

**MULTICULTURALISM,
EL MOVIMIENTO
AND WHAT IS TO BE DONE**



**BY
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When approaching the concept of multiculturalism or diversity from a Chicano perspective it is impossible to begin any discussion without first understanding the idea and importance of 'community.' Since before the Europeans, La Raza has been a communal people whose thoughts and ideas were based on community rather than the European idea of individualism. Ownership of land was not a concept. Manipulation of nature for profit was not a thought. It is important here to say that the purpose of these statements is not meant to over romanticize the past, to imply that greed and selfishness and murder and rape had not existed within my ancestors society, but rather to state the fact that our culture and our thought processes are based on the fundamental idea of community. Even the Spanish crown granted *hijos* to La Raza, communal land that belonged to all the people collectively. We must recognize that for the Chicano, communality is something cultural, things so simple as taking care of extended family and friends. But also an intrinsic part of this cultural communality is that of political communality that began to emerge with the coming of the Europeans and has remained a significant part of our culture ever since. Great uprisings against European oppression surfaced and has continued for over five hundred years: Cuahemec, Bolivar, Juarez, Zapata, and Menchu are only a handful of thousands and millions of people who have struggled collectively against the settlers. We see ourselves in the context of our people, our community. When our people are hurting, we hurt.

For myself, when thinking of multiculturalism, I draw a comparison to the talk of political correctness. It seems that so much of this society is based on what we say. Isn't that trick of America? If you say the right thing, don't matter what you do, just say the right thing, and you can get by. Look at the politicians, look at Reagan Bush Clinton, and it is obvious. It happens every five years in Mexico too. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has their presidential elections and the candidates spout off some revolutionary rhetoric, pretending to be in the tradition of Zapata, the figure the people identify with, when the fact is, in action they are more like Don Porfirio than Diaz himself. Today with the demographics of America changing so rapidly, with more and more minorities benefiting from the new access to education, racism has become a thing of evil, something repulsive that not even the most right wing intellectual could support and still maintain whatever position of power they

hold. Over the last twenty years with the politicization of race consciousness, our society in true form has adapted, changing their language so as not to offend anyone. While the semantics have changed, though, the literal condition of the aggregate community of minorities has worsened. PC language is an illusion, a lie set up in order to appease the emerging minority elite, while mitigating the guilt of the controllers of power. If a racist confronted with his racism is convicted in his mind or by societal opinion and can mitigate his guilt by saying, 'this is my African American slave' rather than, 'this is my nigger slave,' then he is saved the trouble of redistributing his power and can still maintain his position of comfort rather than setting the slave free. The problem was never the word, it was the hoarding of power in order to manipulate people for the establishment of individual wealth. How does changing a word here and there change hundreds and hundreds of years of murder that racism, in conjunction with capitalism in conjunction with the white racist liberal tradition, has perpetrated? What's the difference in saying he's a wetback in the barrio or he's a Chicano in the barrio. 'Whew, I almost called that Mexican worker that I pay less than minimum wage and whose daughter is sick because of the pesticides I spray, a wetback. that would have been bad, huh?' It's a trip that the only progress we have made in twenty years, in 500 years, is that they call us the Chicano worker rather than the wetback worker. This language also serves to mitigate the guilt of the white liberals. White liberals can use all the politically correct language they want and feel so good about it that they do not feel compelled to change the real conditions of oppression. Are they in fact responsible for changing that oppression? Isn't living your life right, not doing anyone any harm, ok? I think it is important to understand responsibility. As a Chicano, it is impossible to view history as linear. Not only is it cyclical, but can probably be better understood as a cloth that is bunched up with numerous folds touching each other. The events that happened 500 years ago affects us today, affects our people's current position in this society. It also affects the privileged position that the white liberals are in. Just as history is not linear, neither are the crimes that were committed in the past. They too are bunched up like a rag and they still affect minorities. If crimes are cyclical, then so is guilt. Therefore, since politically correct language refuses to push people to rectify their crimes and instead only serves to mitigate their guilt, then truly it is a great lie.

Multiculturalism like wise is an illusion. It was developed as a

way to stave off mass uprisings by minorities that would have caused the United States considerable international embarrassment not to mention it being a threat to the power of the rich whites. The establishment gave up the crumb of education, a very small crumb allowed only to the smallest percentage of minorities, a crumb that has turned out to be a good investment. It is important to note that in any mass movement, there must be the collaboration between the masses and the intelligentsia, otherwise that movement is bound to failure. If just the intelligentsia rebel, then they will have no physical threat to back them up (for instance Tienamen square), and if just the masses rebel, then they will essentially be leaderless. Usually movements are initiated by educated visionaries. The Chicano movement is no exception. Much of the radicalization of the Chicano community was due in large part to college radicals. These radicals, however, were easily eliminated, some through assassination, others through imprisonment and government harassment, but most were eliminated by simply giving them positions with in the current structure. It seems as though these minority radicals said, 'Wow, see what we got from all our struggle. Let's get more in!' A natural reaction, a reaction that deserves no condemnation. But it was at this precise moment, for the Chicano community at any rate, that our struggle began to go down hill. The energies of that educated Chicano radical 'class' began to be diverted from the overall community, to that of the educated Chicano community. Although the rhetoric remained the same, the purpose of it was to establish a foothold with in the system, to thereby effect the community from those positions of structural power, rather than taking the grass roots approach, a truly communal approach, that they had previously. In the 60's many of the college Chicano radicals were directly involved with those who experience life in the belly of oppression. Many of those Chicanos in the 60's working for the UFW now work at the universities, and the UFW has essentially become, in terms of effecting masses of the farmworking community, defunct. Let me state that these new Chicano elite have not completely abandoned communality, nor is their rhetoric completely empty, rather it is skewed. They still fight for the Chicano community, but that community is the new emerging Chicano elite instead of the poor working class and peasants that still comprise the vast majority of our communities. And so, although their fights are for the rights of the 'community,' that community is an elite people of color community. At the previous institution I attended, brown and black administrators, professors and politicians would talk a good multicultural sentence about how we are under

represented and then drive off in their BMW's, not to the barrio where they'd have to see the shit their gente lived in, but to the North side where the whites were either happy to have a diverse neighborhood or were pissed at having a minority in their midst. In their fight for structural representation, that is multiculturalism, they have in effect abandoned the people. So the smoke screen is that these Chicanos are fighting for our rights, when in fact they are merely supporting the same old oppressive system that still has its boot on our necks.

In the article by Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'Good-bye Columbus? Notes on the Culture of Criticism,' he brings up the point that there is a difference between political multiculturalism and textual multiculturalism. Perhaps. What has thus far been discussed in this paper can be considered political multiculturalism. Political here does not mean in the euro-settler tradition, although many minorities have adopted that way, but rather political in the sense that for five hundred years our existence has been one of survival, the politics of survival. Is textual multiculturalism just as much of a sham as the political one? To discuss textual diversity from a Chicano perspective we must turn to the concept of communality and accessibility in terms of language, content and document accessibility. Just as political multiculturalism should empower those groups of people who have not yet been empowered by white controlled America, so should textual diversity. For the written word to have effect on those minorities, and in this paper specifically Chicanos, those words, those texts must be accessible to the people they are intended to empower. If they do not reach the hands they were intended to then it will have as much an effect as an African speaking about racism at a kkk convention. Let us first discuss publishing. It is obvious, that for anyone to be canonized they must first be published and promoted. Today with all the hubbub about diversity, publishers are in a mad dash to have minorities listed on their lists of people they have published. If we look at the individuals, however, published by the most influential publishers, we find that those people of color have most likely lost all sense of their political communality. Take Gary Soto, for instance. Gary comes from Fresno, my home town. He writes a literature that is very self indulgent with an ethnic flare. A Big Mac with salsa, if you will. His words have not even an inkling of the racial, economic and political turmoil his people deal with on a day to day basis in the San Joaquin valley, let alone a tone of empowerment. Rather than seeing his craft utilized in a communal way, a poetic of liberation, he instead has adopted the Anglo tradition of art. That of self indulgence. Its

target audience are those who have no need of liberation: the emerging minority elite and whites. His concept of community is skewed. There are those who write a literature of a political nature, whose literature is geared for the aggregate of the community, however, these are not the ones promoted. These are not the ones taught in contemporary Literature courses. Furthermore, how accessible is the writing of Gary Soto and others like him to his community, not the emerging elite, but the majority of Chicanos? Not very. But let's say that his books were put in the hands of every Chicano out there, what effect would it have in terms of empowering them? I would suggest that the only effect it would be to foster a false sense of pride at having a Chicano writer, a pride that makes them feel good but does not incite them toward any liberative action. But let's pretend that Knopf decided to publish a highly political Chicano author. Would that be multiculturalism? To answer this we need to talk about accessibility. Knopf is interested in making money, therefore their target audience is going to be those who have money: the Chicano community has no money. There would be no mass advertising campaign in the barrios to promote this radical Chicano's work. It would be marketed to those educated Chicanos and white liberals who would read it and say 'Boy I understand that anger. it's legitimate.' It's all a big game. There are those published who are political. I will use the example of Adrienne Rich. Even though she is not a Chicana, I use her example because as a feminist who is interested in writing an empowering poetry, she is very relevant. Although much of her work is very political, politically relevant to the oppressed, the complexity of her craft, her poetic strategies and language employed to get her message across are not accessible to those who need it most. Her poetry is ineffective in terms of the goals of multiculturalism, the goal of true empowerment.

Multiculturalism is as much a joke as it's great American grandfather: Democracy!

Are we to say then, that multiculturalism is evil, something to be shunned like a bad chiva habit? If, as Chicanos, we acknowledge that textual multiculturalism will not attain for our peoples the justice we require, will not in fact liberate us, should we also fight against its implementation? To do so would only be a waste of our time. Although the hope of our gente is in our own hands in terms of temporal liberation, textual multiculturalism can serve our needs in rare incidents, especially where a professor at a university who has high access to Chicano college students who come directly from the centers of oppression, sees the urgency

of our situation. As mentioned earlier, movements of change are usually spurred by educated visionaries. This professor would be able to educate these students using multicultural texts, using those texts and showing their relevancy to the current situation of Chicanos. Our small glimmer of hope then, is not really in multiculturalism, but rather in those first generation Chicano college students. First generation here is meant not in terms of American residency, but instead to indicate that these students are the first in their families to enter a University. These students come directly from the centers of oppression and much of their ties, families, friends, are in the communities where oppression is felt the hardest. Our temporal hope then, in terms of textual multiculturalism, is based in our hope that these first generation college Chicanos will be able to analyze these texts in terms of their own experience, and then we hope that these Chicano will be spurred to some sort of action to liberate his/her gente.

Let me give the examples of the writings of Linda Brent in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and the writings and speeches of Maria Stewart published in America's First Black Woman Political Writer. Both of these women wrote in the period of American Literature traditionally known as The Romantic Period. The main authors taught in the universities in regards to this period are white men such as Emerson and Hawthorne. Both women were Africans who wrote prior to the Emancipation Proclamation. Both are now being distributed and taught in African-American Studies courses and sometimes even in American Romanticism courses. Both of these women wrote with the expressed intent of sparking people, white people, black people, to some sort of liberative action. Brent states in her preface:

I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is...how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations. May the blessing of God rest on this imperfect effort in behalf of my persecuted people!

This fact alone can be important to the Raza student both in terms seeing the importance for writers and others of being moved to action on behalf of the oppressed as well as giving the student an account from the perspective of the oppressed people of the past, thus having implications on the historical development of America. These acknowledgements are rudimentary, however, and even the whites will admit this much.

These writings, for the movement of change in the Barrios, become important when the Raza students read them and say "Hey, bato, that sounds like something I can say today!" This was the effect on me when I read Stewart's speech delivered at the African Masonic Hall in Boston in February 1833. She stated,

Cast your eyes about, look as far as you can see; all, all is owned by the lordly white, except here and there a lowly dwelling which the man of color, midst deprivations, fraud, and opposition has been scarce able to procure. Like King Solomon, who put neither nail nor hammer to the temple, yet received the praise; so also have the white Americans gained themselves a name, like the names of the great men that are in the earth, while in reality we have been their principal foundation and support...we have performed the labor, they have received the profits; we have planted the vines, they have eaten the fruits of them.

When the college Chicano who comes directly from the jaws of oppression, from fields and the barrio, reads a statement like this, s/he knows that the conditions that sparked this statement over a hundred and fifty years ago remains true today for an ever growing population: that of la Raza. This student knows that the vines are still planted by us, la indigena, and the gabachos still reap the benefits. In the barrios we work at the canneries, sweat shops, anything we can get to survive like dogs. Even though these women were African slaves, we were enslaved before them and after them by the Spanish and therefore can relate directly to their experience, their past is our past in a sense. So when the first generation college Chicano reads the previous quotation, if given the right direction, he/she will see this text in terms of their own experience, his/her ancestors, both past and present, and will come to the realization that the crimes committed in the past, are still being committed today, will see the texts historical context in terms of struggle. This college Chicano will see that the whites have no excuse, they have been warned all along, by God: Stewart states,

O, ye great and mighty men of America, ye rich and powerful ones, many of you will call for the rocks and mountains to fall upon you, and to hide you from the wrath of the lamb, and from him that sitteth upon the throne...You have acknowledged all the nations of the earth, except Hayti...You may kill, tyrannize, and oppress as much as you choose, until our cry shall come up before the throne of God; for

I am firmly persuaded, that he will not suffer you to quell the proud, fearless and undaunted spirits of the Africans forever; for in his own time he is able to plead our cause against you, and to pour out upon you the ten plagues of Egypt.

Our hope is that these readings will inspire some to action.

Now, these first generation college Chicano students that are incited to liberative actions on behalf of his/her persecuted peoples are under the great burden of deciding which path of action to consider. In order to proceed in the liberative process the individual must be transformed into that individual they desire society to produce. In other words, the individual cannot just talk about revolutionary change, but in fact foster that change within their everyday walk, otherwise these will lead us down paths of continued destruction. In Introduction to Liberation Theology Clodovis and Leonardo Boff state:

What are the main characteristics of the men and women who work to bring about the dream of this society of the freed? This is what they and its members will be like:

-Comradely. Like the good Samaritan, they will converge on the fallen to take them with them. There will be no liberative struggle they do not make their own, determining what sort of support they can give and how they can identify with the consequences of their actions, however burdensome they may be.

-Prophetic. They denounce mechanisms that generate oppression. They seek out hidden interests sheltering behind the plans of ruling powers. They proclaim the ideal of a society of equals through words and deeds. They never compromise with truth.

-Committed. Action imbued with correct understanding transforms reality. So commitment to the oppressed for their liberation is worthy of the name only when it is realized along a road traveled together with others who share the same dream, expend their energies in achieving it, and are prepared to lay down their lives for it.

-Free. They seek freedom from the schemes and illusions imposed by the dominate system, in order to be free to create, with others, more adequate forms of life, of work, of being Christians; seeking freedom from themselves so as to be freer and more available to others and ready even to die in witness to the kingdom of God and its justice, becoming history in the noble struggle of the oppressed for God-given dignity, rights, and life.

-Joyful. The clear option for the poor and their liberation raises

conflicts. The efforts required to bring about the insurrection of the gospel in oneself, in the structures of society, and in the church, often produce tensions and painful separations. Accepting such situations joyfully as the price to be paid for integral liberation is a sign of maturity and characteristic of the spirit of the Beatitudes, as so many Christians committed to the poor have shown in so many ways.

-Contemplative. In the midst of struggle, they do not lose the sense of the gratuitous, the value proper to every dimension of human existence - love, celebration, fellowship, communion. They will be able, like Jesus, to pray with a clear heart, to contemplate God in human history, especially in the struggles and resistance of the poor and lowly. They will appreciate the ingenuousness of children as much as the courage of fighters, and will know how to be magnanimous, without being servile, toward their adversaries.

-Utopian. They will not rest after advances, or be disheartened after setbacks. They will translate the eschatological hope of the kingdom for the full freedom of the children of God into historical hopes in the personal and the social spheres-in work, health, culture. Those committed to integral liberation will keep in their hearts the *little utopia* of at least one meal for everyone every day, the *great utopia* of a society free from exploitation and organized around the participation of all, and finally the *absolute utopia* of communion with God in a totally redeemed creation.

Our hope as a people in the temporal realm, then, is that men and women will arrive at this point in our historical development, who have within them the qualities of the liberated in their personal life and who will go forth in the struggle for the oppressed, analyzing our current position in relation to our past, our current struggle with our past struggles, with the essential characteristics of moral peoples, in order to forge a new path toward liberation.

It is important to acknowledge that without action, a concentrated well thought out action, a new path that realizes the history of our struggle in terms of not only the last 150 years, but the last 500, the government of the rich will continue to rule and the Chicanos and other 'minorities' will continue to be the 'principal foundation' of their wealth. So action is the only option given us. Action as a word is meaningless, just as ineffective action is meaningless. What then is the action we should contemplate? Taken out of the context of our history it can mean almost anything from

letter writing campaigns, legislative lobbying, legal action, marches, conferences, etc. These, however, in viewing our history, our historical stance, have been used time and time again, more so recently in the last 100 years, and have failed miserably to affect the conditions of subservience and oppression that continue to afflict the majority of our communities. Because of the abstractness of this term 'liberative action,' it is important that we recognize what position we hold in las Americas, and from that point, keeping in mind the ineffectiveness of our current struggle, it is essential to consider a new path of action.

In the introduction to the first edition of Occupied America, Rodolfo Acuña states:

...the conquest of the Southwest created a colonial situation in the traditional sense-with the Mexican Land and population being controlled by an imperialistic United States. Further, I contend that this colonization-with variations-is still with us today.

For us as Raza, we need no one to tell us the truth of this statement. We understand what it means to be a conquered, despised peoples. We know this colonization did not start with the conquest of the Southwest, but rather that we as indian peoples were conquered, subjugated five hundred years ago by the European, and this colonization continues to chain all the indian peoples from Tok, Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, Argentina. Of course it goes without saying that we are moved to action against the oppressor because of our local conditions, the conditions of colonization manifesting themselves in our Barrios, but, nonetheless, it is impossible for us to view our position as different than that of our sisters and brothers to the north and the south.

The Mexican population in the US has been growing and once again we maintain a majority of the population in the Southwest United States, as well as in the whole of las Americas. The European stronghold in las Americas is here in the US. We, los Chicanos, indios, live in the belly of the beast. We are daily kept down by a system of institutionalized apartheid that carries with it the high price of death and disease in our Barrios. Who can refute this? Furthermore, who can show how the barrios have changed for the betterment of our raza, who can show us what liberation have we received with all our peaceful 'resistance' to the European?

People must see clearly the futility of maintaining the fight for social goals within the framework of civil debate. When the forces of oppression come to maintain themselves in power against established law, peace is considered already broken.

-Ernesto Che Guevara,
Guerrilla Warfare

It is obvious that for the past 500 years the European settlers have continually denied us our rights as human beings, denied us justice, health, life and dignity. How can we not recognize that for all our peaceful demonstrations, marches, sit ins, all our conferences on diversity, our raza still lives in a situation of continual colonization that breaks every law of justice and morality. Whenever a man of peace or a peaceful movement has seriously threatened the power of the rich, then these have been neutralized: Martin Luther King, the United Farm Worker's Union, etc.. From the time that Montezuma treated the European with respect, until today, we have dealt peaceably and honesty with the European colonists, but they have again and again been treacherous, perpetuating our murders. There is no justice for us, no rest. There is no peace.

Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed states:

...the oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires...

and,

...castrated in their power to create and recreate, in their power to transform the world. This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed which their education must take into account.

It is essential that the college Chicano, the men and women who are driven forth from the gut to seek justice and freedom for the poor, see, in context of our historical oppression, that adaptability to the structure that has kept us down, has never and will never free our gente. It is essential for them to acknowledge that multiculturalism and diversity is threatening to seduce all our forms of struggle, is in fact funneling all our 'actions' down into another cage, another illusion of freedom, with total disregard for the poor

who comprise the aggregate community of the Raza. We must see that due to the lack of education provided our people by the Colonist, an education that teaches us to adapt to oppression and subservience, it is important that the college Chicano, educated visionaries be inspired to act on behalf of the poor, on behalf of his/her gente, thereby giving the example not only with lip service but with concentrated action. This 'visionary' must recognize the 'yearning' of our Raza to be free is ready and running rampant through the streets of the Barrio, and because those who live directly in the centers of oppression have adapted to their situation and are kept there by the 'tragic dilemma,' between choosing to live quietly in oppression and making the sacrifice to struggle, in new ways, old ways, for freedom, it must be the role of the college Chicano to act for them, knowing their struggle is not in vain, knowing they struggle in a good way for good things.

The liberative action required to obtain freedom for our peoples is not a game for children. It is important to seriously consider new paths of active resistance against the oppressors heavy hand, seeing that all other avenues of peaceful struggle have been attempted and failed. First and most important, we must acquire wisdom, we must look for it, listen for it. Fear God and beg for wisdom and understanding. Without wisdom, understanding, any movement is bound to failure. Even the Godless cannot deny this. Without it we are already dead! We must also diligently study, with sober minds, the history of struggle. We must devour books on military strategy and analyze them according to our local situations and then adopt strategies to attack the oppressor. We must consider the times and begin planning. Our struggle, our emancipation will happen, but without continual action, without continual attacks, effective attacks, we will be relegated to the same old position we have always held with the oppressor. Essential to keep in mind, to hold dear, is what Che states in Guerrilla Warfare: a method:

The political and military chieftains who will lead the insurrectional uprisings in America, merged if possible in one man, will learn the art of war during the course of war itself. There is neither trade nor profession that can be learned from books alone. In this case, the struggle itself is the great teacher.

We must consider active defense against the forces of oppression, carrying out the struggle in characteristics of morality, walking like Christ. We

must consider not only Gandhi, King, and Chavez, but also Che. We must organize defensive cells, create cadres of disciplined individuals who see the burden of the poor and are outraged, who have no fear, but the fear of God.