SELECTION 4

La Causa

Vocabulary Review

a large influx from Mexico
inequities in education
de facto segregation in schools
a catalyst in forming the current Chicano movement

There is presently a major movement in this country. A
movement most of us in the Midwest know little about. It has been for
centuries, it has been on the conscience of Americans for decades and it is upon
us today. The movement is the Chicano movement; its people are Chicanos, Mexican-Americans.
When I have the chance to talk with my fellow students,
I like to talk with them about Chicanos and “La Causa,”
the Cause, because many of us are unaware of the existence of this movement and its people. Many of us don’t
know of America’s second largest minority of nine million
Mexican-Americans. Many of us simply gape as we drive
down a highway and see fifty or sixty Mexicans stooped
over picking tomatoes in a field. Many of us simply gape as
we drive through a barrio, a Mexican slum, in northwest Indiana and see sub-standard living conditions. Many of
us simply gape in our Sociology 161 and 163 classes when
our “knowledgeable” professor goes on and on about
Blacks and anti-Semitism, and it never occurs to us that they’re not the only ones who have problems. Everything
is not either Black or White, there’s a little bit of brown in
between. But many of us continue to gape and nothing
registers.
I am very much aware of and involved with the movement, first, because I’m a Chicano and, second, because I,
like you, have a vital stake in the future of this country. I,
like you, must have an awareness of the social ripples
around us today which will be tomorrow’s waves of ac-
tion.
There are other reasons why this movement should be understood. If you’re interested in politics, nine million
people are hard to ignore. If you’re interested in social
problems, nine million people are hard to ignore. If you’re
interested in business, a market of nine million people is
hard to ignore.
The history of today’s Chicano dates back to the time of
the Aztecs and other sixteenth-century Indian tribes. They
were noble lords of a culture that was one of the high
points of civilization. Along came the Spaniards, Chris-
tians who looted, murdered, and raped, and for their crimes were promptly knighted. Spaniard and Indian
joined and the Mexican was born.
Mexicans in the United States have come through two
ways; annexation and immigration. In 1848 most of what
we know as the West was taken over by the United States.
This included the five states where most Chicanos live
today: California, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and
Texas. The Mexicans living in these areas became United
States citizens whether they wanted to or not. Although
there had been immigration, since that time the numbers
of Mexicans entering the country was small until the
1900s. Between 1910 and 1930 there was a large influx
from Mexico. People were attracted by agriculture, the
booming railroad industry, and the industrial paradise of
the North. My family, for instance, is fairly typical in the
pattern we followed. First wetbacks, illegal entrants, then
entering legally, we lived in southern Texas for a few years
before we moved to East Chicago. There my father found
work in the steel mills.
As I said before, most Chicanos live in the Southwest.
One interesting fact is that Los Angeles has the largest
concentrated population of Mexicans anywhere, surpassed only by Mexico City itself. In Los Angeles there are almost one million Chicanos. It is known by observation that thousands of Mexicans live in the urban centers in such states as Kansas, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan to name a few. For instance, in my home town of East Chicago, which has a population of 45,000, there are approximately 14,000 Chicanos.

The problems that we face in the Southwest and throughout the United States are many. There are inequities in education, in employment, in housing—three of the most important necessities in our society. Chicanos average 3.9 years less education than Anglo or white Americans—1.6 years less than Blacks. In Texas, for example, 80 percent of Chicano students drop out before they graduate from high school. Yet he is expected to obtain an education despite de facto segregated schools or classes, inferior school buildings, and unfair testing procedures. When a rural Chicano student in southern Texas takes an achievement test, it is usually a test based on the reality of Evanston, Illinois, or New Rochelle, New York, rather than Crystal City, Texas, or Oxnard, California. Also the absence of bilingual instructors and the presence of teachers with negative attitudes toward their students help reinforce the secondary status of Mexican students.

Chicanos throughout the Southwest are generally not considered for higher paying jobs or certain job categories and in some cases are not considered for employment at all. Discrimination takes a variety of not-so-obvious forms such as irrelevant testing, unfairness in promotion, and unequal pay. Most Chicanos, especially the older people, do not have the means to challenge these practices and many are unaware of their right to do so.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has extensively documented the fact that there is serious discrimination against Mexicans in the administration of justice, especially in the areas of police brutality, illegal search, and exclusion from juries. On the community level, regular city services such as water, electricity, garbage removal are often lacking in the barrios.

Two major influences created the process that is now known as the Chicano Movement. The first was the growing urbanization that accompanied the mechanization of farming. The second was the development of the California Grape Strike. The California farm workers' strike, led by Cesar Chavez, has served as catalyst in forming the current Chicano movement. Much of the rhetoric and symbolic language of the grape strike has been incorporated into the movement. "La Causa" once meant the cause of the strike and grape boycott. Now "La Causa" means the cause of the entire political-economic movement. The grape strike further demonstrated what unified group action could achieve.

Leadership on a national level has yet to develop. The person who comes closest to filling this need is Cesar Chavez. However, many urban Chicanos identify him with rural problems only and feel that his approach is too moderate. Two other persons come closer to providing leadership for less patient Chicanos. They are Reis Tijerina of New Mexico, and Corky Gonzales of Colorado. I personally feel that Cesar Chavez has the potential to lead the movement on a large scale. He has the ability to attract and develop wide support from many groups whereas Reis and Corky appeal mainly to the young and to the militant. Although Reis and Corky do not have the stature of Cesar, they are probably closer to the feelings of many Chicanos.

Hopefully, you should begin to understand why many of us don't see ourselves as typical Americans and why we don't embrace the culture and social standards of the middle class. For many of us it is impossible; and for others of us it is undesirable. Too often doing so means negation of a long, rich, and truly beautiful cultural heritage. We accept Mexico for what it is—our cultural homeland—and similarly we accept this country for what it is—the place where we must live our day-to-day existence. We do not believe we must become Angloized in order to take part in this society. Rather we intend to improve America for our people without giving up our unique cultural background. The name Chicano has helped us come together and has given our movement strength.

The Chicano Movement is here. "La Raza" or "Our People" are organizing and petitioning for their rights.
The nine million people who became citizens of this country willingly or unwillingly are no longer willing to accept the inequities in education, employment, and housing which have been part of our lives. We are reevaluating our culture and realizing that it is a thing to be preserved, indeed treasured. In short, we are coming to grips with our reality and a strong sense of unity is developing across the nation. La Causa is growing in momentum and its people, the Chicanos, are growing in pride, dignity, and determination.
Selection 4  Comprehension Questions

Decide whether each of the following statements is true or false according to the selection. Then mark T or F in the appropriate place.

1. A major influence in the creation of the Chicano movement was the California grape strike.

2. The problem with Chicano leaders other than Chavez is that they are not militant enough.

3. One major way in which Mexicans came to the United States is through annexation.

4. According to the article there are more Mexicans in the United States than in Mexico.

5. “La Causa” today refers to the California grape strike and boycott.

Choose the correct answer for each of the following questions and circle the letter before it:

6. Which of the following is not mentioned as a way in which Mexican-Americans are discriminated against?
   a. Higher food prices.
   b. Lack of city services such as water and garbage removal.
   c. Job discrimination.
   d. Less or inferior education.

7. Which U.S. city has the largest concentrated population of Mexicans?
   a. Laredo, Texas.
   b. Albuquerque, New Mexico.
   c. Los Angeles, California.
   d. Tucson, Arizona.

8. How many states were made out of the territory that was annexed from Mexico in 1848?
   a. 3
   b. 4
   c. 5
   d. 6

9. Which of the following statements is true according to the selection?
   a. Most Chicanos live in the middle west.
   b. Among the ancestors of today's Chicano are Aztecs and Spaniards.
   c. Cesar Chavez is the only leader that all Mexican-Americans can identify with.
   d. Most Chicanos wish to become like middle-class Americans.

10. According to the selection, how many Chicanos are there in the United States?
    a. Two million.
    b. Five million.
    c. Nine million.
    d. Twenty million.