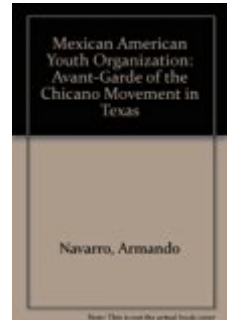


Armando Navarro. *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. xvi + 288 pp. \$40.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-292-75556-7.



Reviewed by Carlos Perez

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Armando Navarro's work is a welcome addition to the spate of recent books published in the last few years concerning the 1960s Chicano Movement (CM) in general, and the Chicano Youth Movement (CYM) in particular. Recent books from Carlos Munoz, Jr.'s *Youth, Identity and Power: The Chicano Movement* (London: Verso, 1989) to Juan Gomez-Quinones' *Chicano Politics: Realty and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990) have begun to fill the lacuna created by the lack of attention paid by scholars, and U.S. society in general, to the relationship of the CM to the broader social movements of the 1960s. The recent four-part PBS special, *Chicano! History of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement*, also brought the attention of a larger audience to this relatively neglected aspect of the 1960s.

In most presentations of the 1960s, the broad categories, the Vietnam War protests, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, the Student Movement, the Counterculture, and Women's Movement, which are normally used to understand this tumultuous decade, ignore the role of

Chicanos, as well as other ethnic groups, in this history. These groups also participated in those struggles for social change, as evidenced by the Third World Liberation Front strikes of the late 1960s. Navarro brings to the surface from the subterranean depths of omission one of the political groups that had a major impact not only in Texas, but also in the broader CM of that period. A sad commentary on the neglect of the CM is that the research for this study was initially done in 1973 for the author's dissertation, "El Partido de la Raza Unida in Crystal City: A Peaceful Revolution." A twenty-year period of neglect for studies such as this has hampered the progress of Chicano studies; without the publication of important works in the field, it is difficult to disseminate scholarship to a broader U.S. audience to enrich the study of U.S. history.

As a participant himself in the CM, Navarro provides a unique perspective on the rise and demise of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) and its relationship to the larger social and political struggles of the 1960s. In 1973, when he conducted his initial research, and in

1993, when he conducted follow-up interviews, the author had access to many of the participants in and organizers of MAYO and, subsequently, La Raza Unida Party (RUP). The richness of the participant's observations of the period are interwoven into the narrative about the particular form that the CM took in Texas. Besides in-depth interviews, the author also utilizes documentary content analysis, participant observations, and secondary sources.

After a brief overview of the literature on social movements in the introduction, the author presents his own paradigm to explain the rise of the CM. He explains that "the CM was a product of relative deprivation. The presence of unfulfilled expectations among Chicanos fostered a heightened level of frustration that in turn created the discontent that led to the CM" (p. 6). He cites a series of exogenous and endogenous antagonisms that gave rise to the CM and the CYM. He cites the Civil Rights movement, New Left, Antiwar movement, Black Power movement, foreign movements, and the War on Poverty as exogenous antagonisms. The endogenous factors were the history of Chicano resistance, demographic growth, changing socioeconomic profile, Reies Tijerina and the Alianza Federal de Pueblos Libres (AFPL), Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers (UFW), and Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales and the Crusade for Justice. For Navarro, there is an interdependency between these exogenous and endogenous antagonisms whose possibilities were realized in the "dialectical historical process" (p. 8). Each successive antagonism led to a higher stage of radicalism, intensifying the contradictions inherent within the CM.

Chapter one, "The Chicano Movement: Impact of Endogenous Antagonisms," is an overview of the CM during the 1960s. After presenting the conceptual framework of internal colonialism utilized by numerous Chicano scholars in their analysis of Chicano history, Navarro provides a brief historical sketch of that history by dividing it into

three periods: (I) the epoch of resistance (1846-1915); (II) the epoch of accommodation (1915-1945); and (III) the epoch of social action (1946-1965). (10) An analysis of each period follows, along with their contribution to the rise of the CM in the 1960s and 1970s. After providing historical background, there is a periodization of the second endogenous antagonism, population growth through immigration. The author also examines the other exogenous antagonisms in this chapter. The discussion of Tijerina and the Alianza, Chavez and the UFW, and "Corky" Gonzales and the Crusade provides an excellent introduction to the impact and influence that these individuals, and the movements they fostered and led, had on the CM as well as the impact they had on the broader social movements of the period.

Navarro differentiates the CYM from the CM in the book's second chapter, "The Chicano Youth Movement: Catalyst for Change." He considers the CYM as an important element in the radicalization of the CM. He traces the roots of the CYM to the work of the scholar and organizer Ernesto Galarza, who initially planted the seed after close to eighty years of not only political, economic, and social neglect, but also educational neglect by the dominant U.S. society. Galarza's early efforts bore fruit with the birth of the Mexican-American Movement (MAM), the precursor of the CYM, in 1938. The MAM did not survive the disruption of World War II, as its demise came in 1950. The early 1960s would be a period of subterranean activism by individual Chicanos who participated in some of the emerging New Left and Civil Rights organizations. These Chicano student activists were not only the harbingers of the CYM, but they also contributed to its emergence.

In his analysis, Navarro divides the organizations of the CYM into those that were Chicano barrio youth organizations and those that were Chicano student organizations. Each had a particular social base with a different political agenda. Barrio organizations' members were basically lower-

class and coalesced around different community issues, one of them being education. The student organizations' social base was primarily middle class and their major issues revolved around education. The rest of the chapter is dedicated to an analysis of a representative student organization, the United Mexican American Students (UMAS), and a representative barrio organization, the Brown Berets. He cites the role that the 1969 National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, held in Denver, Colorado, had in bringing these two types of organizations together to discuss the CM and the CYM, their direction and goals. Out of this conference emerged "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán," the CM's most influential manifesto. In 1969, with the increasing radicalization of the CYM, a conference was held in Santa Barbara that attempted to operate on the basis of the plan. "El Plan de Santa Barbara" concretely tried to provide a plan of action for higher education that would force California's dominant educational institutions to incorporate Chicano studies programs and undertake other reforms beneficial to Chicanos in higher education. The Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), which unified the disparate Chicano student groups, also emerged from this conference. Navarro also briefly examines the Chicano cultural renaissance that occurred from 1967 to 1972. By the end of 1972, this radicalization could not maintain its momentum, and the CM and CYM entered a period of relative decline.

This preliminary background of the CM and CYM contextualizes the rise of MAYO in Texas. The heart of the book begins with chapter three, "MAYO: A Cadre Organization of Organizers," which characterizes the organization as the most effective youth organization because it brought together barrio youth and students. This chapter analyzes all aspects of MAYO, its history, quasi-ideology, membership, and other fundamental factors of its internal organization and public perception. With a wealth of detail, Navarro presents to the reader the internal workings of the organi-

zation. He demonstrates the importance that Los Cinco, the five founding members, had on the initial creation and subsequent direction of the group. He presents their concerns and longings for a rejuvenated CM that would concentrate on barrio issues and struggle for social change to improve the political, social, and economic conditions of the Chicano. Navarro writes, "Few activists within the CYM were as methodical and deliberate in building their organizations as were Los Cinco. MAYO was not built on spontaneity, nor was it formed as a response to a specific crisis" (p. 83). The controversial use of the term "gringo" by the organization is discussed and put in proper perspective as an organizing tool in the particular racist atmosphere existing in Texas with its violent history against Chicanos.

Chapter four, "MAYO: Protagonists for Educational Change," focuses on the efforts of MAYO to challenge and improve the educational system in Texas through direct action. The form that direct action took was that of the school boycott, or walkout. Navarro emphasizes that MAYO had a reform agenda that sought the inclusion of Chicanos into the educational system through the hiring of Chicano faculty as well as the incorporation of Chicanos' history, language, and culture into the school curriculum. He analyzes the importance and influence of the major school boycotts, the Edcouch-Elsa Boycott (1968), the Kingsville Walkout (1969), and the Crystal City Boycott (1969). The successes and failures of this form of protest politics are investigated by the author. These boycotts were intimately intertwined with the rise of MAYO as the predominant vehicle for protest politics in Texas.

The struggle for educational change was only part of MAYO's larger objective of fostering social change in the South Texas barrios. Chapter five, "MAYO: Advocate for Social Change," examines the organization's role in furthering its goals on the social and political levels. Imbued with the playful spirit of the 1960s, a spirit that demon-

strated the absurdity and contradictions of accepted dogma, the three MAYO leaders, Jose Angel Gutierrez, Mario Compean, and Nacho Perez, challenged the dominant paradigm associated with U.S. independence as they marched in the 1967 Independence Day parade demanding Chicano Independence. The crowd's reaction to this challenge to their cherished ideals brought MAYO into public attention through the media. MAYO continued in this spirit during an action protesting the firing of some Chicano VISTA workers for participating in a MAYO-sponsored demonstration in Del Rio. The organization held a funeral procession with a dead rabbit named "Justice" to protest the lack of justice in Del Rio.

The Del Rio incident demonstrated the dangers involved when organizations advocating social, political, and economic change depend on the same institutions that they are challenging for their resources. This dependence on government funding and on "other entities' resources became an Achilles heel for MAYO" (p. 159) Navarro examines and analyzes this danger as the government--local, state, and federal--entered the fray, seeking to neutralize MAYO by going after government-sponsored entities that supported the organization. Even with these attacks, the organization continued to increase its numbers and political mobilization, proving a threat to the established political structure.

Navarro, in chapter six, "MAYO: Precursor to the Raza Unida Party," puts forth "a two-part thesis: MAYO, as an organization, was the precursor to the RUP in Texas, and the formation of the RUP precipitated the demise of MAYO by 1972" (p. 182). He traces this development through the heightened political activism of the organization. The core of this activism was the quasi-ideology of Chicanismo, which defined the organization's political actions. MAYO became involved in organizing Chicanos for participation in electoral politics. There is a detailed analysis of the organizational strategies undertaken by MAYO's leadership. This

analysis demonstrates that the leadership not only had a cognitive and theoretical understanding of Chicano culture and the barrio, but also a deeply visceral one. This visceral understanding allowed them to connect with the barrio's inhabitants and their needs. As an organizational tool, MAYO founded its own newspaper, *La Verdad*, to spread its message. The organization reached its zenith of political activism in 1969, as it changed direction by its self-immolation through political actions that demonstrated the need for a political party representing Chicano interests. Gutierrez, who had always envisioned the creation of an independent Chicano political party, broached the idea again at the 1969 MAYO conference, where it was finally accepted. With the rise of the Raza Unida Party (RUP), MAYO subsequently declined as its energies were channeled into organizing the RUP.

Chapter seven, "MAYO: Decline and Demise," analyzes how MAYO's success spelled its own destruction. Mayo's demise was characteristic of the demise of radical movements that occurred on the U.S. political landscape with the end of the 1960s. The CM and the CYM, as part and parcel of the radicalization of U.S. politics, also underwent a transformation with the opening of the political sphere to historically neglected social groups. As these social groups began to participate in electoral politics, they were effectively neutralized by the political system through concessions. Navarro writes that the "decline was also ascribable to the growing debilitation of both exogenous and endogenous antagonisms, which by the early seventies had lost much of their capability to mobilize power" (p. 212). The author analyzes the importance of the Crystal City victory of the RUP to the broader CM. It symbolized that it was possible for Chicanos to take control of the political institutions in their communities through a third party.

This victory spelled a rupture for MAYO between those who wanted to concentrate on consolidating their victory in South Texas, the rural

camp, and those who sought to expand the RUP into a statewide political party, the urban camp. The rural camp lost the vote, and MAYO's energies were transferred to building a statewide political party. By 1972, this decision caused the organization's demise, as MAYO activists joined the RUP county and local organizing committees, depleting the organization of its most dynamic members. As Navarro summarizes this transition, "Many MAYO chapters were transformed into RUP entities....MAYO's legacy of militant direct action was replaced by a modus operandi of accommodation and a growing conservatism" (p. 236). In the "Epilogue," the author examines MAYO's legacy not only in Texas, but also in the broader CM, with observations on the state of Chicano politics and issues in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

The book is very clearly written and is accessible to a broad audience. In its appendix, it provides some of the crucial documents for an understanding of the period. Coupled with the recent PBS series, it could provide the basis for a profound analysis of the 1960s CM and CYM in the classroom. It can be utilized in a course on Chicano or Latino history as a means for students to analyze how one organization can represent the rise and demise of the CM in the 1960s and 1970s. One of the book's shortcomings is that it does not contain a bibliography for further investigation into some of the themes explored. This is also a practical book for those who want to learn from their history so that they will not repeat the mistakes of the past.

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