

CHAPTER 8

SIMPLE JUSTICE

Despite the board’s commitment to consider Mexican Americans as an identifiable minority group, it continued to view them as white. This became apparent in December, 1970, when district officials drafted a new integration plan for the spring term that failed to consider them as an identifiable minority group. Under this proposed plan predominantly Mexican American schools were paired with predominantly African American ones. MAEC members criticized the school board’s action and recommended additional changes, including the inclusion of Anglos in the pairing of schools. Their pleas were ignored. Incensed with the school board’s response, MAEC called on the community for further action. Realizing its organizational limits and the possible dissolution of mass support for continued protest activity, MAEC called for a policy of noncooperation that included a limited “stay-at-home” policy, selective pickets of individual huelga schools, and further negotiations with school board officials. The events that unfolded during the spring of 1971 indicate how traditional black / white racial policies of the past continued to clash with the new Chicano ideology of nonwhiteness and cultural pride. This chapter focuses on the activities associated with the politics of school desegregation from December, 1970, to February, 1971.

INITIAL RESPONSE TO HISD’S MODIFIED PAIRING PLAN

MAEC’s boycott in September ended in large part after the school board agreed to most of MAEC’s demands, including the decision to appeal to

the U.S. Supreme Court the pairing part of the Fifth Circuit's integration order. School pairing was based on the premise that Mexican American children were white for desegregation purposes; it directed the district to pair Mexican American schools with black schools. The appeal was predicated on the belief that Mexican Americans were not white but rather a distinct ethnic minority group. Thus, more Anglo schools had to be included in the pairing of schools in order for the district to achieve equitable integration. In response to the pressure from the Mexican American community and other sources, the school district also filed a request with the Fifth Circuit to delay implementation of the pairing provisions of its August 25 mandate until the Supreme Court reached its decision.¹

On December 12 the Fifth Circuit denied HISD's plea to delay implementation of the pairing provisions.² The following day the school board stated that it would appeal the pairing order to the district court. As part of its appeal, the school district submitted a modified pairing plan to Judge Connally for review.³ This plan ignored the district's commitment to MAEC to consider Mexican Americans a distinct ethnic minority group for desegregation purposes.

The modified plan, according to Superintendent Garver, was prepared in conjunction with parents involved from all the schools to be paired. A journalist, however, described this plan as the result of closed sessions with a few select parents and principals and the three-member administrative committee of the twenty-five schools to be paired.⁴ Neither MAEC nor its supporters were active participants in the plan's formulation.⁵ Lorenzo Díaz, the Northside MAEC representative, also charged that this was not a community plan. "This is their [the administration's] plan," he said. "They presented it to us and said we could take it or leave it."⁶

Under the traditional pairing concept mandated by the court, grade levels were restructured in the paired schools so that kindergarten through the third grade were offered in one school and grades four through six in the other school. This type of pairing affected every neighborhood involved since all the children had to attend a school outside the community for at least three years of the elementary grades. The proposed plan retained kindergarten through the sixth grade in each school and only moved 1,876 pupils to different schools. The majority of those moved were "white" and black students residing in the north and east sides of town. Unlike the court's original plan that paired twenty-seven elementary schools, this one paired only twenty-two. Under HISD's plan two addi-

tional elementary schools were rezoned and three of them—Eliot, Easter, and Ryan—were dropped from the pairing.⁷

The result with respect to Mexican Americans, however, was the same as the court's earlier plan. Generally speaking, the new plan ignored their new identity and continued the injustice of the earlier plan by viewing them as legally white for desegregation purposes and by pairing them with blacks. Seven of the schools in the proposed pairing plan were predominantly Mexican American in student enrollment, and twelve of them were predominantly black.⁸

Despite these shortcomings, the superintendent and the board supported the plan because it was not as disruptive as the earlier plan—that is, it did not offend many Anglos.⁹ It also helped to maintain the neighborhood school concept intact by limiting the number of schools involved to those in the minority communities.¹⁰

The modified pairing plan was approved at an emergency board meeting on December 16. A formal vote was not taken until nearly midnight. By that time the public, including about one hundred MAEC members, had gone home.¹¹ Lorenzo Díaz, selected to speak on behalf of MAEC, charged that Mexican Americans were excluded from commenting on the plan prior to its adoption by the board. The meeting, he stated, did not allow Mexican Americans to argue against the plan since the open session did not start until 11:55 P.M.¹² Díaz vowed to protest the pairing plan. "We'll use every means to oppose it," he said after the meeting. "If necessary, MAEC will launch another boycott of schools to protest it."¹³ Díaz's four children attended Ryan, one of the excluded schools.¹⁴

Díaz was not the only one incensed at the board's refusal to honor its commitments. Most of MAEC's leaders and supporters voiced their strong opposition to the new plan. Several of them echoed Díaz's sentiment and threatened another boycott.¹⁵ Leonel Castillo likewise supported those who called for a further boycott of the public schools. Ironically, the night before passage of the modified plan by the board Castillo had told the membership at a MAEC banquet that the organization did not plan any further boycotts of the public schools because of "improved situations" for Mexican Americans.¹⁶ On Wednesday evening a reporter asked Castillo to compare the talk of a new boycott to his comment on Tuesday evening. Castillo responded, "That was 24 hours ago."¹⁷

Gregory Salazar, speaking on behalf of MAYO, also criticized the board's decision to implement a new pairing plan that continued to use Mexican

Americans as pawns in the district's desegregation design. Salazar noted that the plan omitted two elementary schools where the Mexican American boycott conducted in September was most effective—Eliot and Ryan. Under the original August 25 mandate Eliot was paired with Atherton and Scroggins; Ryan was paired with Ross and Looscan.¹⁸ Similar to other MAEC members, he supported more drastic action, including a boycott of the HISD schools.¹⁹

On Friday, December 18, MAEC held a general meeting to discuss the pairing plan and a possible boycott of the public schools. Unlike other meetings, significant differences between many of MAEC's members and Barrio-MAYO emerged. Most members believed that the organization could still get the school board to recognize Mexican Americans as an identifiable minority group for desegregation purposes. They, in other words, still supported just integration. Barrio-MAYO members, however, opposed integration and argued that they should push for community control of the schools rather than integration.

MAYO's position had officially been voiced the day before at a press conference the group set up. At this press conference MAYO spokesperson Gregory Salazar said that the organization was not "an official part of the MAEC" anymore because of its disagreement over goals.²⁰ The real issue facing the schools and the education of Mexican Americans, Salazar stated, was not integration but rather "the control of the barrio schools by the people in the community." He added, "We seek the complete control of barrio schools by the community whose children attend these schools."²¹

MAYO's new position was based on the cultural nationalist ideals and social change program of El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, a program of action developed at two National Chicano Youth Liberation Conferences held in 1969 and 1970. These conferences, hosted by Rodolfo "Corky" González's group, the Crusade for Justice, promoted a cultural nationalist ideology and action plan to "liberate" the Mexican American masses from the dominance of Anglo America. More specifically, conference participants agreed that "Chicano" nationalism would be the common denominator for mass mobilization and organization in the United States and that "social, economic, cultural and political independence" was the only road to "total liberation from oppression, exploitation and racism." In practical terms, this meant that the struggle for liberation would be based on the "control of our Barrios, campos, pueblos, lands, our economy, our culture, and our political life."²²

MAYO's position was also probably influenced by the "peaceful revolution" taking place in Crystal City. In 1970 Chicano and Chicana activists took control of the local city council and school board and initiated a series of significant social and political reforms, i.e., the "peaceful revolution," that improved the lives of the predominantly working-class Mexican American population.²³ The realization of self-determination in Crystal City in combination with other factors encouraged Barrio-MAYO to take a position in favor of community control. This, rather than integration, held the possibility for true reform in the Mexican American community. Those in attendance probably rejected Barrio-MAYO's arguments and continued to support MAEC and its goal of equitable integration.

In addition to determining the group's major goal, those at the meeting also decided on its demands. Because the court had not yet granted them legal status as a distinct identifiable minority group, they decided to demand that Anglo schools be added to any pairing plan. This became MAEC's major demand.²⁴ The group also decided to continue its negotiating strategy with school officials. In addition to meeting with school board members and the superintendent, MAEC also agreed to voice its concerns before the court-appointed Bi-Racial Committee.²⁵

THE POLITICS OF NEGOTIATION

On January 8, 1971, Castillo wrote a letter to the board clarifying MAEC's position on the pairing plan. He pointed out that the desegregation plan handed down by the Fifth Circuit Court allowed more flexibility than was being exercised by HISD. The section of the ruling under discussion read: "The District Court is directed to implement the forgoing modifications as to the elementary school zones or alternatively the court may adopt any other plan submitted by the School Board or other interested parties, provided, of course, that such alternate plan achieves at least the same degree of desegregation as that reached by our modifications." The modifications the court referred to in this section, Castillo argued, were those pertaining to the pairing and grouping provisions of the ruling. "We feel that this clause clearly allows you leeway to change the pairing and grouping so as to bring Anglos into a desegregation plan," he said. "It is our contention that by simply adding a few Anglo schools into the formula a greater degree of desegregation could be achieved and a greater degree of educational quality could be maintained."²⁶

Castillo then suggested several additional actions that could be taken to achieve the flexibility allowed by the court. They were:

1. If we must pair and group, then the two predominantly Black elementary schools, Frost and Rhodes, should not be paired with one another.
2. If possible, why not have a larger number of minority students moving to predominantly Anglo schools than Anglo students to minority schools? This would achieve more integration statistically and also improve teacher-pupil ratios in the minority schools.
3. Convene a group of M.A.E.C. and H.I.S.D. attorneys to fully explore the flexibility allowed under the ruling.²⁷

The board took no actions on Castillo's suggestions.

The second major strategy, to meet with the Bi-Racial Committee, was initiated on January 5, 1971. On this date Leonel Castillo wrote to John Wheat, chairperson of the court-appointed Bi-Racial Committee, requesting a hearing before this committee. Two days later Wheat responded that he was unsure whether the committee should hold a hearing on "the pairing and grouping provisions" of the court's August 25, 1970, judgment. He informed Castillo, nonetheless, that he would request guidance from the court "as to when and to what extent we explore the subject."²⁸ On the night of January 12, 1971, Superintendent Garver contacted Castillo and told him that the Bi-Racial Committee would allow MAEC to present its case at a formal hearing on Tuesday, January 19, and that comments would be heard from "no more than five individuals."

On Friday, January 15, MAEC held a strategy session and decided on the topics to present to the board. Those present agreed to discuss MAEC's philosophy, its legal perspective of desegregation, its views on grouping and pairing in the different barrios, and its ideas on some new approaches to desegregation. Leonel Castillo would discuss the organization's philosophy, Abraham Ramírez would focus on the legal issues, and three others would discuss issues and problems in several different barrios.²⁹

On January 19, 1971, MAEC members spoke at the Bi-Racial Committee hearing.³⁰ Leonel Castillo summarized MAEC's key points. First, Castillo stated that MAEC strongly endorsed integration: "We agree with the 1954 Supreme Court Ruling, we agree with the principles which have been announced by various Presidents and by the Congress of the United States, and we are eager to see Houston become a place where all the ethnic and cultural groups can live together in harmony." "However," he added, "the

present pairing and grouping plan, which has been submitted by the Houston Independent School district, is a sham of these principles which we value so highly.” He explained that MAEC members did not believe that pairing Mexican Americans and blacks was sound practice. “We do not think,” noted Castillo, “that it makes sense from an educational point of view, from a philosophical point of view, or from a simple justice point of view.” The plan was viewed as a “sham” because it did not allow for parental involvement and because it was based on some false premises. Mexican Americans were not white, as the district court had ruled, but rather an identifiable minority group.³¹

Castillo charged that the zoning concept adopted by the school board discriminated against poor people. Furthermore, he called for the establishment of a triethnic rather than biracial committee to monitor desegregation in the city, questioned the use of federal funds for desegregation purposes, and asked for assistance in persuading Judge Connally to allow MAEC the opportunity to be heard in court. Finally, he urged the committee to impress upon the district court that the plan suggested by the Fifth Circuit was not rigid but rather allowed room for flexibility. “The most obvious need is to bring the Anglo into the desegregation formula,” he concluded. The other presenters agreed with Castillo and elaborated upon these arguments and ideas.³²

MAEC’s presentations, while eloquent and articulate, had no immediate impact on the Bi-Racial Committee. The committee did not add any new members, nor did it support MAEC’s or MALDEF’s friend-of-the-court brief. The committee also did not seek modifications in the district’s pairing plan.³³

PLANS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE MODIFIED PAIRING PLAN

During January, MAEC continued to express disapproval of the modified pairing plan as a desegregation remedy. Most members hoped that they would gain some concessions when school started again after the holidays. They were mistaken. On Tuesday, January 26, the school board issued the new pairing plan for the remainder of the academic year. Instead of triethnic pairing, the plan continued the pairing of Mexican American and black schools.³⁴

To facilitate the plan’s implementation, district officials decided to phase in the school pairing. On Friday, January 29, Poe would be paired with MacGregor, Frost with Rhoads, and Dodson with Lantrip. On February 3,

Burris was to be paired with Roosevelt, Pleasantville with Port Houston, and Sanderson with Chatham. On the fifth of the month Bruce was to be paired with Anson Jones and Crawford with Sherman. On February 8, Atherton was to be paired with Scroggins, Nat Henderson with Pugh, and Ross with Looscan. In each case school officials would announce which paired elementary school each student would attend.³⁵

On Thursday, January 28, MAEC met at Juan Marcos Presbyterian Church to discuss its response to the new pairing plan. Over two hundred parents, teachers, and community leaders attended the meeting. Those present voiced their anger over the pairing decision. Romualdo M. Castillo said that he and others were angry that the district failed to consider Mexican Americans a separate ethnic minority group within the white population. “We are legally white,” he noted, “but we have not had all the opportunities of the whites.” Others such as Maggie Landron accused HISD of using Mexican Americans for political purposes. HISD officials, she argued, could not afford to develop a “just” integration plan during an election year because it would upset Anglo voters and parents. “Politically for HISD,” noted Landron, “the Anglos were more important.” Leonel Castillo supported this theme of political expediency. “In other words,” he said, “the Mexican American does not matter because he doesn’t have very many votes.” School officials, he continued, have been “playing games with us for five months, they never intended to change the pairing plan.”³⁶

An activist later elaborated on this theme of political expediency. When ordered to comply with federal integration laws, HISD officials designed a plan that was, by their own admission, “politically expedient and immoral, improper, and a flagrant denial of the essence of the federal law,” the activist noted. Furthermore, this plan “was a deliberate attempt to circumvent the inherent justice of the integration laws by pairing a minimum number of Anglo students with the black community.” Bigotry and white inconvenience were the reasons given for “this blatant disregard of our human dignity,” this person continued. “The majority faction in the district are bigots, and they would vote the school board members out of office if they did not devise a plan to perpetuate white supremacy.” Furthermore, mandating school pairing for white children would inconvenience board members since it would force them “to wake up earlier than they are used to.”³⁷

Aware of their organizational limits and the lack of resources, MAEC members decided to adopt a strategy of “non-cooperation with the pairing of schools” that would include a stay-at-home policy, selective picket-

ing of the schools and the administration, and establishment of “alternative schools.”³⁸ Castillo noted that MAEC was in a much better position to set up huelga schools than it had been in September, 1970: “We have a few dollars this time. Last time we were broke.” MAEC threatened to hold the huelga schools through the end of the school year “if necessary,” said Castillo, adding, “Given the attitude of this school board toward Mexican Americans it is very possible.”³⁹

The struggle was on again, noted one community activist. This person said, “Maybe this time the Anglos will get the message that the Chicanos mean business. Just integration and quality education are two things that the Mexican American people will not be cheated out of any longer.”⁴⁰

MAEC’s plans were announced at a press conference the following day. The stay-at-home policy, noted Leonel Castillo, was not a general boycott but a selective one; it would affect only those children assigned to the paired schools. MAEC recommended that parents whose children were affected by the pairings keep them home. The council was planning to set up schools and transportation systems to aid the stay-at-home policy.⁴¹

MAEC also would protest the first day of pairing by holding a demonstration at Lantrip Elementary School, a predominantly Mexican American school to be paired. Lantrip was the major target for this day, and others would be focused on later. Those choosing not to send their children to public schools could send them to huelga institutions. The new pairing of schools necessitated these actions. “The pairing of Mexican-Americans with blacks and the pairing of blacks with blacks cannot be construed by any reasonable person to mean integration has occurred,” Castillo said. “The majority population, which consists of Anglos, must be brought into any equitable just plans.”⁴²

THE STRATEGY OF NONCOOPERATION:

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The stay-at-home policy was relatively successful in accomplishing its goal. On the first day of school only Lantrip and Sherman Elementary Schools were affected. MAEC’s chairperson, Leonel Castillo, led eighteen women in protest at Lantrip. He reiterated the reason for the protest: “In the last four months the school board has failed to bring Anglos into the [pairing] formula.”⁴³ The mothers of these children marched up and down in front of the school with their signs reading “Hell No, No Vamos” and “Education Si, Mickey Mouse Games No.”⁴⁴

Parents also boycotted buses scheduled to take the Mexican American children from Lantrip to Dobson Elementary. Although MAEC had only a few days to organize Lantrip parents, its efforts were successful. Most of the seats of the “shiny, yellow HISD school bus” were empty as the Mexican American children stayed at home to protest pairing with blacks.⁴⁵

At Sherman Elementary in the Northside barrio Mexican American parents successfully boycotted the bus. The parents led by Lucil [*sic*] Rivera, Victor Bueno, Frances Jasco, Rachel Lucas, Charlotte Aguilar, Virginia Vara, Amalia Ponce de León, and Margarita Calsade effectively led a bus blockade. Only seven of eighty-five children boarded the bus. “And some of those didn’t count,” noted one MAEC member, because “three were anglos and the other an oriental.”⁴⁶

Throughout the week Mexican American pickets at selective sites were relatively successful in encouraging parents to keep their children at home. On February 3, for instance, more than one hundred Mexican American parents picketed in front of Port Houston Elementary School. Mrs. María Moncevais and Mrs. Morales (no first name provided) led them. Only two of the eighty students who were supposed to transfer to Pleasantville boarded the bus. At Roosevelt twenty-four parents picketed, and only seven of the ninety students boarded the buses to Burrus Elementary at this site.⁴⁷

On a chilly Friday morning, February 5, 1971, “many Raza” showed up to picket at Anson Jones, located in El Segundo barrio. The night before the boycott started the parents used the cafeteria to plan their tactics. Much to the dismay of the principal, who thought that the parents were interested in the pairing of schools, they used this time to plan their boycott. Daniel Torres led the effort. Only 10 out of 110 students were bused that day.⁴⁸ Mexican American parents also picketed Sherman Elementary. Only 10 of 84 students from that school appeared at Crawford on Friday. Pickets continued at Port Houston, where only 7 of 80 students boarded the bus going to Pleasantville.⁴⁹

The resistance to the district’s pairing plan continued into Monday, February 8. In addition to boycotting the buses, Mexican American parents also picketed several elementary schools, including Scroggins, Pugh, and Looscan. Monday was an extremely cold day with temperatures in the low twenties, but Mexican American parents showed up to picket the schools. There were some thirty of them picketing Pugh Elementary and at least forty at Scroggins. José Padilla and Victor Bueno instructed *las madres* at Scroggins on the art of picketing. “The result,” noted one MAEC

member, was that only “ten out of 110 boarded the bus.” At Pugh Elementary, Rumaldo Castillo, Marie Juárez, Frances Fernández, Mary Villareal, and Dolores Tamayo all stood in twenty-degree weather to picket for their cause.⁵⁰

The largest group of protesters was at Looscan. Over sixty parents and community people picketed this school. Carmen Beltran was in charge of this large group. With her were Collie López, Bertha Ybarra, and Lucie García. Abel Alejándro and his wife reported that their family was not affected but they still supported the boycott “porque somos Chicanos [because we are Chicanos], and we need to stick together.” Rosie Limón was also present although she was not affected. All carried signs with different messages. Some condemned the school board; others told the board to “learn their ABCs—Anglos, Blacks, Chicanos”; and others questioned why Anglos were not included in the pairing plan. A sixty-five-year-old woman, Victoria Hernández, told reporters that Chicanos must get it together and “que sigan adelante (keep struggling).” Only seven out of sixty-three Mexican American children boarded the bus at Looscan that chilly day in February.⁵¹

Denver Harbor parents helped out in other ways. Mr. Ayala, for instance, kept his children from attending Eliot Elementary to express solidarity with the striking parents of Scroggins. Mrs. Villaseñor and Dora Guerra had no children in school but still aided the cause by walking the picket lines. Amalia and Linda Ávila both had children in Eliot but were in the picket line.⁵²

For the most part the strategy of noncooperation pursued by MAEC was perceived as quite successful. The boycott of the busing plan, according to MAYO member Pédro Vasquez, was about 85 percent effective. This, he noted, was in contrast to Superintendent Garver’s comments that little difficulty had been experienced in pairing the elementary schools.⁵³ “Either Garver was ignorant of all the resistance that the Mexican American Education Council and Chicano parents put up,” said Vasquez, “or he knew of these incidents but was afraid to expose the failure of the pairing plan.” Notwithstanding Garver’s comments, the Chicano community was optimistic of changing school desegregation policy. “If MAEC can continue this and open up the Huelga schools, then Garver will have to admit the sham of the pairing plan,” stated Vasquez.⁵⁴

MAEC had another opportunity to voice its concerns at the regular school board meeting scheduled for Monday, February 8. That day a large number of Mexican American parents marched outside the administra-

tion building for four hours. Some of “las mujeres” carried a black casket on their heads that said “Justice is Dead.” “Justice from the schools,” noted one observer, “died when the whites used the Mexican Americans as the only source of integration.”⁵⁵

Inside the board meeting three individuals—Mrs. María Moncevais from the Port Houston area and José Pérez and Memo de la Cerda, MAYO members—were given the opportunity to speak. MAYO members recommended that the school district be subdivided on the basis that would ensure “barrio control of barrio schools.” The school board stated that it would look at the merit of the idea and then “ended the matter with a ho-hum.”⁵⁶

Mrs. Moncevais talked about Port Houston Elementary and explained that it was already integrated. According to her, the school had 515 students whose racial composition was 15 percent black, 60 percent Mexican American, and 25 percent white. She then noted how busing of the children would “put a hardship on a lot of people that live here.” She explained, “We are not fighting anybody, we are not violent people, we just want our children to go to elementary school in their own neighborhood.” Referring to the boycott, she stated: “And it is not the stupidity of parents that their children are not in school: it is the stupidity of other people who brought all of this upon us.”⁵⁷

Despite vocal protests by MAEC and MAYO, the school board ignored them. “Like ostriches with their heads in the sand,” noted one observer, “they [board members] carried on the meeting ‘business as usual’ spending two minutes on the pairing plan.” Superintendent Garver declined to determine the number of students who had refused to board the buses at the different schools.⁵⁸

Official neglect of the community’s interests further encouraged MAEC to continue the boycott. Although it is unclear how many participated or how long it lasted, some evidence suggests that the boycott attracted several hundred and lasted longer than a month. By late February community activists writing in *Papel Chicano* defended the ongoing boycott and criticized individuals, especially Anglo liberals, who were beginning to oppose this action. Liberals, one of the activists argued, were confused over the community’s opposition to pairing and were wondering why MAEC attacked both conservative and liberal board policies, why it expressed pride in being an ethnic group, and why it displayed racism toward blacks and Anglos.⁵⁹ In general, this activist argued that these criticisms reflected the biases of white liberal middle-class individuals who did not under-

stand minorities and who tried to “fit their pre-conceived ideas of what is best for ‘our world.’”⁶⁰

In an effort to understand MAEC’s support for the boycott, this activist continued, liberals had to understand what the organization stood for and how it interpreted the “facts relative to the pairing plan and to the boycott.” MAEC was a barrio or grassroots organization that sought to meet the educational needs of Mexican Americans. The council was comprised of people from the Houston barrios “who themselves are personally the daily subjects and recipients of white racism and bigotry.” MAEC was formed specifically to oppose racism, prejudice, and inequality of education. The organization’s philosophy was based on the notion of cultural diversity and pluralism, that is, “on the right of each group to maintain its cultural values, pride in its heritage, and respect for its historical evolution.” This was in contrast to the schools that sought to “destroy this philosophy by its total insistence that all children are the same by conformity and rigidity.” MAEC recognized that if the schools promoted respect and understanding of each group’s contributions, integration would be beneficial to all racial and cultural groups, “including anglos.” However, “the schools are unequipped to do this,” the newspaper article noted.⁶¹

The way to judge MAEC, the author of the article further noted, was by its actions. MAEC favored the “just integration” of all children on a triethnic basis. “The only integration that has taken place in Houston,” according to the article, “is with Chicanos and Blacks.” Readers were reminded that MAEC and the Chicano community were not against blacks; they opposed racism in general and worked “side by side” with them for years in the civil rights struggles. Leonel Castillo, for instance, fought for integrated housing in San Antonio in 1961, and Sister Gloria Gallardo spent four years teaching in Mississippi. The article pointed out that Ben Reyes and Romualdo Castillo were also key players in the coalition between Operation Breadbasket (a black-sponsored organization) and the Denver Harbor MAEC chapter.⁶²

MAEC opposed pairing of minorities because Mexican Americans had suffered “the same indignities, discriminations, and poverty as the Blacks” simply because they were brown and maintained “a Spanish-speaking culture.” “Minority with minority, [and] poverty with poverty integration,” the article writer noted, “is a disaster to both groups—it gives the white its token integration and also gives them the excuse needed to keep the schools educationally backward.” Thus, the arguments raised by liberals that the Mexican American boycott was racist and their conclusion that

the school board's pairing decision was "appropriate" were both misleading since they were based on a misunderstanding of the Mexican American community and its responses to the pairing plan.⁶³

CONCLUSION

Despite MAEC's strategy of selective boycotting and picketing, by the end of February the community had failed to get the courts or the schools to seriously recognize their legal status and their needs. Although concessions had been exacted from the superintendent and the members of the board, local officials continued to function on the basis of black-white race relations rather than on a triethnic basis. Local school officials, notwithstanding their pledges to the Mexican American community, were legally bound to ignore this group in the development of integration plans. Failure to consider a change in the legal status of Mexican Americans, however, did not lead to despair; it only encouraged the community to struggle harder for this reform. The possibility for changing a policy based on outdated racial ideals guided MAEC's actions. Sooner or later, the organization's members believed, the board would take them seriously and change its integration plan. But for now the school board's indifference continued to fuel MAEC's oppositional efforts. The struggle was far from over.