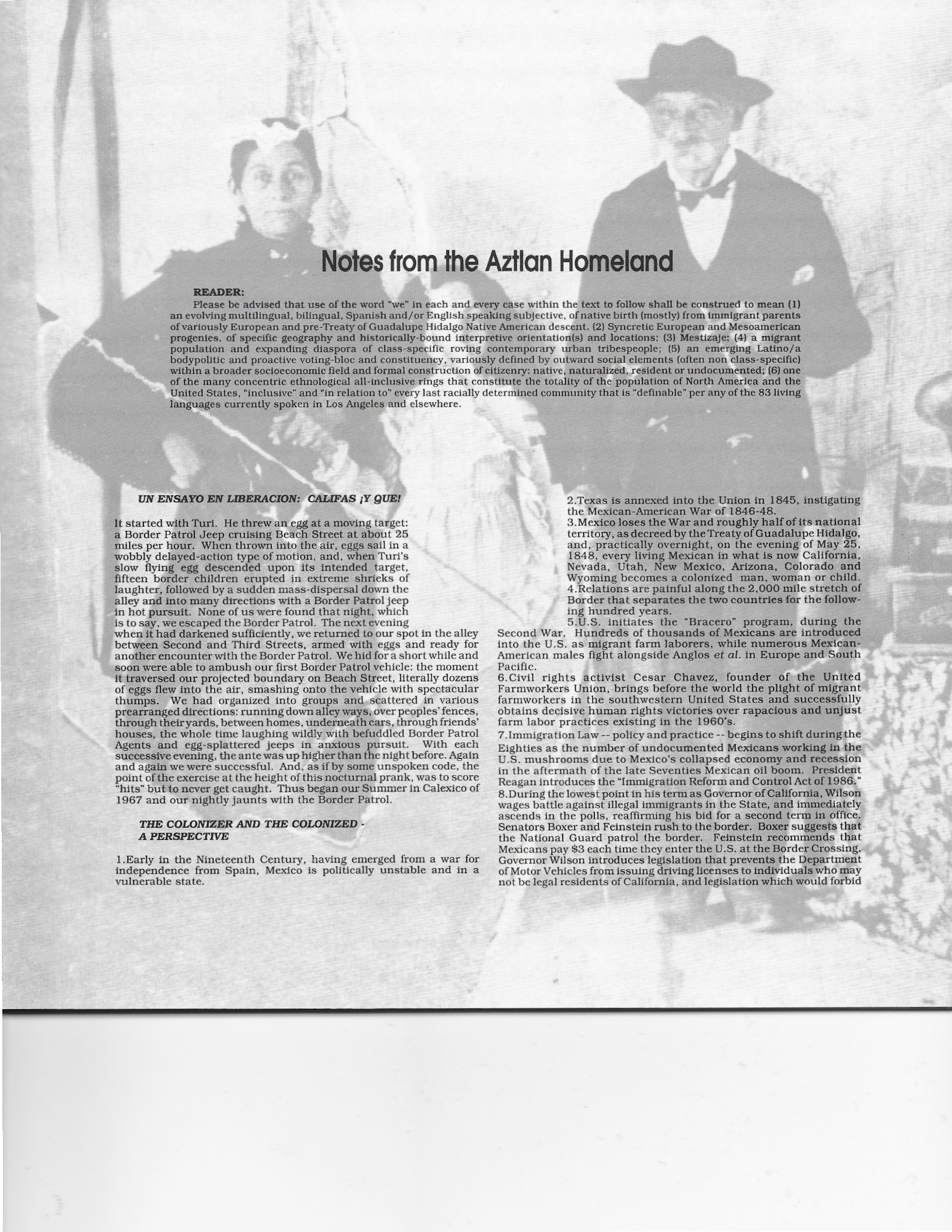




Notes from the Aztlan Homeland

READER:

Please be advised that use of the word "we" in each and every case within the text to follow shall be construed to mean (1) an evolving multilingual, bilingual, Spanish and/or English speaking subjective, of native birth (mostly) from immigrant parents of variously European and pre-Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo Native American descent, (2) Syncretic European and Mesoamerican progenies, of specific geography and historically-bound interpretive orientation(s) and locations; (3) Mestizaje; (4) a migrant population and expanding diaspora of class-specific roving contemporary urban tribespeople; (5) an emerging Latino/a bodypolitic and proactive voting-bloc and constituency, variously defined by outward social elements (often non class-specific) within a broader socioeconomic field and formal construction of citizenry; native, naturalized, resident or undocumented; (6) one of the many concentric ethnological all-inclusive rings that constitute the totality of the population of North America and the United States, "inclusive" and "in relation to" every last racially determined community that is "definable" per any of the 83 living languages currently spoken in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

UN ENSAYO EN LIBERACION: CALIFAS ¡Y QUE!

It started with Turi. He threw an egg at a moving target: a Border Patrol Jeep cruising Beach Street at about 25 miles per hour. When thrown into the air, eggs sail in a wobbly delayed-action type of motion, and, when Turi's slow flying egg descended upon its intended target, fifteen border children erupted in extreme shrieks of laughter, followed by a sudden mass-dispersal down the alley and into many directions with a Border Patrol jeep in hot pursuit. None of us were found that night, which is to say, we escaped the Border Patrol. The next evening when it had darkened sufficiently, we returned to our spot in the alley between Second and Third Streets, armed with eggs and ready for another encounter with the Border Patrol. We hid for a short while and soon were able to ambush our first Border Patrol vehicle: the moment it traversed our projected boundary on Beach Street, literally dozens of eggs flew into the air, smashing onto the vehicle with spectacular thumps. We had organized into groups and scattered in various prearranged directions: running down alley ways, over peoples' fences, through their yards, between homes, underneath cars, through friends' houses, the whole time laughing wildly with befuddled Border Patrol Agents and egg-splattered jeeps in anxious pursuit. With each successive evening, the ante was up higher than the night before. Again and again we were successful. And, as if by some unspoken code, the point of the exercise at the height of this nocturnal prank, was to score "hits" but to never get caught. Thus began our Summer in Calexico of 1967 and our nightly jaunts with the Border Patrol.

THE COLONIZER AND THE COLONIZED - A PERSPECTIVE

1. Early in the Nineteenth Century, having emerged from a war for independence from Spain, Mexico is politically unstable and in a vulnerable state.

2. Texas is annexed into the Union in 1845, instigating the Mexican-American War of 1846-48.

3. Mexico loses the War and roughly half of its national territory, as decreed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and, practically overnight, on the evening of May 25, 1848, every living Mexican in what is now California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Wyoming becomes a colonized man, woman or child.

4. Relations are painful along the 2,000 mile stretch of Border that separates the two countries for the following hundred years.

5. U.S. initiates the "Bracero" program, during the Second War. Hundreds of thousands of Mexicans are introduced into the U.S. as migrant farm laborers, while numerous Mexican-American males fight alongside Anglos *et al.* in Europe and South Pacific.

6. Civil rights activist Cesar Chavez, founder of the United Farmworkers Union, brings before the world the plight of migrant farmworkers in the southwestern United States and successfully obtains decisive human rights victories over rapacious and unjust farm labor practices existing in the 1960's.

7. Immigration Law -- policy and practice -- begins to shift during the Eighties as the number of undocumented Mexicans working in the U.S. mushrooms due to Mexico's collapsed economy and recession in the aftermath of the late Seventies Mexican oil boom. President Reagan introduces the "Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986."

8. During the lowest point in his term as Governor of California, Wilson wages battle against illegal immigrants in the State, and immediately ascends in the polls, reaffirming his bid for a second term in office. Senators Boxer and Feinstein rush to the border. Boxer suggests that the National Guard patrol the border. Feinstein recommends that Mexicans pay \$3 each time they enter the U.S. at the Border Crossing. Governor Wilson introduces legislation that prevents the Department of Motor Vehicles from issuing driving licenses to individuals who may not be legal residents of California, and legislation which would forbid

citizenship to children born in the U.S. to undocumented immigrants.

IMMIGRANT WORKERS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY ILLEGAL ALIENS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The Immigration Question, burning political gambit of the age, attains pre-election debate status during the Fall of 1993, an emotional issue directly affecting the lives of those in the balance: millions of tax-paying, gainfully employed undocumented workers living in California(1) and elsewhere. Deployment of intensive media concentration along the U.S.-Mexican border in the fall of 1993 generates a growing, slanted public perception of the situation, one in which Undocumented Workers are held largely accountable for the financial crisis of California's flagging economy.

One of my five sisters, Yolanda Marlene, having no interest in driving a motor vehicle, went out and acquired a valid "California Identification Card." Configured exactly like the Driver's License, with a three-quarter view mug-shot and personal identification number, it did not permit operation of a motor vehicle. Yolanda had gone through the necessary steps in acquiring this I.D. so that in the event she were to be detained by the Border Patrol, on her way to school or wherever, she would be able to show her I.D. and not waste precious personal time having to negotiate her legal status and prove her identity, a predicament not uncommon to younger Chicanos during the Sixties.

OCCUPIED AZTLAN

For contemporary world historians, particularly those concerned with zero-degree polemics concerning cultural and geopolitical social manifestations in currency late in the Twentieth Century, the notion of a "ripple effect" tide of cycles -- birth, growth, ascendancy, decline -- that historically link the world's nation-states and great powers (from pre-Assyria to the post-colonial present) continues to serve both as an instructive model -- in whose shadow comparative analyses of prior and more recently collapsed polities may be based -- as well as a barometer to the multiple perceptions of the world as a place of no locus, of variously shifting militarized zones and paralinguistic systems monitoring the edifice of Western Doctrine, overriding mythology to the endurance of status quo. From Spain's two hundred years domination, to Britain's one hundred and fifty years as a relative world power, to the recent events in the regions of the now dissolving Eastern Bloc, contemporary polity eruptions presage the nature and phenomenology of contemporary imperial power. Life passes before us and if we are the least bit curious (concerned) we may partake in the master-narratives as they unfold. In 1914 we became the richest nation-state on the planet. Soon after, we also became the world's most powerful. Eighty years later, we are faced with perhaps the biggest crisis in our history: that of having to cope with an extraordinarily complex and seemingly unsustainable economy, one marked by an alarming disregard for education. As the Baby Boom Generation draws closer to retirement, the System scrambles to readjust to the sobering fact of a relatively smaller workforce that is also per-capita significantly less educated than its predecessor (read: lower skills, lower wages, lower productivity, lower tax revenues for the State). Roughly one third of the entire adult population in the United States is currently illiterate,(2) and the generation that is presently enrolled in the Public Education System faces the burden of rapidly vanishing resources, an economic impera-

tive to a sound education that previous generations had taken for granted. The literacy paradigm is not hopeful within the context of a social space of diminishing resources and fervent anti-intellectualism. Given the present state of the education system, the K-12 experiment will not proliferate, despite the fact of an increasingly hyper-cybernetic world, where five-year-olds arrive to school already bolstered with prescient critical faculties and the hunger for knowledge.(3) Western Expansionism has navigated towards the center of this critical mass. And Manifest Destiny, anticlimaxed. We are entering -- returning to -- the point of "prehistory," in which "the outcome depends, to a great extent, on the ability of the young generation -- not to drop out and not to accommodate, but to learn how to regroup after defeat, how to develop, with the new sensibility, a new rationality, to sustain the long process of education -- the indispensable prerequisite for the transition to large scale political action. For the next revolution will be the concern of generations, and the 'final crisis of capitalism' may take all but a century."(4)

Q & A at the International Border Crossing, Calexico, California, circa 1966, returning from my friend Alfredo Wong's after-school Chinese Academy in a basement somewhere in downtown Mexicali. As I approach the turnstile, the Customs Agent begins his routine questioning:

- 1 Where were you born?
- 2 What year were you born?
- 3 What hospital were you born in?
- 4 What was the name of the Doctor that delivered you?
- 5 Do you have your passport or birth certificate with you?
- 6 What were you doing in Mexico just now?
- 7 How long were you in Mexico?
- 8 Did you buy anything in Mexico?
- 9 What is your name?
- 10 How old are you?
- 11 What street do you live on?
- 12 What is your address?
- 13 What is your father's name?
- 14 How old is your father?
- 15 Where does your father work?
- 16 Where is your father now?
- 17 How old is your mother?
- 18 What is your mother's name?
- 19 What is your mother's maiden name?
- 20 Where do you go to school?
- 21 What grade are you in?
- 22 What is your teacher's name?
- 23 What do you study in school?
- 24 What time does the bell ring in the morning?
- 25 What time does school end?
- 26 What is the capital of California?
- 27 What is the Capital of the United States?
- 28 Who is the President of the United States?
- 29 Who was the President before him?
- 30 And who was the President before Him?
- 31 What did you say your father does for a living?
- 32 Where was your father born?

- 33 Where does your father live?
- 34 How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- 35 What are your brothers and sisters names?
- 36 What are your brothers and sisters ages?
- 37 Where do your brothers and sisters go to school?
- 38 Who was the first president of the United States?
- 39 Et cetera, ad infinitum.

At this point in the interview I am fuming at the Agent, yet continuing to answer all his questions. After a while a second agent steps over and begins listening to the interrogation. As the first Agent continues, it becomes clear that the second agent has only drawn near in order to be amused and entertained. My hopes begin to sink. I then ask the Agent if I may "cross" into the United States. To which he responds: No, you certainly may not cross into the United States. Go back to Mexico until your parents come over here with your birth certificate or a passport.

The interrogation has taken 50 minutes and he's sent me back into Mexicali. It's night time, and I don't even have money for a phone call. What is especially infuriating is the fact that during the questioning, as people have approached, he's ordered me to stand aside in order to be able to attend them, letting them cross and then returning to me and commencing the interrogation once more. I am now walking back into Mexicali, facing the bright auto headlights that illuminate me on that long dark sidewalk on the Mexican side of the Border Crossing Station. A half block into Mexico, I turn back and walk decisively towards the crossing. The Agent, who sees me approaching the turnstile, hollers at the top of his lungs:

I said go back to Mexico!

Here I am, a nine year old, among the drunks of El Molino Rojo and the cigarette stench gamblers of the Agua Caliente Racetrack. I look everywhere but do not see anyone that looks faintly familiar. There are trios with their boleros and Norteño music along the many bars that dot this street. Crossing quickly, past the headlights of oncoming traffic, I run across towards the curio shop that sells the jumping beans, the place where my Uncle had bought me a wooden guitar for my birthday. I notice a faint light coming from inside and am so relieved to see the elderly lady who runs the shop. She's bent under a single bare lightbulb, working on a sewing machine. Her hair is done in a bun with a peinetta and lace mantilla on top. I knock on the glass door, she sees me, opens up and is asking me in, and what in the world am I doing there at that hour. She knows me, I have been coming to her shop for several years, she speaks in perfect Castilian. Soon I have telephoned home and now wait patiently by the Border, within view of the Agent who is smoking a cigarette inside his booth, not saying anything, only sitting there looking blank with disdain, aware of my presence yet trying not to look in my direction, not even a glance. Then my mother arrives (with my birth certificate) and an incredibly verbal and animated exchange has just taken place, and soon after, I am back in the United States, in Calexico, in California, the place of my birth, on native soil.

A DYING COLONIALISM

It is also a question of memory, this critique, a matter somehow more focused upon the conditions and multiple phenomena that underscore the forces of amnesia in the Social. Racially motivated

factors that serve to erase history and obliterate elements of selfconsciousness in targeted social groups and communities can only be understood to be mechanisms of a much greater tactical amnesia. The manufacture of a deliberate state of conditioned response in the colonized -- apathy and the lack of engagement -- is one of the principal aims of colonization; as a device for the restraint of self-determination, it induces nonalienated human relationships in the subject (whole), is repressive of autonomous modes of representation, and is an injunction to silence, interdiction and exclusion. The regulation of social relations, which is to say, the policing of desire in the Social, is the precise location of severe restrictions upon political agency and the very instruments of liberation. Social amnesia, an institutionalized racism, is less the result of a natural -- genetic -- disinterest and lack of motivation in, to cite an example, participation in the political process, than a syndrome in an extended exercise of class restraint within the model of colonization. At any given point, three elements -- memory, cognition, and autonomic cultural self-referencing -- figure prominently as determinant social factors in the construction of a people's selfconsciousness and identity. Anesthesia is understood in our culture -- from cough syrup to the dry martini -- to be located at the nodal point between subtle lapses in memory/awareness to all-out substance-dependent states of numbness that eliminate pain, not unlike the physiological state of the unconscious patient on the stretcher in the surgery ward. But imagine, if you will, the forms of psychic anesthesia that have evolved through the years as we have remained strapped to the narrative of colonization, voiceless subject(s) mirrored both in our role as a nonvoting bloc and in our seeming dysfunctional and redundant lack of participation within the sphere of politics: a socially compromised community (since 1848) marked by an overwhelming distrust for elected politicians and their predictably affected rhetorical engagement to issues framed by de-facto positions that often respond to the lowest common denominator, the tide of popular sentiment as intersected by electoral politics. A First Goal = proactive Xicano Leadership. A First Step = Self Criticality.

SPECIAL REPORT #1:

The U.S. Bureau of the Census predicts that by the year 2010, nearly one of every six U.S. youth between the ages of 18 and 21 will be Hispanic. According to a recently released study by the National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities, by the year 2000, California alone will experience a 41 percent rise in the number of college-age students, and over half of them will be Hispanics and other minorities.(5)

SPECIAL REPORT #2:

The Connecticut Civil Liberties Union has filed a lawsuit, apparently the first of its kind in Connecticut, arguing that a Bridgeport City Council redistricting plan approved this spring is so flawed that the November elections should be postponed or canceled. The suit, filed last month in Federal District Court in New Haven, says that racial bloc voting is deeply entrenched in white, black and Hispanic neighborhoods in the city and that the white-dominated City Council redrew district lines in May with the specific goal of maintaining white control. Bridgeport, the state's largest city with a population of 142,000, is about 51.5 percent black and Hispanic. But the redistricting plan approved by the Council includes, among 10 districts, only one majority black district and one majority Hispanic district, according to the suit.(6)

Preface (On the Frontlines of the Xicano Homeland)

First Draft, Speech to be Delivered by Ex-Officio, Evening of Party Resolutions, AZTLAN NATION POLITICAL PARTY, Grand Ballroom, The Westin St. Francis Hotel, San Francisco, California, 1996-1997:

"To all of the many compañero/as in the *Movimiento* that are gathered here during this most important evening, it is with much respect that I come to you in this hour of our cultural crisis and urgency, and, it is with all of the respect that I have come to hold for *La Causa* and everything that *El Movimiento* has come to signify for the past 25 plus years and throughout most of our lives, with true heart-felt Honor for the many compañero/as that join me here this evening that I take this opportunity to address the question of our collective future, albeit from the perspective of evolution and change. Let us not forget all of those not able to be present with us this evening, hombres and mujeres who have struggled all of their natural lives in order that this Movement and its natural inheritors -- the younger generation of Latino/as -- should be able to enjoy to the fullest the basic opportunities that we have long struggled for and, on occasion, have come to take somewhat for granted in this age: University educations, MTV, normal jobs with health benefits and retirement schemes, et cetera. Compañero/as you must forgive me, but I think, again with all due respect, that it is time to for us to begin singing new material, that is to say, that we should reconsider our positions within the larger scheme of things in the world and begin to take stock, not only of what ground we have gained, but, perhaps, also, what we have failed to achieve for our younger Chicano/as. If you think for a moment: Gone are the days of singing *De Colores*, gone are the early days of the *Movimiento* underneath the Coronado Bridge in Chicano Park, gone are the University Moratoriums, the "Walk-outs," and Brown Beret faction *haciendo the right thing*. We were students with eager intelligence and overwhelming determination, rediscovering our collective past, knowing that we too had a story to tell, that we would state it to the world, that we would no longer remain silent, that we should all band together, burst from our bounds because in this way we could UNITE AND FIGHT! These were revolutionary times and we TOOK THE POWER and marched on the streets chanting THE PEOPLE UNITED CAN NEVER BE DEFEATED!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! But, it is now 1996 and the Quincentenary is behind us, leaving us a little wiser to the fact of an extreme indoctrination process that has evolved through the past 500 years, and, this makes me QUESTION whether true parity is really possible, or whether equality and justice in the street, in the workplace, and in the public educational system is really definable across racial and class lines. Or is it that we should begin to define OUR SYSTEM as a space beyond Victimization Discourse, and, reinscribe ourselves within the tenets of a unifying and restrengthening cultural/critical language that better serves our collective attempts at meeting the constant underlying challenges that characterize our lives during these times. As we begin addressing these questions, the necessity for adjustments and the reinvention of Ideology brings me to a clear conclusion: Let us face the world, as we did in 1965 with the formation of the United Farm Workers Union, with the birth of the *Movimiento*, with unbending intent, with a single motive: EMPOWERMENT. I implore everyone here this evening to join me in preparing the path for our XICANO PROGENY, for the future leaders in XICANISMO, for the NEW XICANO PARADIGM. ¡Si se Puede. Unidos Venceremos!"

CALECIA / CON SAFOS / XIII/ P/V / LOCO/A(S)

"National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon."

Words of the late Frantz Fanon, written in the early Sixties.

Armando Rascón © 1993

Armando Rascon is a conceptual artist whose current site-dependent installation works and curatorial projects examine the institutional construction of cultural repositories, archives, and information systems through a set of investigative strategies involving traditional methods of research and comparative analysis. Co-director of San Francisco's TERRAIN gallery for the past six years, Rascon was born in 1956 in Calexico, California, where he resided until 1975. Rascon was born is the recipient of a Visual Artists Fellowship Grant in Painting from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1987. Rascon lives and works in San Francisco, California

NOTES:

1. Statistics regarding the impact of undocumented workers on the U.S. economy are mostly inconclusive. The INS apprehended 1,068,822 illegals in fiscal 1992; attempts at precise demographic studies have been difficult due to the constant dispersing of workers and their families. For an in-depth discussion, see Wayne A. Cornelius and Philip L. Martin, *The Uncertain Connection: Free Trade and Mexico - U.S. Migration* (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, 1993) and Alan C. Miller, "Data Sheds Heat, Not Light, on Immigration," (cover article, *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday, November 21, 1993).
2. Jonathan Kozol, *Illiterate America* (New York: PLUME, Penguin Books USA Inc., 1985.)
3. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty's piece, "The Psychological Deviance of Language in Children" in his book *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
4. Herbert Marcuse, *Counter-revolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972).
5. Patricia Guadalupe, "Teaching Our Culture," (Washington, D.C: *HISPANIC*, magazine published by Hispanic Publishing Corporation, October, 1993. For projection conditions, etc., contact the U.S. Census Bureau, Projections Department, telephone (301) 763-7902.
6. Kirk Johnson, "Minority Voters Challenge Redistricting of Bridgeport," *New York Times*, August 25, 1993.