This speech advocates that Mexican-Americans must undergo a process of radicalization to attempt to transfer anger from deeds to words. This minority is losing faith in speech as a means of redress, but corrective measures should come through dialogue and not collision. Few Mexican Americans designated themselves "browns" a year ago—but it is now necessary, given the growing black-white polarization. This affirms the Mexican-American self-identity. Browns constitute the second largest and most destitute minority, yet they retain faith in and patriotism toward America. Lack of collective bargaining and "green card" practices maintain an oversupply of unskilled labor and depressed wages. Brown education is a disaster area. Justice is arbitrary, and police seem to be waging an undeclared war in brown communities. Equal opportunity in employment is a hoax to a people denied the basic rights of collective bargaining, education, and justice. The author says the situation can lead to anarchy; without the protection of the rights of minorities, the majority flirts with its own eventual demise. (Author/DM)
BROWNS IN ANGER: THE OVERLOOKED MINORITY
Address delivered to the Public Affairs Council
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By
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ADVOCACY IN A TIME OF RADICALIZATION

I am by profession a churchman, although a layman, not a clergyman. I have no license to practice as an advocate for Mexican-Americans. But with the encouragement of many of them and the sponsorship of five national Protestant bodies, I have been playing this self-appointed role for nearly three years. It is a precarious business, and it gets more precarious as the days go by. This long-suffering minority, traditionally gentle and courteous, is fast losing faith in speech as a means of redress. The institutions of our society have seldom responded to it with affirmative action as a result of gentle persuasion. Instead, in practically every case the grudging responsiveness of the institutions seems to have resulted from a more aggressive type of confrontation.

For us, the advocates, committed as we are to reason and words, this process of radicalization may be deeply disturbing, but seen against the backdrop of our present mood, it becomes a necessary adjustment if hope is to be fulfilled and justice to be upheld. The advocates must, in turn, accommodate their idiom to the seriousness of the situation, if for no other reason than to attempt a transfer of anger from deeds to words. It is far more reasonable to try to set in motion corrective measures through spirited dialogue than through angry collision.

COLOR AND NATIONAL ORIGIN

An illustration of the advocate's adjustment to the prevailing mood is my own reluctant acceptance of the first half of the title of this address, "Browns in Anger." It was a suggestion, not a mandate. An explanation of my reluctance may be instructive. Until a year ago, few of us Mexican-Americans favored the self-designation "Browns." It was not because we were nervous about our permanent suntan. Nor was it a silly attempt to preserve the legal fiction of our classification as "whites" since the 1940 Census. Rather it was the apprehension that we might be making a concession to a color-mad mentality, shifting our self-designation, even temporarily, from one of proud national origin to another of disadvantaged coloration. The choice, we found, was no longer ours. It had been made for us. In the growing white-black polarization, our struggle had become invisible. When social vision takes its major point of reference from color, the choice for those of dark skin is to disguise color through physical or psychological cosmetology, or to affirm it as a primary fact of self-identity. We have affirmed our brownhood. It was thought we might alienate the countless Mexican-Americans whose features show little or no Indian blood. We drew reassurance from the experience of Mexico, where Mexican blondes have become psychological "Browns" (mestizos). Besides, the fair-skinned Mexican-Americans have all along enjoyed preferential treatment over their darker brothers, so we should not agonize over them.
Another reason for my own long-standing resistance to the designation "Brown" is that by accepting it I would be admitting my painful disillusionment with a country I deeply love. As an immigrant for whom personally the American Dream has been dramatically fulfilled, it has been with genuine sorrow that I have for some time now turned my love affair with this nation into a lover's quarrel. Why? Because of my growing awareness of this society's deeply entrenched intolerance to my difference, to the difference of my people's color, to the difference of my people's culture. When I was refused service at a cafe some years ago in a city of the Southwest for being a Mexican, I was temporarily shattered, but resolved to dismiss the bitter experience as totally atypical of an egalitarian society. Twenty years later, in the same place, Mexican-Americans are being refused public services. Now the difference is that we are more indignant, less resigned, more united, and less powerless. We also have new resources. For instance, through the Ford Foundation-funded Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund we can seek redress through the courts. But isn't it tragic we must look to the courts - first through local courts which themselves are often biased - to secure for people of a different color or a different cultural makeup elemental human rights? What is the fundamental cause of Brown anger? It is the fact that we are just different enough to be a folkloric curiosity but not different enough to be a national concern.

MARGINALITY AND PATRIOTISM

Yet, Browns constitute the nation's second largest ethnic minority and quite possibly the most destitute. We number in excess of six million people, 90% or more U.S. citizens, 80% or more urban dwellers, with the three largest conglomerates in Texas, California, and Michigan. Writing in the Atlantic Monthly of June of 1967, Helen Rowan, in an article significantly entitled "A Minority Nobody Knows" helps us to understand the legitimacy of Brown anger:

Census statistics and other studies show the Mexican-Americans of the Southwest to be worse off in every respect than nonwhites, not to mention the dominant Anglos. The Mexican-Americans are poorer, their housing is more crowded and dilapidated, their unemployment rate is higher, their average educational level is lower, their dropout rate is higher than that of any other group; and very few of those who graduate from high school move on to college.

Surely, this dismal picture is not accidental. Let no one further inflame Brown anger by suggesting some inherent flaw in their cultural ways. How can it be that their blood kin in Mexico in thirty years have transformed a backward nation into the most flourishing society among developing countries, while here, in the land of the free and the home of the brave, after more than a century they constitute a disaster area? The judgment of history is inescapable. This minority first obtained citizenship through military conquest, and except for those who have succeeded by feats of tenacity or preferential treatment, the rest have subsisted as if under the rule of a force of occupation. The commanders are nowhere to be seen, and no one among the abundance of low-ranking officers seems willing to assume responsibility for the present state of affairs.
Nonetheless, Browns have never given up hope in the promise of this nation. Even when one lives on the fringes of this society he cannot help the contagion of its ideals, no matter how sadly these ideals may be trampled upon by the rank and file, but especially by the flag-waving super-patriot who has conveniently forgotten his own immigrant ancestry. The child who repeats the pledge of allegiance to the U.S. flag eventually will probe into the meaning of those haunting words, "... one nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all," and will ask himself whether they have or could become realities for himself, his family and his group. Adults are likely to run across that small band of volunteers from the prosperous side of the tracks, risking profession and status to obtain redress for the grievances of the powerless. There, too, the question is posed, "Why?" The answer comes in terms of a heritage no betrayal can kill. Here and there a decision of the higher courts upholds an insignificant citizen against forces once considered beyond the law. Faith in democracy is thus revived. And, then, there come those moments of testing when the whole social fabric is in jeopardy because of a domestic peril or an international threat. The flood gates are thrown open by the pent-up libertarian currents that run deeply in the national soul. Browns have been sustained by these ideals and drunk deeply from these currents. This explains why in World War II no ethnic group earned a larger proportion of Congressional Medals of Honor or suffered a larger percentage of casualties than Browns. In Korea and Vietnam the record of their heroism has been repeated, if not actually enlarged. Mexican-American casualties in Vietnam are roughly double their population percentage. But their contribution goes far beyond the sphere of military duty. Seldom unfortunately are we told of the key role played by their back-breaking labor in building the railroad, mining, sheep, cattle and agricultural empires of the West and the Southwest. Surely, they are entitled to ask with growing indignation, "What have we received in return?" As most of them see it, the answer is galling: inferior opportunities in securing the basic rights guaranteed to every citizen in a democratic society. Time forbids an extensive review of this pervasive violation of the rights of Mexican-Americans. Let me simply list and briefly comment on the most representative grievances.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The National Labor Relations Act is now thirty-four years old, but no collective bargaining legislation exists for nearly a quarter of a million Brown seasonal farm laborers. One of the most dehumanizing concomitants of such powerlessness is the forced yearly cycle of migrancy. The average annual earnings for a migrant laborer in 1967 were $1,307.00. Compared with the national rate, migrants suffered that year 125% higher infant mortality, 125% maternal mortality, 200% more cases of influenza and pneumonia, 260% higher incidence of tuberculosis and other infectious diseases, and 300% more accidents. Average per capita expenditures for migrants was $7.20 as compared with $200.00 for the population as a whole, and $170.00 for the American Indian. The life expectancy of a migrant is 49 years today as compared to 70 for the rest of the population. The immorality of this inhumanity is magnified by the recent statement on seasonal farm laborers by the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, "No other segment of our population is so poorly paid yet contributes so much to our Nation's wealth and welfare."
GREEN CARD COMMUTERS

Closely related to the sorry lot of Mexican-American laborers, not just in agriculture but also in domestic, public, and clerical services, is the massive use made of cheap labor from Mexico along the border and other areas through the abuse of "white" and "green" cards. The white card is granted presumably for a maximum visiting period of 72 hours. The green card is a document clearly intended for its possessor to establish bona fide permanent residence in the U.S. A multitude of white carders are employed. But immigration laws explicitly exonerate the employer from any penalty for so harboring an illegal alien. Meanwhile, the U.S. Immigration Service, with no legal justification whatsoever, has permitted the green carder to become a commuter, living south of the U.S.-Mexico border, working on the U.S. side, displacing domestic workers in areas already experiencing an acute oversupply of unskilled labor, further depressing wages, and often serving unwittingly as an effective strike breaker.

CESAR CHAVEZ

The struggle of Mexican-American farm workers for union recognition is pivotal to the future of the entire Brown community. Its outcome will largely determine whether non-violence is still the means by which this wretched minority can obtain redress. The signs are both encouraging and disturbing. There is, as you know, a vigorous national boycott action against all California table grapes which account for 90% of the national crop. Growers have exchanged nearly one hundred brands among themselves to avoid being singled out, so now they face a collective boycott. Support for it has come from the National Council of Churches, many Roman Catholic bishops, the majority of the Jewish community, scores of municipalities, a growing number of U.S. Congressmen, and thousands of distinguished civic personalities. César Chávez, its leader, is not only respected but venerated by the Brown community as a rare combination of saintliness and sagacity. A measure of the man's greatness is his 25-day penitential fast in the spring of 1968 as a powerful symbol of re-commitment to non-violence by himself and his followers. Some of his vital organs have been impaired for life, but his moral stature has been immeasurably magnified as a consequence. After 16 years as an organizer, Chávez lives with his wife and eight children in a small, four-room house in Delano. He does not own a car. Since the grape strike began in 1965, he has received no salary. He and his family live like all Delano strikers on $5.00 per week spending money, food from the strike kitchen or store, and payment of basic utilities by the Union, the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC).

The escalation of anti-Chávez propaganda is pathetic, full of half truths and often replete with falsehoods. A shoe salesman, parading as a Brown grape picker, has been hired by the National Right-to-Work Committee to tour the country delivering addresses to discredit Chávez and his Union. The argument is the classical one. There is no strike in the grapes and the Union does not represent the workers. Yet in the secret ballot election that led to the negotiation of 10 crucial contracts with wine grape growers, in every case the workers voted to be represented by Chávez and his Union. By the way, anti-union forces carefully overlook the vastly improved management-labor relations growing out of the 10 contracts. Speaking for wine grape growers, George Morrison of Almaden has recently stated "Our contracts have increased labor costs, but we're not hurt. It is unfair to say this is not a responsible Union."
Meanwhile, opposition measures against union recognition are reaching awesome proportions. The latest raises huge moral questions. It has to do with the escalation of grape requisitions for Vietnam by the Department of Defense just as the boycott had cut 1968 domestic grape sales by an estimated 20%, and as wholesale buyers had begun to take advantage of the grape crisis by forcing lower prices. The figures are astonishing, as two reporters of the Los Angeles Times, Frank Mankiewicz and Tom Braden, have recently revealed. In the fiscal year 1966 - 67, 468,000 pounds were shipped to Vietnam. In 1967 - 68 the figure increased to 555,000 pounds. In the first six months of this fiscal year over two million pounds have gone to Vietnam. According to these two reporters, the Department of Defense estimates the total will be over 4 million pounds by July 1. Meanwhile Browns die in that war presumably to safeguard the basic freedoms of all. Do you blame 19-year-old Fernando Chavez, son of Cesar Chavez, for first attempting to obtain a conscientious objector status, and failing to even get a hearing from his draft board, later, on April 23, 1969, refusing induction into the U.S. Army?

EDUCATION

The disaster area which Browns constitute is intimately connected with an educational system that was clearly not designed for them. In the Southwestern state where their percentage is largest, among their adults nearly no fourth have less than one year of school completed, and nearly 40% are functional illiterates. According to the 1960 census, in that state among individuals in the crucial age of 20 to 49 years who dropped out before high school graduation, the Mexican-American percentage was nearly 80%, as against 60% for Blacks, and 33% for Anglos. The median years of school completed by persons 14 years or older were 6.2 for Mexican-Americans, 8.7 for Blacks and 10.7 for Anglos. Recent studies indicate that in Texas and California of those Browns who enter college less than 3% are able to graduate. Harold Howe II, immediate past Commissioner of Education, reviewing these appalling facts last year said to an audience of educators, "If Mexican-American children have a higher drop out rate than any other identifiable group in the nation - and they do - the schools cannot explain away their failure by belaboring the 'Mexican-American problem.' The problem, simply, is that the schools have failed with these children." 6

In corroboration of Harold Howe''s remarks listen to Rosalinda Mendez, a graduate of a predominantly Brown high school:

From the time we first begin attending school, we hear about how great and wonderful our United States is, about our democratic American heritage, but little about our splendid and magnificent heritage and culture. What little we do know about Mexicans is how they mercilessly slaughtered the brave Texans at the Alamo, but we never hear about the child heroes of Mexico who courageously threw themselves from the heights of Cholula rather than allow themselves and their flag to be captured by the attacking Americans.

We look for others like ourselves in these history books, for something to be proud of for being Mexicans, and all we see in books, magazines, films, and TV shows are stereotypes... But we
are not the dirty, stinking winos that the Anglo world would like to point out as Mexicans. Yet, we begin to think that maybe the Anglo teacher is right, that maybe we are inferior, that we do not belong in this world, that - as some teachers actually tell students to their faces - we should go back to Mexico and quit causing problems for 'America.'

Every civilized country has developed bilingual and bicultural educational institutions where two cultures and two languages converge. Not so in the United States. According to testimony presented to the U. S. Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, James L. Hennesy, Executive Assistant to the U. S. Commissioner of Immigration, in the 1967–68 fiscal year there were 135,800,000 border crossings made from Mexico into the United States. My own semi-educated guess is that some 100,000,000 from the U. S. made border crossings into Mexico the same year. If this does not make for bilingualism and biculturalism, I do not know what does. Spanish as the language of the home in Brown communities, constantly replenished by visitors or new arrivals, is naturally kept alive as the mother tongue of countless children. Yet at the age of six, miraculously these same children are supposed to be ready for an education in English. Less than 10% of the more than a million and a half Mexican-American students enrolled in grades one through twelve participate in a bilingual program. Last year, chiefly owing to the exertions of Senator Ralph Yarborough, the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs created by President Johnson, and the Mexican-American Unit of HEW, the U. S. Congress was led to pass the Bilingual Education Act with an appropriation of thirty million dollars. No allocation was immediately available. Again, the Vietnam conflict had siphoned enough available revenue. Finally, the pathetic amount of 7.5 million dollars was extracted from a reluctant treasury, the equivalent of 1.5 million for each of the five southwestern states. State legislatures have increasingly favored this type of education, but have relied entirely on federal funds for financing it. Meanwhile, Brown lives fall and die in Vietnam. Their disproportionate casualties are intimately tied to an educational system not geared to the culturally different, therefore prolific in draftable drop-outs. The nation, in turn, cannot raise the modest 22.5 million dollars of the original appropriation, all in the name of freedom’s defense, while Mr. Rockefeller’s entourage in Latin America hears angry sounds in a language it cannot decipher.

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Few institutions of this society have been more arbitrary in their treatment of Mexican-Americans than those charged with the administration of Justice. A recent illustration comes precisely out of the struggle of the Brown communities in East Los Angeles for adequate schools. In the spring of 1968 there were huge walkouts by Brown students dramatizing the mockery of education in their de facto segregated high schools. Two respected adult community leaders were charged with conspiracy to disrupt the operation of the schools. Their bail was originally set at $12,500.00 cash bond each. The immediate massive protest of the community, joined by civil libertarians throughout the city, caused the authorities a few days later to fix bail at $2,500. That was apparently interpreted by the police as encouragement of disrespect for law and order. The escalation of trumped up charges and arrests on the Mexican-American is one of the saddest infamies ever perpetrated in the name of law and order. In East Los Angeles
today there is a virtually undeclared war by the police against the Brown community. The same may be said for countless other Brown communities, the most dramatic cases being Denver, Colorado, Northern New Mexico, and Starr County, Texas.

Few people in the U.S. suffer from a higher degree of overpoliceing, more inflated incidence of indictments and arrests, and consequently a more sinister picture of criminality than this beleaguered minority. Someone has said, "We tend to fear what we do not understand, and despise what we fear." I suspect many law enforcement agents confuse the difference they do not understand with de facto criminality. In Starr County, during the unsuccessful attempt by farm laborers to gain union recognition, 113 arrests were made by Texas Rangers. They were called in by the county attorney, who has subsequently admitted to State Senator Joe Bernal being on a retainer's fee by the second largest agricultural firm of that county. Of the 113 cases, 13 have been tried. Three individuals were fined $25.00. The other cases have been dismissed as groundless. Two years later 100 remain untried. People wonder what went wrong with the union recognition effort. Many of us are reminded of the words of a wise American jurist, "Justice long delayed is justice denied."

EMPLOYMENT

Lastly, let me talk about employment. A people long denied the basic rights of collective bargaining, adequate education, and equal treatment under the law are not very likely to be favored in the employment market. All of us are committed to equal opportunity these days. The sign or ad reading, "This is an Equal Opportunity Employer" may look impressive, but in reality it often becomes a cruel hoax for those who never knew genuine equal opportunity. Former president Johnson was right on target on the issue when speaking to a largely black audience on June 4, 1965, he said:

You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "You are free to compete with all others," and still justly believe you have been completely fair.

But this is precisely what employers also say to the Mexican-American when they use the seemingly fair language of "equal opportunity" and qualifications. In fact, such rhetoric frequently disguises a great deal of duplicity. The very firm or industry which years ago simply would not employ the grandparent or the parent, and by such rejection relegated him to a menial job or to no job at all, now requires of his grandchild or child a level of accomplishment similar to that of the person in whose family color or culture has been no handicap. Then, also, so called qualifications do serve as an effective mechanism of continuing discrimination against ill-educated and ill-trained minorities, when oftentimes a few weeks of on the job training are far more pertinent to job performance than a high school diploma or a qualifying test.

We have a great deal to learn from Ling-Temco-Vought and several hundred "un-qualified" Browns. With a Federal assistance grant under the Manpower Development
Training Act, in 1967 Ling-Temco-Vought trained in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in an imaginative earn-learn program, 684 former Mexican-American migrants, few of them with a high school diploma. After five weeks of training they were relocated with their families for full-time employment in the highly sophisticated LTV aeronautical plant in Grand Prairie, between Fort Worth and Dallas. A highlight of the kind of risk LTV took was the training and hiring of a jobless Mexican-American deaf-mute (now, that is what I call a disadvantaged minority!). On a recent aircraft project, the first two wings with a record of zero defects were two on which the Mexican-Americans worked. The corporation expected to lose 40% of the trainees. They lost 8% to other industries in the Dallas - Fort Worth area, and only 2% returned to the Valley. By the way, in about a year's time the government had gotten back in income taxes its one thousand dollar training and relocation investment per trainee. By any standard, this is a phenomenal accomplishment, but to my knowledge, since its discontinuance, it has not been replicated anywhere else in the Brown community. Do you blame Browns for resenting how little publicity has been given to this venture, and even how less effort there has been to duplicate it elsewhere?

Humble Oil and Refining Company should also be mentioned as another instance of affirmative action in circumstances perhaps less conducive to increased minority employment. With decreased revenue from foreign operations, growing automation, and an employment force in some areas in excess of need, the oil industry is understandably hard put to rectify its traditional dereliction in the employment of Browns and nonwhites. Fifteen months ago, a group of us Browns pressed demands for increased employment of Mexican-Americans in Humble in full knowledge of the fact that other oil companies were probably just as derelict. The reason for picking on Humble was that we had official employment figures for an area of South Texas of high Mexican-American density, where Humble has important operations. These figures appeared in a publication of the Texas Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. We had no such documentation on the performance of its competitors. That is our next target. The Chief of Humble's employee relations nearly disarmed us with his candor and his commitment. We declared a boycott which proved abortive, mostly because we perceived we were dealing with highly responsible people. Here is the evidence. The percentage increase of Spanish-surnamed employment from the end of 1965 to the end of 1966 was 12%. From the end of 1966 to the end of 1967 it increased to 24%. In February of 1968 representatives of the Mexican-American community initiated conversations with the firm. Twelve months later the Spanish-surnamed increase jumped to about 50%, and the greatest increment was in the college degree category. Energetic recruiting had proved the fact that where the job does require professional qualifications, minority applicants are there to be found.

Before concluding the discussion on employment, I must touch on the dismaying record of minority employment in practically every major firm under federal contract compliance requirements. Nearly one third of the nation's labor force is employed by government contractors. This means each of them comes under the provision of Executive Order 11246 of September 24, 1965 prohibiting discrimination in employment, and requiring affirmative action to make opportunity truly equal. In simple language this is a call under the law to assure horizontal fair representation of all groups and vertical fair upward mobility for all employees. Evidence recently gathered by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights discloses serious and widespread violations of Executive Order 11246. What is even more disturbing is that to date no government prime contractor or subcontractor has had one
Single contract cancelled, even when discriminatory violations have been proven beyond a reasonable doubt. In the Southwest, Browns are being consistently discriminated against, horizontally and vertically, by a host of firms in gas, telephone and electrical utilities, gas and oil companies, banking concerns, and military installations, practically all under federal compliance regulations. This sounds like a sweeping generalization, but as recently as December 9 - 14, 1968, we heard men under oath making some seriously incriminating accusations and admissions in this very compromised area of federal contract compliance at the Hearings conducted by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on Mexican Americans. I for one consider it a great tragedy that a government I want to trust clamors for law and order, but by its own failure to enforce its laws violates them, and in effect subsidizes its fellow violators in the private sector. Ladies and gentlemen, I suggest no decent American can tolerate this situation. It can surely lead to anarchy. Nor can any decent American use it to justify another violation of law. Browns may be angry, but their anger is more in the nature of militant hope. Therefore, they would much rather denounce violations of basic laws dealing with human lives, than use these violations as justification of further disregard for law. But their anger is likely to become rage if the powerful continue to enjoy this status-beyond-the-law with the tacit connivance of the very agencies set up as administrators of justice. This is precisely the point at which it can be persuasively argued that without the protection of the rights of minorities, the majority flirts with its own eventual demise. For exactly such a reason, Browns join a distinguished American in saying to you and the nation:

Our purpose is grander than simply guaranteeing every Mexican-American the opportunity to achieve a decent American standard of living, even though that is a worthy goal. We are talking about providing a material basis on which a cultural tradition that is precious to the United States of America can grow and flourish.
Browns in Anger: The Overlooked Minority

NOTES


4 - Los Angeles Times, Monday, December 16, 1968 in an article by Harry Bernstein.

5 - April 25, 1969.


10 - Jobs and Civil Rights, prepared by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights by the Brookings Institution. Washington, D.C. Also, Communication from the Acting Staff Director of April 1969, with a letter from Dr. John A. Hanna to the Secretary of Labor, a Staff Memorandum on Federal Contract Compliance, and a copy of the testimony of the Special Assistant to the Staff Director of the Commission before an ad hoc committee of the House of Representatives.


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