

MECHA LEADERSHIP MANUAL: HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY.

By Roberto Tijerina Cantu. Riverside, CA: Coatzacoalco Publications, 2007. 689 pages. Paperback \$40.00.

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Almost forty years after the founding of the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), there is an unexpected dearth of research examining its role in modern U.S. history. Strikingly, not one book-length study has been published on the topic, even though MEChA has survived longer than any other Chicano campus-based organization and has left an indelible mark on educational institutions. Founded in 1969 at a conference held at the University of California, Santa Barbara, MEChA has remained at the forefront of student organizing on most campuses across the Southwest. The organization, it seems, has been widely present, yet written out of the scholarship. Roberto Tijerina Cantu's MEChA Leadership Manual is therefore an important contribution to the historiography of Chicano student activism.

As the subtitle suggests, the purpose of the MEChA Leadership Manual is threefold: to chronicle MEChA'S history, to rekindle an interest in El Plan de Santa Barbara and other founding documents of the organization, and to serve as an organizing manual for local MEChA chapters. Tijerina wrote the book after participating as a member of MEChA, an activist in various community organizations, and a radio staff person at the University of California, Riverside, for more than a decade. Through his retrospection, the author hopes to teach students how to plan and organize meetings, conferences, and demonstrations, skills he hopes will help MEChA function as an "efficient machine" (3) guided by "one vision" (4). In short, he sees the book as an unofficial organizing manual that MEChA can use to cultivate a new cadre of Chicano leaders in educational institutions across the nation. But the book, published by a small local press, Coatzacoalco Publications, is more than a history text or organizing handbook. Reminiscent of the monographs issued by La Causa Publications in the 1970s and self-published books like Jose An el Gutierrez's Gringo Manual (1974), the MEChA Leadership Manual evokes a new Chicano manifesto through its relentless call for social change. In a voice of urgency, Tijerina states, "*The second coming of the Chicano Movement is here Raza*" (377, *italics in original*).

The book is organized into eight chapters and concludes with an extensive appendix of primary source documents crucial to MEChA'S direction. A portion of the book consists of a series of newspaper articles originally published in Nuestra Cosa, the Chicano student newspaper at UC Riverside, where Tijerina served as contributing writer. The first chapter introduces the reader to the fundamentals of MEChA, and successive chapters are ordered in a manner intended to guide students through a political awakening. Chapter 1 centers on 1970s movimiento nomenclature and racial self-identity. Titled "Who Am I?" this introductory chapter answers rudimentary questions regarding MEChA'S history, current direction, terminology, and organizational strategies. In addition to recounting MEChA'S accomplishments, Tijerina grapples with mistakes made by MEChA organizers. In a section titled "Why Has MEChA'S Strategy Been Ineffective?," the author outlines some of the major obstacles MEChA has encountered

at the campus, regional, and national level (32). The second, third, and fourth chapters gradually shift away from the debates on self-identification to engage larger questions about the political economy, social structure, and the racial state of the nation: In chapters 5 and 6, Tijerina plunges into some of the most tedious but significant and heretofore ignored aspects of student organizing. In about 150 pages, the author instructs Mechistas in how to successfully organize conferences and workshops, publish newspapers, create radio programs, write letters, and plan fundraising events.

The richest and perhaps most controversial material is found in chapters 7 and 8, where the author explores a range of philosophies and ideologies that he believes impair the organizing efforts of Chicano students. Tijerina argues that Third World organizing, Marxist movements, and gender-driven agendas threaten MEChA'S position as a vanguard for Chicano student liberation. He associates sexuality and gender perspectives with what he calls the "New Hispanic Right," which, he argues, encompasses ideas and social movements that serve to weaken the Chicano movement by invoking a marimacho and lesbiano agenda. To him, homosexuality is a form of "sexual deviance," and he decries any attempts to classify it as an acceptable human behavior. It is, he claims, a "free choice not a biological preference," which unlike race is socially constructed (393). Humans "are born into race/culture first. One chooses to be gay or not" (387). Thus, Tijerina argues, MEChA students should dismiss gender and sexuality as an organizing platform since these categories inherently destabilize the organization and distance it from its founding documents. Tijerina claims that MEChA should rally behind the pressing issues that led to its emergence in the 1960s and that still trouble the barrio today-racism, educational inequity, inferior health services, drug addiction, overrepresentation in prisons, and teenage pregnancy.

In the final and highly valuable chapter, "How Do I Teach Experience?" Tijerina presents four case studies to affirm the propositions made throughout the book. By examining four distinct MEChA events that occurred at a high school, two community colleges, and a research university, Tijerina shows how the organizational tools provided in this book can be successfully implemented in indifferent educational institutions. A vital section of the book is the author's detailed account of his own transformative journey through high school, community college, and university, followed by his experiences as an alumnus and eventually as a radio disc jockey. Tijerina provides a riveting account of his discords with Greek fraternities, Latino clubs, community organizations, the university administration, a student newspaper columnist, and radio station staff. He notes, "In the 1990s, Chicano fraternities and sororities popped up in many universities like bad weeds in a beautiful green lawn. These semi-quasi, want-to-be Chicano organizations claimed to be for the Raza" (20). His debates with them ranged from mundane matters of hiring staff or requesting a bicycle rack to critical issues of campus student radicalism. In his ripping account of the Centro Azteca, a local community center in Southern California, Tijerina details the paradox that MEChA students encounter when they privilege community volunteerism over campus activism. The book's greatest strength is its meticulous focus on the nuts and bolts of Chicano student organizing. Students can refer to this book with questions about organizing protests, raising funds, and running meetings and gain a new outlook on perplexing situations. The author looks at campus activism through the lens of Chicano-related issues. For example, he takes into account how culture, race, class, and gender politics are intertwined with larger issues of leadership, matters that appear tangential in some books. Chicano students will appreciate this book because it speaks and understands their language of student activism.

Yet, while the book is a welcome addition to Chicano movimiento literature, there are seemingly irresolvable tensions. While the author strives for the unification of "all the Raza" by restoring confidence in Chicano nationalism, he condones the exclusion of certain individuals whom he sees as undermining this nationalism. He asserts, "To go against Nationalism in a Nationalist organization is either ignorant, a contradiction, or infiltration" (452). The problem with Tijerina's Chicano nationalist ideal is that it restricts Mechistas from exploring other ideas, especially notions challenging masculinity, sexuality, and class structure. Although it may seem that the author is hoping for an alliance of "all the Raza," it becomes clear that this is not the case. Tijerina's overarching goal to include "all Raza" as part of MECHA is quickly weakened by his proposal to limit the participation of individuals who promote gender, sexuality, globalization, or multiculturalism as an organizing principle. To Tijerina, the proponents of these philosophical stances threaten the success of MEChA and inevitably fragment the movimiento.

Nevertheless, readers will find that the MEChA Leadership Manual has a great deal to offer. The author is partly successful in meeting the stated goals of the book. While the discussion of philosophy is not as tactful as some might wish, and the history section receives the least attention, the book largely succeeds as a practical organizing manual. It joins the ranks of a few texts that provide a poignant critique of the Chicano student movement and attempt to define new directions. It is an important study for scholars and students who are interested in reinterpreting the enduring legacy of MEChA and Chicano cultural nationalism.

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