December 12, 1968.

³⁵ Vigil, 113.

demands and two recommendations in which they were to be presented to the Edcouch-Elsa school board.³⁶ These demands came to being due to claims of blatant discrimination that many Mexican American students experienced and the article explained the organization's demands briefly. Their demands were to be given to the school board that night but it was postponed until the next special session. On November 14th *The Monitor* reported that 140 Mexican-Americans students participated in a boycott of classes at Edcouch-Elsa High School today after gathering at the campus at 8a.m.³⁷ The number of students indicated in the newspaper on this date was inaccurate due to the fact that the final number of students who walked out was 192 according to Barrera:, but this article mentions that 125 students began the demonstration as the school bell ran at 8a.m., and another 15 walked out at the beginning of the second period.³⁸ The number of students who participated in the walkout was finalized by the end of that school day. In that same day, the *Valley Morning Star* also printed an article that dealt with the students' decision to walk out. The article, "Professional Agitators Stirring Mass E-E School Fuss, Is Charge," detailed how students passed up classes because the school board failed to appear as requested by the organization.³⁹ It also described that organizers and students practiced nonviolence once they walked out of their classes and how there was support from the community as well as disapproval.

The principle, assistant principle, and two teachers encouraged students to return to class while getting their information for later action. Many students involved said the walkout would "hit the school where it hurts," cutting down the average daily attendance on which the state

³⁶ "Mexican-American Youth Group Drafts 15 Demands On School," *Valley Morning Star*, November 13, 1968.

³⁷ "140 Students Boycott," *The Monitor*, November 14, 1968. 1.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "Professional Agitators Stirring Mass E-E School Fuzz, Is Charge," *Valley Morning Star*, November 14, 1968.

funds are allocated.”⁴⁰ Yet not all the students were in agreement with the student protest occurring outside the school. Many of the Mexican American students remaining in classes told reporters at a break between classes they thought the walkout was a “disgrace.”⁴¹ Others who remained in class were “violently” opposed to the demonstrations.⁴² As the protest continued through the day, many other school districts around the area kept in touch with the administrators of Edcouch-Elsa in fear that the movement might spread to their districts.

On November 17, *The Monitor* reported that the Edcouch-Elsa campus was quiet after arrests were made, but concerns were still high due to the tranquility. As Principle Pipkin reported in the paper, “it could be just the lull before the real storm,”⁴³ which was a direct correlation to the people amassing outside the jail in support of the students. The arrest of these six students brought the community together to hold a mass rally in front of the Hidalgo County jail before the last of the arrested students was freed early Saturday at 1a.m. During the time of the students’ incarceration, Deputy Tom Wingert estimated the crowd at around 250, while Assistant District Attorney Jim Skelton said the crowd numbered over 300.⁴⁴ Those in the crowd held candles, some held banners saying “Free the students” and sang “We Shall Over Come.”⁴⁵ The crowd consisted of some college students, students from various high schools, and parents.

In the November 15th issue of *The Monitor*, school officials in districts throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley watched nervously as student upheaval disrupted the classroom

⁴⁰ “140 Students Boycott,” *The Monitor*, November 14, 1968. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Principle Fears More Demonstrations Will Take Place Monday At E-E School,” *Valley Morning Star*, November 17, 1968.

⁴³ “E-E Campus Quiet Saturday after Six Arrested,” *The Monitor*, Nov. 17, 1968.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

routine.⁴⁶ Superintendents from Edinburg and Weslaco went on record stating their opinions and fears about the escalating dissent. Thomas Pickens, superintendent from Edinburg stated that no indications of student unrest had yet surfaced, but that “we all live in the same area and it is a fact of sociology that what happens in one district can happen in another.”⁴⁷ “We feel sure it’s going to hit us sooner or later” said Buck Henson, superintendent of the Weslaco School District.⁴⁸ “There are rumors it may happen. We know some of our students have attended those meetings, but what can we do?”⁴⁹ With concerns of keeping the peace, many mid valley districts denied enrollment to these expelled students due to fear of other walkouts happening. Another article in that same issue detailed the actions that would be held against those students who walked out. School officials filed charges against Mexican American student demonstrators on the high school campus as more than 100 youngsters were chanting, clapping and cheering as they marched in front of the school.⁵⁰

After arrest warrants were obtained, Sherriff E.E. Vickers, along with two deputies, Pat Ramsey and W.T. Freeman, served them and arrested six students who lead the movement. These six students were Mirtala Villarreal, the only 17 year old female, Freddy Saenz, the only juvenile who was 16 years old, Homero Trevino, 19 years old, Arnulfo Sustaita, also 19 years old, Artemio Salinas, 18 years old, and Javier Ramirez, who was 17 years old.⁵¹ Principle Pipkin wanted to take legal action against all students and outsiders who were loitering on the campus the Monday the walkouts ensued and believed these arrests would have a sobering effect.⁵²

⁴⁶ “Valley Schoolmen Keeping Eye on Edcouch-Elsa Developments,” *The Monitor*, November 15, 1968.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “E-E Campus Quiet Saturday After Six Arrested,” *The Monitor*, November 17, 1968.

⁵² Ibid.

On November 24th, “Parents of Five E-E Students Go to Court” detailed how students who were suspended in connection with the walkout filed suit in the U.S. District Court in Brownsville on November 22, 1968. The plaintiffs included Xavier Ramirez who was described as the “spokesman” for the protesting students by *The Monitor*. Ramirez, along with Antemio Salinas, Mirtala Villareal, Raul Arispe, and Jose Chavez sued the district for \$50,000 in alleged damages. Three of the plaintiffs that sued were leaders of the student walkout and with help from their defense attorney Bob Sanchez, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) attorneys Pete Tijerina, Mario Obledo, and Alan Exelrod; they were reinstated to continue classes. These students would make up their work in the spring of 1969 in accordance to a settlement that was reached.⁵³ Other attorneys that aided the students were James De Anda from Corpus Christi; Norman Amaker, and Vilma Martinez from a New York City law firm; and Jack Greenberg who worked for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).⁵⁴

On the November 13, issue of *The Monitor*, the article detailed that many Civil Rights organizations came to the aid of the students who participated in the walkout. MAYO, PASO, the Brown Berets, *La Raza Unida*, NAACP, and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund stepped up in defense of the students. MAYO contributed to the walkout by having some of the students leaders actively participate and vocally express their dissatisfaction of the Edcouch-Elsa school system. PASO also rendered their services to the student activists who were suspended due to the actions they took during the walkouts. PASO offered legal aid to students expelled or who were about to be expelled for participating in certain Mexican

⁵³ Barrera., 63

⁵⁴ Ibid.

American organizations.⁵⁵ According to the president of PASO in Hidalgo County, Abel Ochoa, the organization would provide legal assistance to boys and girls kicked out of school for “trying to legally organize to effectively solve problems of Mexican American students and parents.”⁵⁶ With their combined efforts, five students were reinstated into school as well as the many others whose only option was to attend the La Joya school district to continue their education.

The involvement of Mexican American students and their actions made the walkouts a heated topic locally. These students had joined countless of others across the Southwest in the fight for educational reform. Many parents whose children were involved in the walkout and affected by the consequences of their actions supported their children. Teachers, other students, parents and other members of the community believed that the actions of the students and their supporters brought shame to the community. Yet, despite the negative publicity and opinions from others, the Edcouch-Elsa walkout brought a change to the educational system in Deep South Texas. After 44 years, the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts have not faded from public memory due to scholarly publication, recent reports from the media, brief lecture of the account in local high schools and the upload of the CBS news broadcast of 1968 to the internet website YouTube in 2010.

In the late 1990s, *The Monitor* published articles in dedication to the walkouts as the 30th anniversary of the event approached. The article, “1968 Student Walkout Wasn’t Kid Stuff”, explained, from former students, why they decided to walk out and the ordeal they experienced as the consequences for their actions came to. One important fact that was revealed to the newspaper 30 years later and not shown by the students during their protest was the fear of losing the fight for equality. Many in the community felt it was not proper for students to

⁵⁵ “PASO Offers Legal Aid For Expelled Students,” *The Monitor*, November 13, 1968

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

walkout and demonstrate in front of the school. Bob Sanchez, an attorney for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund that assisted the expelled students in federal court stated that ‘if the case was lost, we would have lost face with the community, the parents, and the more conservative element.’⁵⁷ This concern was very real, but the outcome of the trial superseded fear with elation because in this historic event, the students were in the right and *The Monitor’s* article expressed that sentiment.

In December of 1998, the article “Former Edcouch-Elsa Students Remember the Walkout” detailed how some in the community negatively remember the walkouts. Few in the community still had contempt against the student movement decades after the fact. Faculty who were present as the walkouts ensued, such as Genoveva Garcia believed that there was nothing noble about the walk out and Homero Diaz was apprehensive about the involvement of outside groups assisting the students.⁵⁸ A longtime member of the community and mayor of Elsa from 1961 to 1965, Neil Galloway saw no need to “dredge up memories of the walkout, let alone celebrate it because the fissure between Mexican Americans and Anglos widened after the walkout and many businesses gave up on the area. An exodus of Anglos left the community as well as businesses and teachers left the profession.”⁵⁹ Yet the most interesting segment of this article is how Mexican American students perceived the walkouts at time of this report. Students who were featured in this article found themselves in distress when they noticed that very little information about Hispanic culture and Mexico was included in their world history books. According to their teacher and Edcouch Elsa alumni Delia Perez, that the history of the walkout and the lack of information about “their” history in textbooks made this issue relevant and very

⁵⁷ “1968 Student Walkout Wasn’t Kid Stuff,” *The Monitor*, July 27, 1998, 8A.

⁵⁸ “Former Edcouch-Elsa Students Remember the Walkout of 1968,” *The Monitor*, December 14, 1998.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

real to them.⁶⁰

From recent interviews that were conducted a few years ago by *The Monitor*, as well as stories printed detailed the event in celebration and remembrance. Many of those who walked out described and shared their accounts with the public on their experiences as students of Mexican descent in the 1960s. As adults, many of those who participated shared their experiences with *The Monitor* and explained why they acted in the manner they did. Released in November of 2008, the section of Opinions from the newspaper aired the story to remember the brave actions of those who participated.

Eddie Gonzalez, who was the city commissioner of Edcouch at the time of the interview, stated that, “the principle was Anglo, the assistant principle was Anglo, the counselors where Anglo...”⁶¹ Gonzalez’s account describes a racial hierarchy within the school system. As his statement continues, he recalls a moment in which one of the Anglo counselors stated “Eddie, don’t waste your time in college...go to trade school, learn to be a mechanic, that way you can start making right...making money right away.”⁶² As he mentions in the interview, this created a division between Anglos and Mexican Americans. Many scholars have identified these methods of forcing Mexican American students into trade schools, military or other occupations that did not lead to college as “pushing out.” As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Olga Rodriguez mentioned this in her work, “The Politics of Chicano Liberation” that this was very common throughout the Southwest.

Felix Rodriguez, now a worker for veterans affairs and student organizer during the walkouts recalled how every facet of their lives was controlled by the Anglo controlled

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ “The Edcouch-Elsa Walkout,” *The Monitor*, November 2008, <http://www.themonitor.com/video/?videoId=1917577873>

⁶² Ibid.

establishment. “We were punished for speaking Spanish, we were punished for speaking English with a (?) Mexican Spanish, Mexican accent.”⁶³ Rodriguez could not believe or understand that “if there was a God, why he would allow this kind of treatment.”⁶⁴ Felix Rodriguez’s role as a leader during the walkouts was still seen vividly through his emotions and mannerisms in the interview.

Jesus Ramirez, an attorney in present day and member of MAYO during the walkouts started his interview by stating that the year 1969 was very different from the present. No stranger to segregation, Ramirez mentioned that he attended segregated schools until he reached middle school. He remembered one of the punishments that Anglo teachers would give students for speaking Spanish or English with a heavy Spanish accent. “The teacher would stand there while you went out and basically put some soap (rubs hands) and washed out your mouth with soap.”⁶⁵ Ramirez’s statement about this form of punishment to students who spoke Spanish or English with Spanish accent detailed one of the many injustices that occurred in Edcouch-Elsa.

In a three part series that *The Monitor* printed in the month of November 2008 recounted what occurred in Edcouch-Elsa and how students practiced civil disobedience for the sake of equality and cultural understanding. Between November 12 and 13 of 2008, headlines such as “1968 Edcouch-Elsa Walkout Timeline,” “The Seeds of Change: The Stories of the 1968 Edcouch-Elsa Walkout,” “In 1968, Students Walked Out,” and “Walkout: An Unlikely Leader” detailed this historical event. The series printed in *The Monitor* explored the reasons for the walkout, why people still talk about it, and examined the impact it had on the community then

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

and the decades after.⁶⁶ These articles depict how those that were marginalized because of race planned a peaceful protest with the help of Mexican American organizations in order to bring much needed change in Edcouch-Elsa. However, as explained in one of the articles in this three part series, the student walkout divided not only the school but the community as well in 1968 and these divisions still remained.⁶⁷ As presented earlier in this work, many students and members of the community, both Anglo and Mexican American either did not support the student movement or did not support the manner in which the protesting students acted in order to be heard.

The Brownsville Herald, newspaper from the City of Brownsville also ran a story about the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts on August 10, 2010. However, this story of the walkouts focused more on the female students who participated and their recollection on why they walked out. Many female students faced discrimination and punishment as much as the male Chicano students. Male students were physically punished for speaking Spanish on school grounds by having their mouths washed with soap, or being struck by teachers or administrators. Many females suffered almost the same consequences as their male counterparts. One female who attended Edcouch-Elsa High in the late 1960s explained the consequences for not speaking English. Both male and female students were swatted with a ruler when caught speaking Spanish. Girls got hit with the flat part of the ruler while the boys got hit with the edge.⁶⁸

Yet, discrimination against female students was not uncommon either as seen from interviews from the same source. Superintendent Reyes explains and recalls how little opportunities many female Mexican American students had during these troublesome times.

⁶⁶ “The Seeds of Change: The Stories of the 1968 Edcouch-Elsa Walkout,” *The Monitor*, November 12, 1968.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Stett, Holbrook and Lupe Chavez, “Former Edcouch-Elsa Students Recall the Tumultous Year,” *Brownsville Herald*, December 19, 1998, 4.

“My counselor advised me to go to secretarial school and that I couldn’t make it at the university. I remember being devastated by that, because my parents had always said we could do anything”,⁶⁹ states Reyes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mexican American female students experienced various types of oppression because of the issues of gender, gender roles, and race. These forms of subjugation that Mexican American females encountered by not only the Anglo system, but also by the Mexican American males forced some to create their own movement for equality in the Southwest. However, before and after the Edcouch-Elsa walkout, many females were treated differently from their male counterparts.

As presented in Vicki Ruiz’s, *“From Out Of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America”*, Teresa Córdova indicated that “Chicana feminist have struggled to find their voices-have struggled to be heard...”⁷⁰; and such was the case with Mexican American female students at Edcouch-Elsa. The manner in which they were subjugated to follow traditional gender roles not by Mexican American males, but by Anglo faculty who at times would advise them to not pursue a higher education, learn how to maintain a household, or simply would be “pushed out” forcing them to not complete high school. Yet two of the females that CBS news reporter Ed Rabel interviewed as the student protests reached its high point demonstrated a self-awareness about their rights as not only Mexican Americans, but as females. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the first female student that Rabel interviewed stated that she was not sorry for walking out while the second female student replied to Rabel’s question by answering that they (Mexican Americans) would not be pushed around anymore.⁷¹ According the Cynthia

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ruiz, 125.

⁷¹ *Edcouch-Elsa Student Walkout school boycott 1968 CBS News Broadcast Walter Cronkite*, reported by Ed Rabel (CBS News Report, November 29, 1968) YouTube URL: <http://youtu.be/xU-zQBvgn-k>.

Orozco, “feminism is necessary for liberation”⁷²; these two Mexican American females demonstrated that. “Chicana feminism means the struggle to obtain self-determination for all Chicanas, in particular that Chicanas can choose their own life course without contending with the pressure of racism, sexism, and poverty...”⁷³ The Edcouch-Elsa student walkouts of 1968 occurred during a troublesome time period in which the nation was divided between equal rights and contentment of the old order of racism. Many students who decided to walkout were tired of being belittled and discriminated against by the Anglo dominated school board and faculty at Edcouch-Elsa. With being physically disciplined for speaking Spanish in the school grounds and discouraged from applying to college, many of the Chicano student body created a list of demands that were presented to the school administration. With the help of MAYO, Mexican American students demanded the right to speak Spanish in the school grounds, incorporate Mexican and Mexican American contributions to the curriculum, advisement for college, and many other demands. When this group of students was not heard, their only option was to walk out of their classrooms and protest the unfair treatment.

Two public sources that currently are available online expressed the sentiment that many of these adults who participated in the walkout as teenagers still have after so many years. Sharing their stories with not only the community of Hidalgo County, but the Rio Grande Valley represents an event that will never be forgotten. Even now in the year 2012, young and old, still remember what happened and the impact this walkout had in the area. One major factor for this is the availability of these sources in the internet. Ironically, while trying to find the date in which the CBS news broadcast was uploaded to the popular website YouTube, I ran across a project in which students of an American Heritage II class from the University of Texas Pan

⁷² Ruiz, 125.

⁷³ Ibid.

American recreated the walkouts for a class project. This demonstrates how the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts are being incorporated into the college level history courses and students taking part in remembering their local history. The actual CBS news report that was uploaded on YouTube by user *perales7676* on July 7, 2009 has 9,150 views as of April 23, 2012.⁷⁴ The second video that was a project for an American Heritage II class and uploaded by *hplover13* on August 15, 2011 has 87 views as of April 23, 2012.⁷⁵

The incident that occurred in November 1968 in Edcouch-Elsa brought forth a change in the educational system in the Rio Grande Valley. However, the memory of what happened late that year has not been forgotten by the community in Hidalgo County, especially Edcouch-Elsa. The moment the students decided to take action against what they believed was unequal treatment; the news media covered every aspect of the movement. Whether it was local or national media attention, students who participated in the walkout had their voices heard in wanting a better education. *The Monitor*, along with the *Valley Morning Star*, *The Corpus Christi Caller*, and *Edinburg Daily Review* provided extensive details of the walkout to the community, even though some of the articles presented the walkout and those who participated in a negative aspect. The media helped the walkout gain attention on the local and national level and contributed to its success. Though the student movement was labeled as militant and caused by outside agitators, the media focused on why these students were protesting, the experiences they encountered on the campus, and the trial. The walkouts were peaceful, organized, no person or persons were injured and there was no violence towards the police during the students' actions, tensions between law officials and students were not high. For students, their complaint was not against law enforcement, but towards the school board and its unjust treatment of

⁷⁴ *Edcouch-Elsa Student Walkout school boycott 1968 CBS News Broadcast Walter Cronkite*, reported by Ed Rabel (CBS News Report, November 29, 1968) YouTube URL: <http://youtu.be/xU-zQBvgn-k>.

⁷⁵ *Edcouch-Elsa Walkout Reenactment* by Antonio Garza, YouTube URL: <http://youtu.be/98GqU-1iKNw>.

Mexican Americans. Thus, as stated in the research, many in the community supported these students and their actions; but of course there were others who opposed them and their tactics in order to reform the educational system in Edcouch-Elsa. Days, weeks and months after Mexican American students walked out of their classes, newspapers that have been mentioned followed the events that transpired and encouraged the community to express their opinions on the section “*Letters to the Editor.*” What prompted the success of the walkout were these opinions, positive or negative, and the information that was provided to the community. The students at Edcouch-Elsa intended to make their grievances known to the public, but what occurred was a controversial debate within the local community that incited people to ask various questions about the educational practices in the school system and the issue of race.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The history of Mexican Americans' relations with the educational system was of neglect and failure; the school system neglected them and failure came by their part because they had one of the highest dropout/push out rate than any other ethnic group in the United States.¹ As the student movement progressed throughout the Southwest in the late 1960s, their struggle eradicated certain practices that oppressed them came to fruition. The Edcouch-Elsa walkout of 1968 was one of the many that occurred in the Southwest during this time period. Educational reform within the local school district, equality in the classroom, and more control of their educational future were but a few ideas in their list of demands.

However, the school board ignored the students' demands, prompting them to undertake the actions they took in order for their voices to be heard. With support and backing from local, regional, and national civil rights organizations and along with their parents, these students successfully challenged and won against the Anglo controlled school system. As Barrera states in his work, "The Chicano student movement in South Texas came about to redress and take non-violent militant action against impoverished conditions and unequal treatment that plagued Mexican American students at their schools."² Within the same concept, the Edcouch-Elsa walkout became part of a greater movement in the Southwest which enabled not only Mexican American students, but also farm workers, politicians, and others in the community to be part of

¹ Mirande, 92.

² Barrera, 77.

the American Dream. These changes of self-awareness came over the next few years throughout South Texas in cities such as San Antonio, Crystal City, Kingsville, and Pharr.

Yet success did not only come because of the students' actions of walking out from class or winning a landmark case in federal court that dealt with the violation of the students' Civil Rights guaranteed by the United States' constitution. A major contribution to the success of the Edcouch-Elsa walkout came from the manner in which the media reported the incidents to the community. Local and regional newspapers, along with the national CBS news report created public discourse in which the issues of race, language and culture were heatedly discussed by the community. Also, these media sources reported the day to day actions of the students and school board to the community as each side shared their stance of the situation.

Between the months of November 1968 and January 1969 many newspapers reported the Edcouch-Elsa walkout to the community as it progressed. Three Rio Grande Valley based newspapers and one from Corpus Christi reported this event. McAllen's *The Monitor*, Harlingen's *The Valley Morning Star*, Edinburg's *Edinburg Daily Review*, and Corpus Christi's *The Corpus Christi Caller* followed the walkout from its inception to the final result. While most of these newspapers concentrated on the story, all except the *Edinburg Daily Review* included public opinion of the matter at hand. In sections titled "Letters to the Editor", the newspapers presented public views and discourse over the students' actions. Some within the community agreed with the students while others did not and viewed their actions as being influenced by outside agitators.

Within these public opinions, it is clearly shown that media was essential to the walkout's success because even though some of these public letters denounced the students' actions; many in the community agreed and sympathized with their cause. Excerpts from the letters of

individuals such as Maria Gonzalez from Harlingen stated, “Rejoice! We, the people of the Valley should be happy that the students want a change,” and “People should take this demonstration as an S.O.S. from these students.”³ Mrs. G.W. Bernert indicated that, “Racial discrimination is a very real thing in the Rio Grande Valley and along the USA in states bordering Mexico. It does make a difference whether your name is Garza or Smith.”⁴ These two examples are but a few that have been presented in this research that indicate how public discourse of the walkouts influenced its success not only in 1968, but also in the decades to come due to the vast attention it received as younger generations of Mexican Americans paid tribute to the movement.

Nationally, the only media report that was found of the Edcouch-Elsa walkouts is the CBS News Broadcast of November 29, 1968. The video of the news report represents how the national news took interest of the local walkout due to similar events occurring nationwide. Interestingly though, news reporter Ed Rabel stands along the Rio Grande River as he begins his report demonstrating that the walkouts were occurring on the United States side of the border. Rabel asked the students participating in the walkout why they are doing it and if they will ask for forgiveness to be let back into class. As he narrated their epic story of struggle, the students’ plight and their desire for the district to reform its policies was heard across the nation. In short, the Edcouch-Elsa walkout of 1968 brought change to many aspects in the educational field in the Rio Grande Valley. However, this national coverage of the Edcouch-Elsa walkout yields no conclusive evidence that it influenced the America outside of the Valley. It can be argued though that support for these students from regional and national civil rights organizations may have originate from Ed Rabel’s report.

³ “Letters to the Editor,” *The Valley Morning Star*, December 14, 1968.

⁴ “Letters to the Editor,” *The Valley Morning Star*, December 1, 1968.

The media's role during the entire ordeal focused on the progress of events and outcomes that transpired from said events. Unlike other movements across the Southwest, students and organizations involved with the walkout at Edcouch-Elsa did not manipulate the media. Students and the organizations that assisted them used the media to present their grievances and demands to the public. Such examples of this are presented in *The Valley Morning Star*, *The Monitor*, *The Corpus Christi Caller*, and *Edinburg Daily Review* newspapers. There was no evidence to conclude that both students and organizations manipulated the media for their own gain, but as stated before they utilized the media as an aide. This experience demonstrated the use of the media by civil rights groups and students was very important to both parties because the oppression they encountered became known to the public.

Ed Rabel's report for the CBS news network as well as newspaper clippings from the previously mentioned newspapers confirms the importance of the media. Since students and civil rights organizations did not use the media for their own gain, they were well aware of the media's attention that was focused on their actions. This awareness enabled students and organizations to make their message clear to the public both nationally and locally. Evidence of this is seen in many newspaper articles which included the entire list of the students' demands, reasons for walking out, the struggle they endured through the whole ordeal, and other issues. Mexican American female students at Edcouch-Elsa experienced subjugation in various forms just like their male counterparts. However, female students faced triple oppression due to the issues of race, gender, and gender roles. Just like Mexican American male students, many females were not encouraged to seek a higher education, but instead train for vocational jobs that best suited them. Since they could not join the military like their counterparts, traditional gender roles were applied to them insisting that they learn the basic house necessities for their success.

Another example in which females were treated differently than males was when the six student leaders were arrested and posted bail. Five Mexican American male students struggled to bond out from jail while the only one who was arrested was released under her own recognizance; and reasons for that is unknown. Yet with the student walkout, Mexican American females joined the movement for the same reasons as Mexican American males. But the difference was that females who were interviewed in the national news report portrayed a new sense of self-awareness and would not bow down to the administrators as “good girls” who felt sorry in order to be readmitted.

The success of the student movement at Edcouch-Elsa transpired for various reasons. First, the legal action the students and their parents took against the Edcouch-Elsa school board was “the first major Chicano civil rights victory in the court” due to their (the students) constitutional rights “being enforced” rather than just hearing about their rights.⁵ Secondly, students who were suspended for participating in the walkouts and exercising their rights were re-admitted to classes following the ruling of the U.S. District Court of Brownsville deeming the school board’s actions against the students unconstitutional. Throughout my research, no evidence was found to infer that Federal District Judge Reynaldo Garza’s decision was influenced by the media. His only concern was if the students’ civil rights were violated by the school districts’ policy to deter students from protesting which resulted in immediate expulsions. According to Judge Garza, “the school board’s ruling prohibiting demonstrations and boycotts was unconstitutional,”⁶ therefore his ruling against the school board came from his interpretation of the law and not from the media. Third, an adjustment to the district’s hiring process of Mexican American educators and administrators in the early 1970s. However, Barrera stated in

⁵ Barrera, 73.

⁶ “Expelled Students Will Be Readmitted: School Board Policy Ruled Unconstitutional,” *The Corpus Christi Caller*, December 19, 1968.

his research that “whether or not the walkout had a direct effect in prompting these changes during the years immediately following the walkout is debatable and difficult to determine.”⁷ Yet the creations of these positions for Mexican American faculty after the walkout provide a solid argument that some of the students’ demands were met.

Fourth, the media’s reports of the movement and contribution inspired the community to question practices of the faculty at Edcouch-Elsa which prompted Mexican American students to walkout of their classes attributed to the movement’s success. Creating public discourse over race, language, history, culture and whether or not the students’ actions were justifiable made movement valid. Despite the negative remarks that the civil rights organizations received from administrators and individuals from the community by calling them “outside agitators”, the student walkout succeeded. The inability to invalidate the students’ and organizations’ efforts only strengthened the movement’s cause which can be seen by the end results. The ideology that negative outside influence was responsible for the walkout only circulated amongst those who did not agree with the walkout and the help that was given to the students; while those who supported the movement did not mentioned anything of the sort. Lastly, evidence of the success of the student walkout can be seen today as those who participated and current Edcouch-Elsa administrators praise the movement every ten years. In the most recent commemoration held in 2008, *The Monitor* featured stories of the accounts from those who participated and how the Rio Grande Valley has changed since. In December of 1998, a conference was held in which old friend re-united to share their experiences with students and those who were not born or around when the event occurred.

Mary Alice Reyes, superintendent at the time welcomed those participating in the conference and called the day “a celebration of heroes in the community who provided

⁷ Ibid., 76.

opportunities for others.”⁸ Indeed those who walked out and faced the unknown were heroes to a community long oppressed by certain tactics practiced in the community and schools. The media’s role throughout the entire ordeal was to inform the community about the unfolding events. However, the media itself became a driving force which assisted the students in achieving their goals by making the community take part in public discourse through the newspapers about the walkout.

⁸ “Conference Recalls E-E Student Walkout of 1968,” *The Monitor*, December 16, 1998.

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APPENDIX A



Edcouch-Elsa students after walking out from classes on November 1968. Courtesy of *The Monitor*, July 27, 1998.



Three Edcouch-Elsa High School seniors showing their support for the walkout and a better education. Courtesy of *The Valley Morning Star*, November 15, 1968.

Faces In The Crowd

Shown are some of the various Escobedo, Valle, and out-of-Valley residents who were attracted to Monday night's school board session on the student boycott. A crowd of around 450 crowded into the school library for the session, while hundreds more milled around outside trying to listen to the proceedings. After students presented their list of demands and various school officials replied to them, it was announced suspensions of students would remain in effect until the school board could meet with the individual parents and their lawyers. (Monitor Photos)



BOARD PRESIDENT BILLIE CULLUM AND TRUSTEE CALVIN SMITH...
In huddle prior to opening of tense meeting with parents



BOB SANCHEZ...
Attorney for Students



XAVIER RAMIREZ...
Student Leader



MARTIN PENA...
Answers Charges



DR. HECTOR GARCIA...
Rights Commissioner



MERLE SMITH...
VISTA Supervisor



RICHARD AVENA...
Rights Investigator

Key individuals who played a major role after the student walkout. Courtesy of *The Monitor*, November 19, 1968.

VMS 12-14-68
**Letters To
 The Editor**

To the Editor:

How perturbed people seem to be over E-E rebel students' demonstrations! Rejoice! We, the people of the Valley, should be happy that students want a change. They no longer want to attend class from day to day just to sit in class, hear others recite, and have others receive all the learning. They, too, want to participate in activities. In other words, they want to make the most of their school days. Do you blame them?

People should take this demonstration as an S.O.S. from these students. They want to speak Spanish? Fine! Let them do it in their own Spanish classes. Let them talk and talk — conversing about their lessons, discussing good Spanish literature, reciting poetry, debating, etc. Both junior and high school Spanish classrooms can be wonderful workshops for these students!

Teach them English, too. Give them vast opportunities to recite in the many classes.

What if some make mistakes? Isn't the classroom the best place to make them? Encourage them and give them a chance to change for the better.

Let's stop condemning or feeling sorry for this group of students. We should help them. We should organize clubs, sponsor recreational activities, open our hearts to the youth of this area. We should do our best to help these youths from becoming "yes sir" and "no sir" people. We have too many big and little men of this type in E-E, the Valley, and the state of Texas to help increase the number.

Let's not punish them so severely! Let's make them realize that any person with a Spanish surname born in the United States is an American and not a Latin-American, Spanish-American, Mexican American or Chicano and that English is this person's language.

Let's sic the dogs at the pack of wolves who hunger for power and gain it at the expense of the unfortunates. Let's help the needy help themselves. Help them to change for the better.

P. S. Haven't there been students' demonstrations all over the world? Probably, not in Russia! Students would find themselves in Siberia, wouldn't they? We are not like the Russians, are we?

Maria Gonzalez
 Harlingen

One of the letters sent to *The Valley Morning Star* by Maria Gonzalez, who supported the student walkout and urged the community as well as educators to understand their needs. Courtesy of *The Valley Morning Star*, December 14, 1968.

Monitor 11/18/68
VMS 11/18/68 NOV 18

The People's Voice

An Open Letter to: The E-E Revolving (sic) Students

On behalf of numerous responsible American citizens of Latin extraction, we want to go on record with our opinions which are:

(1) You may or may not have justifiable reasons for seeking redress of wrongs allegedly perpetrated against you. This remains to be seen.

(2) Be that as it may, your approach to the solution of such grievances classify's you as utterly immature, irresponsible youngsters. Let us follow your reasoning to the point of absurdity just to illustrate what we mean.

(a) You would hurt your state allocation of funds by being absent from school? How ridiculous! You can't see beyond your noses — so next year you will have a poorer school system, and you will be castigating yourselves by making it impossible to ameliorate the very same deficiencies that you want to rectify.

(b) You refuse to accept the English language and want to force the anglos to learn Spanish. How absurd! Don't you realize that a bi-lingual individual is more, and better, educated than the person who speaks only one language?

The solution to your problems is to do exactly the opposite of what you're doing.

(a) You should attend classes as much as possible in order to get a better state allocation of educational funds for your schools. The more money available, the more improvements you would have.

(b) You should make an effort

to learn to write and to speak the English language as correctly as you can. You might start by learning to speak correct Spanish in the first place — there is no such word as "Chicano." You have labled yourselves with the mark of ignoramouses worse than the "Pachucos," who have no idea of what you're doing. Countless persons whould gladly pay for the privileges that you're stomping into the ground.

Don't listen to those imported goons that are schooled in the creation of caos. They are communist trained to divide and conquer.

We apologize to all our good anglo friends for the behavior of these little infants. "Forgive them; for they know not what they do."

MISSION AMERICANS OF
LATIN EXTRACTION
Efrain Cid Dominguez
Mission, Texas

NOV 18

Another letter written and sent to *The Monitor* and *The Valley Morning Star* by Efrain Cid Dominguez who did not support the students' actions and affiliations with groups of the movement. Courtesy of *The Valley Morning Star*, November 18, 1968.



"Efforts to completely disrupt the progress of the war will be made. But the stateholder would be available to assist the stateholder in the war's progress."
— Admiral Don Marston

VALLEY MORNING STAR

Your Freedom Newspaper



5th Year - No. 137 Dist. GA-3-1511 Hattiesburg, Miss., Friday, November 15, 1968 12¢ Daily - 15¢ Sunday 24 Pages

Action May Be Spreading Over Valley

Edcouch-Elsa Student Revolt Continues With Rally Today

BY AMERICANS
Massive Bombing Hits Reds

STATION (AP) — A massive bombing of Communist positions was reported today by the United States military command in the Vietnam War zone. The attack was said to be the largest since the start of the war, and it was reported that the bombing had killed several hundred Communist soldiers and destroyed many of their bases.



Signs of discontent — Students in several groups refused to attend classes Thursday in the Edcouch-Elsa school system. The school system had suspended 75 students, some without warning.

Feds Trick Old Santa

STATION (AP) — Federal agents tricked an old Santa Claus into carrying a package of explosives through a busy airport today. The package was found to contain a large quantity of dynamite, and the man was arrested.



Protest sign — Three Edcouch-Elsa High School students show one of the various protest signs carried in the Edcouch-Elsa school system Thursday.

Bomb Scare On Thursday Believed Hoax

STATION (AP) — A bomb scare in a school building today was believed to be a hoax. The scare occurred during a school assembly, and a large crowd of people gathered outside the building.



UNION FLAG — The blue eagle flag of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee was waved during the Thursday morning student demonstration at the Edcouch-Elsa High School. Many demonstrators carried signs and waved the flag.

Jack Forrester Is Found Guilty

STATION (AP) — Jack Forrester was found guilty of a crime today. The jury returned a verdict of guilty after a trial that lasted several days. Forrester was charged with a serious offense, and the judge sentenced him to a term of imprisonment.

Strange New Medicine Is Discovered

STATION (AP) — A strange new medicine was discovered today. The medicine was found by a group of scientists who were conducting research on a new type of plant. The medicine was found to have unusual properties, and it is expected to be used in the treatment of various diseases.

Building Permits Are Issued For Two Major Projects Here

STATION (AP) — Building permits were issued today for two major projects in the city. The projects are expected to be completed within a few months, and they will provide many jobs for local workers.



STOOD FOR — Governor Don James today signed a bill that would allow the state to take over the operation of the Edcouch-Elsa school system if the school board fails to resolve the current crisis.

Blustery, Hot Today

STATION (AP) — Blustery, hot weather was reported today. The temperature was in the upper 80s, and there was a strong wind. The weather was expected to continue to be hot and blustery through the weekend.



STUDENT REVOLT LEADER — Xavier Bonner, leader of the Edcouch-Elsa student revolt, is seen here today. He has been charged with leading a group of students in a series of protests against the school system.

Valley Marine Vietnam Victim

STATION (AP) — A Valley Marine was reported to be a victim of a Vietnam War incident. The man was killed in action while serving his country. His death was a great loss to his family and the community.

STATION (AP) — A group of people were reported to be involved in a crime today. The crime occurred in a public place, and the police are currently investigating the case. The people involved in the crime are being held in custody.

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Front page of *The Valley Morning Star* a day after the Edcouch-Elsa student walkout. Courtesy of *The Valley Morning Star*, November 15, 1968.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Robles received an Associate's degree in Music from South Texas College on May 2005, received his Bachelor's degree in Mexican American Studies from the University of Texas-Pan American on August 2008, and received his Master's degree in History from the University of Texas Pan-American on May 2012. During his graduate years, he worked as a research assistant and teaching assistant with many professors at the university's history department learning the trade. He also participated in two conferences during his years in graduate school; FESTIBA on March 2009 held at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg, Texas and SCOLAS on March 2010 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. David Robles is the youngest of eight children, from McAllen, Texas and the first in his family to earn his bachelor's and master's degree. Contact email: droblesz3@broncs.utpa.edu