CHAPTER 6

Rain of Fury

On the first day of school in the autumn of 1970, the Mexican American Education Council (MAEC) protested unjust integration orders by organizing and conducting a boycott of the public schools involved in the proposed pairing order. The school boycott lasted for two and a half weeks—from August 31, 1970, to September 16, 1970. In total over 3,500 students, or over 60 percent, of the 5,831 students affected by the original pairing order of August 24, 1970, participated in this action.

In addition to the boycott and related activities, MAEC also developed a network of huelga schools.[1] Officially called Huelga Enrichment Centers because they were not licensed, these schools were located in the area where the Fifth Circuit Court ordered the pairing of the elementary schools.

MAEC's challenges during these three weeks were formidable. The organization had to develop a plan for protesting school board actions, provide leadership to a diverse group of activists, establish huelga schools, organize rallies in different parts of town, negotiate with local school officials, and coordinate boycott activities. However, MAEC's primary challenge was to make sure that all sectors of the activist community—militant barrio youths and students, novice political actors, and moderate middle-class and lower-middle-class activists—worked in unison to resist an unpopular decision by the courts and the schools. The organization's work was facilitated by the emergence of strong leaders at the barrio level who organized most of these boycott or huelga school activities.

These actions symbolized the community's willingness to unify around a specific incident of discrimination on the basis of a new identity and a

new politics. In other words, the unjust decision not only brought activists together but also encouraged them to accept the Chicano ideology of militancy, a nonwhite racial identity, and cultural pride. This chapter traces the evolution and dynamics of collective unity, identity shift, and political mobilization during this three-week period. For narrative purposes, it is divided into two major parts, the establishment of huelga schools and the evolution of boycott activities.

THE HUELGA SCHOOLS

Two MAEC members were given the responsibility for establishing a network of huelga schools—Sister Gloria Gallardo and Tina Reyes.[2] Sister Gloria, a Roman Catholic nun assigned to the Bishop's Committee for the Spanish Speaking, assumed primary responsibility for public relations and for establishing huelga schools throughout the city. Reyes, an activist from the Second Ward, assumed primary responsibility for ensuring that these schools had sufficient resources.[3]

The purpose of these educational institutions, as mentioned earlier, was to provide students with adequate instruction while they were boycotting the schools. In addition to the traditional three R's, these schools were to teach courses on Mexican American culture and history. Certified teachers and volunteers from the University of Houston would teach the basic skills classes, and MAYO would teach the historical and cultural aspects of the huelga school curriculum.[4]

Before instruction could begin Sister Gloria had to overcome several major problems, including the location of school sites, staffing, and registration. At least six locations had been found prior to the first day of the boycott and twenty-five others were under consideration. But a dispute between federal officials at the state and local levels over whether MAEC could use federal funds to establish private schools in antipoverty agencies emerged and cast doubt on some of these additional facilities.[5]

The use of church facilities and the Young Women's Catholic Association (YWCA) also was controversial. Helen Grant, executive director of the metropolitan YWCA, defended this decision to locate a huelga school at one of its local branches in the Magnolia Park barrio. She argued that the YWCA's decision was not an endorsement of the boycott action: "We decided to make it available to them [Mexican Americans] for community purposes."[6] Mario Quiñones, one of MAEC's local leaders and a member of the Harris County Community Action Association in the Port Houston

Table 4. Enrollment in the Huelga Schools, Wednesday, September 3, 1970

Name	*Address*	*Enrollment*
1. Denver Harbor Facilities		2,000
Facility #1	6323 Force	
Facility #2	1146 Gazin	
2. Port Houston HCCAA	1821 Daugherty	126
3. San Felipe Church	9800 Wallisville Rd.	500
4. Juan Marcos Presbyterian Church	3600 Fulton	177
5. Northside People Center	1501 Brooks	50
6. Saint Joseph's Church	1505 Kane	25
7. Our Lady of Saint John	7500 Hirsch Rd.	70
8. Magnolia Park Branch YWCA	7305 Navigation	45
		Total: 2,993

Source: "Chicanos Sign 3,000," *Houston Post,* Thursday, September 3, 1970, p. 13A.

area, argued too that the willingness of these agencies, centers, or churches to provide space for the establishment of huelga schools was not a statement of support for the boycott. "They are just giving space to get the kids educated," he said.[7] Despite this dispute, Sister Gloria was able to use some of these facilities as sites for the huelga schools. By the middle of the week at least nine of them were secured.[8]

Staffing was as problematic as site location. MAEC planned to staff the schools with regular teachers working after hours and with volunteers from local universities. Teachers from HISD and from local universities as well as undergraduate and graduate students volunteered their services, but this was inadequate to meet the great demand for huelga school instruction. Initially MAEC leaders expected about one thousand students to enroll in these schools. Their expectations were too low, as indicated by registration figures.[9]

Registration for the schools began on Tuesday, September 1. Slightly over two hundred students registered that day. On Wednesday, however, enrollment quickly jumped, closing with three thousand students registered. Much of this explosion in enrollment was concentrated in the Denver Harbor barrio, as indicated by the following table showing the names of the facilities, if any, the addresses, and the enrollments (see table 4).[10]

Because of demand for secondary instruction, Sister Gloria made plans for the opening of at least one senior high huelga school. Registration for this school was held on Friday evening at Saint Joseph Church on Kane Street.[11]

During the second week of the boycott the number of huelga schools doubled. Seven additional elementary schools were opened on Monday, September 7, and one senior high school was opened the following day.[12] State representative Lauro Cruz, the first Mexican American legislator from the Houston area and a strong supporter of the boycott, said that MAEC might have to open a second high school to accommodate the striking students. "This is because of sympathy for our cause and because of low quality education in the Houston schools," he said.[13] On Tuesday, MAEC leaders called for additional retired teachers to join the huelga schools because of the large numbers of Mexican American students enrolling.[14]

During this same week, the number of volunteer certified teachers increased to eighty-five. At the senior high huelga school alone there were thirty-five volunteer certified teachers at the first session. These teachers were aided by more than sixty-five University of Houston upperclassmen and graduate students as tutors in special subjects. Sister Gloria reported that some of the teachers were leaving Houston schools to help in the boycott. Others were retired schoolteachers who volunteered their services.[15]

Although no data is available on enrollment, it is likely that the number being served increased significantly during the second week, anywhere from five hundred to one thousand more students than the week before.[16] At the senior high huelga school, for instance, more than four hundred students enrolled in the first session.[17]

Most huelga school instruction in general focused on teaching the three R's. In practically all of the classes lessons in reading, writing, and occasionally arithmetic were offered.[18] At the senior high huelga school the curriculum was more innovative and "enriching." There the school taught a variety of traditional and nontraditional classes on subjects such as contemporary social and economic problems, the fundamentals of aeronautics, art appreciation, music, and public health, as well as college-level courses "redesigned" for high school students. Classes were small and did not exceed twenty-five students.[19]

The principal of the large senior high huelga school was Eliseo Cisneros. He had taught senior high foreign languages and journalism in a suburban school district the year before. Cisneros held a degree from the University

of Texas, probably a bachelor of science in foreign languages, and was a substitute teacher for the Houston Independent School District during the regular academic year.[20]

A curriculum committee headed by Dr. Edward González, a biochemistry professor at the University of Houston campus, planned the high school's courses. This committee planned a program to fulfill all requirements for senior high students in the Houston schools. "Most of the teachers here are not political," said Dr. González. "We are concerned about educating the students who are staying out of school [because of the boycott]."[21]

In addition to the three R's, the huelga school instructors also taught history and culture classes in general and "the political aspects of the boycott" in particular.[22] This instruction occurred but, according to one source, was not effective. Of particular importance was the knowledge taught about the reasons for the boycott. Evidence from several sources suggests that children were taught why the community was boycotting the public schools. Some of these students, especially those from the elementary grades, only obtained a rudimentary knowledge of why they went to huelga schools. "We go to huelga school," reported one student from the San Felipe Church school, "because we are protesting." Another said that they were boycotting because "We have better teachers [at the huelga school] and have lunch and air-conditioning."

Older students gained a better understanding of the meaning of the boycott. One of these students was Jaime Díaz, a ninth grader. In a paragraph on why he was boycotting he wrote: "I am boycotting because I am not a white. I am a Chicano and I'm brown. The School Board considers me white now and that's because they are integrating the schools, you know blacks with whites. Well, I'm no white and I will stand up and show my color. The integrating of schools have [*sic*] taken place in most Chicano schools, you know, putting us as whites. Well, that's the reason I'm boycotting."[23] Another ninth-grade student, Irene Peña, also showed a good understanding of the meaning of the boycott. She stated that Mexican Americans were being denied their rights and discriminated against by the local school board. "Now the time has come to show the people of the U.S. that we are not someone people can toss around as if we were nobody," she argued, adding, "We are showing them we can stand on our own two feet." "I think we chicanos [*sic*] are boycotting," noted another ninth-grade student, "because we don't like the idea of the school board using us as whites."[24] Another unnamed ninth-grade student noted that

Chicanos were boycotting because "we can't just let ourselves be thrown around and called white, when we're not—we're BROWN!"[25]

At the senior high huelga school instructors tried to make their classes "more relevant to the Chicano." In a course on business law, for instance, students discussed the unfairness of the legal system and how it treated politically active people such as Huey Newton, leader of the radical Black Panther Party, and Reis Tijerina, a leader of the militant land rights group in New Mexico.[26] A social problems class taught by a MAYO member discussed the farmworkers' strike in California and Texas. There was also an informal discussion in that class about what students should be learning in the huelga schools.[27]

These examples suggest the existence of some political instruction in the huelga schools at the elementary and secondary levels. The effectiveness of this instruction, however, was questionable, as indicated by Cam Duncan, a supporter of the boycott. She observed and commented on the organization, staffing, and content of the huelga schools. Her visit probably took place toward the end of the second week of instruction. In general she argued that the schools were run by inexperienced individuals, the curriculum was narrowly confined to the three R's, and instruction, especially of the political aspects of the boycott, was ineffective.[28]

During her observations she noted that there were nearly twenty elementary "freedom schools" held in churches and community centers, staffed by volunteer teachers and funded by donations. Although Sister Gloria reported that all the schools had some books and supplies by Tuesday of the second week of the boycott, Duncan noted that there were few textbooks and school supplies. She explained that "this will certainly change if the schools become permanent."[29]

Duncan visited a huelga school at San Felipe Church off Wallisville Road in the El Dorado barrio. The school had an enrollment of two hundred first-through-eighth graders and was coordinated by a nineteen-year-old student. Classes in this school differed little from the standard three R's, although some classes used copies of *Papel Chicano* in their reading and writing lessons. Some political instruction was taking place, but it was not effective. "The students I talked to expressed little understanding of the demands the MAEC is fighting for and of the consequences of the present pairing plan," she noted.[30]

In the evening she visited the senior high huelga school at Holy Name School, 1913 Cochran. The original plan was for the school to open at Saint Joseph's Church, but it was then moved to the Holy Name School, a

"newer, well-equipped" Catholic facility. The school had about five hundred students and twenty-five teachers. Classes were held from 6:00 to 10:00 P.M. daily, and most courses offered by HISD were taught there, as well as classes in social problems and Chicano history.[31]

The school's principal, Eliseo Cisneros, insisted that the school was apolitical and existed merely to keep the boycotting students from falling behind in their public school classes. Some of the teachers and many of the older students, however, felt that the huelga school was providing a political curriculum. Despite this instruction, Duncan noted, students were not being provided with a full understanding of the boycott, especially the reasons for the boycott and the underlying racism of many students.[32] She wrote:

> Despite the fact that the MAEC has taken every opportunity to announce publicly that the reason for the boycott is not to prevent the transfer of chicanos to black schools and vice versa, it appears that the huelga schools are not dealing effectively with the racism of many students and parents, nor educating the people on all of the issues in the strike. Like talking about why blacks are not boycotting, about what a really progressive education could be offered at huelga schools, about what community control of schools means, and how it could be achieved.[33]

Leonel Castillo later admitted that the huelga schools were not doing all they could to eliminate these racist sentiments. He attributed many of the difficulties to the incredible administrative problems involved in setting up a volunteer school district for over thirty-five hundred students in one week.[34]

The huelga schools remained in existence for the entire duration of the boycott. Although it is unclear who actually attended, what was taught, and who taught in them, they served to remind the community that Chicanos and Chicanas could shape their educational destiny. The schools were an extension of the community's political involvement and served to further unite the various activist strains found in the barrios and to inspire them to continue the struggle.

THE BOYCOTT—WEEK ONE: MONDAY, AUGUST 31–SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

The huelga schools were an extension of the community's political involvement. Most of this involvement centered on the radical measures

taken by various sectors of the Mexican-origin community to protest the school's proposed pairing order. The first week of militant activism began on Monday, August 31, with thousands of students heeding MAEC's call to protest the proposed court-ordered pairing of mostly Mexican American schools with predominantly black schools.[35] On the first day about 3,500 Mexican American students boycotted the schools.[36] In the barrio schools of the Northside (Looscan and Sherman Elementary Schools), Denver Harbor (Scroggins and Eliot Elementary Schools), Port Houston (Port Houston Elementary), and the Second Ward (Lantrip and Anson Jones Elementaries) the boycott was 75 percent effective. Some of the schools in El Dorado barrio reported about 90 percent of the students absent due primarily to the boycott.[37] The mainstream media reported that at Ryan Elementary in the Northside only 111 of 258 Mexican Americans registered at that predominantly black school showed up.[38] Although not included in the pairing order, the students at the combined junior-senior high school at Furr supported the boycott; about 300 Mexican American students expected to attend classes there did not appear.[39]

Mexican American parents, all members of MAEC, took the lead in supporting the boycott effort in their local communities. They tried to enroll their children in predominantly Mexican American schools, picketed schools, or demonstrated in front of the administration building. At Sherman Elementary, located in the Northside, parents briefly blocked the driveway to keep teachers and students from attending the school. They advised the elementary-school children to go home.[40] Mexican American parents reportedly took their children out of Kay Elementary School, a formerly predominantly African American school.[41] Other parents picketed outside Eliot Elementary, located in the Denver Harbor barrio, and at J. P. Harris Elementary in the East End barrio.[42] Over one hundred parents marched and demonstrated in front of the school administration building while collectively chanting "Brown, Brown, We're not White, We're Brown."[43]

Despite these actions, the local board reported that the majority of parents and children were complying with school board guidelines as "dictated" by the federal courts. School board officials noted that the district opened its 232 schools "with pockets of dissent prevailing to disrupt education." The boycott, officials acknowledged, was most keenly felt at Pugh, Scroggins, and Port Houston. According to Dr. Charles R. Nelson, deputy superintendent of elementary schools, these schools reported absenteeism of 25–50 percent, a figure much less than that reported by Mexican

American sources.[44] The principal of Eliot Elementary, Courtney Parks, reported that the "brown boycott" was sharply felt at his school since only about one-third of the expected student body enrolled for classes.[45]

Later in the day MAEC held a mass meeting at Moody Park to report on the status of the boycott. Over six hundred individuals attended this rally. Several, including Mr. B. Mega from El Dorado barrio and Andy Guerrero from the Second Ward, reported favorably on the day's boycott activities.[46]

After these initial reports individuals voiced their support for the boycott. One speaker urged that even the Chicanos not affected by the pairing decision should boycott the schools. Any Chicano who did not want to support the boycott had "better get out of the way," he added.[47] This as well as other comments reflected several aspects of the new Chicano ideology, including awareness of an institutional wrong that could be changed through the promotion of a collective minority group identity and the willingness to confront existing school authorities through militant means to correct an injustice. Abel Álvarez, representative for the Barrios Unidos organization formed in January, made reference to one aspect of this ideology when he said, "It's obvious they're [the school board] using Mexican Americans for integration purposes." He further commented that Chicanos wanted to be considered as an ethnic group distinct from whites.[48]

Gregory Salazar, a MAYO member, voiced the opinion that Chicanos had always been considered a separate ethnic group for housing and jobs, "but we are now considered white for integration purposes." Both he and Yolanda Birdwell, another member of MAYO, urged the crowd to continue the boycott. They argued that people should stay out of the schools, not for racial reasons but to protest the poor education Chicanos were receiving in the schools and "because they were being used as white only for the convenience of the racist school board."[49] This latter statement was aimed at discouraging racial prejudice against African Americans and at challenging the underlying racism in many of the students' decisions to boycott the schools.

Racial prejudices between Mexican and African Americans, a topic generally unexplored by scholars, was very much a reality in the barrio. The proposed pairing of these two groups in the schools and the tensions raised by the boycott apparently encouraged individuals to express these racist sentiments. One of the students in the elementary grades, for instance, was reported to have said that he wanted to go to the huelga school because "there are no colored people" there. A ninth-grader was more explicit; he was boycotting because "the niggers always get what they want — chicanos

never do!" Other students were afraid of going to schools that were predominantly black because "black kids are always bossing us around, picking fights."[50] Adults also expressed these sentiments at meetings and in private conversations with some of the MAEC leaders.[51] Salazar's comments sought to counter these attitudes and remind the community about the true reasons for the boycott—discrimination against Mexican Americans, not racial prejudice against African Americans.[52]

Not all the speakers at the rally were Mexican Americans. One, Curtis Graves, an African American state representative from Houston, was a political ally of the Mexican American community and a close personal friend of state representative Lauro Cruz from Houston. Cruz was the first Mexican American elected to the state legislature from the Houston area. His support of the boycott was welcomed by MAEC because he gave it an aura of legitimacy. But, as will be shown later, his support also complicated MAEC's leadership because Cruz acted independently of the organization. He had his own political reasons for supporting this effort and did not generally consult with or seek the approval of the MAEC leader. Still, MAEC leaders welcomed his support.

Cruz was probably the one who invited Curtis Graves to attend the rally and issue a statement of support, which Graves did gladly.[53] "Congratulations on coming together as a united race," Graves stated to the gathering. He told them that racist elements were trying to integrate Chicanos as whites with the blacks and said, "This is a travesty on justice and you should not stand for it. You have been used." He reminded the crowd: "You are not white, but you are Chicano." Finally, he agreed with the Mexican American community's efforts to bring to the attention of the district the "unfair integration policies of HISD."[54] He argued, "The black man in this community stands with you. Don't stop the boycott until you have reached 100 percent."[55]

Graves's appearance was a positive sign of support from the African American community for the boycott. This support, although welcomed, was limited since no other major political leaders issued a statement of support. A few, such as school board member Rev. Leon Everett II, supported the Mexican American community's effort to gain legal recognition as an ethnic minority group but opposed the boycott. "They are to be commended for their belated thrust," Everett said.[56] Still, the comments by Graves projected a public image of minority cooperation on this issue and indicated that this boycott was not merely a Mexican American issue but one of concern to minorities and those interested in justice. His ap-

pearance and comments also challenged the public perception that racism against African Americans was an important motivation for the boycott.

On the second day of the boycott between seventy-five and one hundred Mexican American mothers and some fathers picketed at Pugh, Scroggins, and Eliot, all located in the Denver Harbor area. The rains came that day but did not discourage the mothers, a large number of whom marched and chanted in front of these elementary schools: "Rain, rain go away, La Raza wants to picket today." Others yelled, "Brown, brown, we're not white, we're brown." Chicano mothers rallied in answer to the city-wide Chicano boycott of HISD schools. "We as Chicanos must fight for our schools," stated Mrs. Ernest Sauseda [*sic*]. "We are protesting the busing of only Chicano children to the black schools, we're not white," she added. Several other mothers—Mrs. Edward Salazar, Mrs. Mario Peña, Mrs. Manuel del Campo, and others—pleaded for *ayuda* (assistance) and asked families to keep their children out of the schools. "Put them in the huelga schools," most of them advised.[57] Another parent, Mrs. America García, reinforced these comments when she said, "Chicanos must stick together and support an all-out Chicano boycott." Mrs. García contributed to this effort by providing child care and making her home available to some thirty-three boycotting minors so that their mothers could protest the pairing of the schools.[58]

Youth activists in the community agreed with the mothers of Denver Harbor. One of them argued that Chicanas and Chicanos did not like the idea of integrating only minorities. "If you're brown, you will boycott schools, if you are brown and don't boycott," this person argued, "you are placing an injustice upon your raza." The activist urged readers to "boycott Raza, boycott now."[59]

By the third day the boycott seemed to be attracting larger numbers of students. MAEC encouraged their participation in many of these activities and also urged them to attend the huelga schools. In the meantime parents, especially women, were asked to march and picket in front of several schools. At Jackson Junior High, one of the schools picketed, the principal locked the gates and remained in front of the school while the teachers patrolled the hallways.[60] Once the mothers began to picket the school, however, students began to "blow out," or leave the school. An additional catalyst to "blowing out" was the brave action of one *bato* (young male) who jumped from a second-story window and joined the picket line. Soon five Chicana students—Tina Campos, Linda Sánchez, Sara García, Yolanda García, and Jerry Rodríquez—"blew out." So did two Chicanos from the

Jackson Football B team. "They knew that they might be kicked off the team pero [but] for the Raza, it was worth it," noted one of the activists. By the end of the day about 250 Chicano and Chicana students had walked out of school and joined the picketers. Because of school regulations those on the picket line could not chant, so they simply communicated with the other students in the school by showing "the Chicano Power fist signs."[61]

The boycott at Furr Junior-Senior High and the "blowout" at Jackson Junior High indicated that the boycott was beginning to spread to the higher grades and that parents were using more militant methods. On Friday the week's activities culminated with a "picketing tour" of several Houston schools.[62] About 250 Mexican American children and parents traveled by cars and a bus to a school, marched around it, then moved on to another school. Some of the schools picketed in this manner were Jeff Davis High, Edison Junior High, Austin High, and Jackson Junior High.[63]

By the end of the week at least four individuals were arrested for boycott activities. One mother from the Denver Harbor barrio was arrested for trying to convince another parent not to register her child in the HISD school. Three MAYO members—Andy Guerrero, Mike Almendárez, and Hector Almendárez—were arrested for using a bullhorn without a permit; they were announcing the boycott and encouraging students not to attend. "Raza be careful," warned an activist, "but make a stand on the issue of the boycott." He further stated, "Ponganse alalva [*sic*] [be on guard]."[64]

On Friday evening a meeting of over 700 Mexican Americans was held at Saint Joseph's Catholic Church to discuss the achievements and problems of the past week as well as how to continue the efforts. Elva González noted that only 205 of over 1,600 students had reported to Port Houston Elementary School. Gregory Salazar stated that not enough people were boycotting junior and senior high schools. Guillermo Gutiérrez stated that chairs were needed for the huelga school at the Northside People's Center. Toward the end of the meeting one woman suggested that it might be better to move out of Houston, but the majority rejected this idea. One of the activists, impressed with the community's mobilization, reported that "for the first time in 100 years the Chicano is really starting to unite."[65] Another rally to discuss the status and future plans was called for Sunday afternoon to be held at Eastwood Park on the east side of Houston.

A variety of speakers including state representative Lauro Cruz, Abe Ramírez, and Leonel Castillo spoke at the Sunday rally attended by about three thousand individuals. They provided a status report of the boycott

and the huelga schools.[66] Emphasis quickly shifted to the topic of what needed to be done the following week. Rally speakers encouraged Mexican American parents to keep their children out of public schools until the district declared them a minority group. "All Mexican Americans, on this issue, stand together," said Cruz.[67] He also proposed expanding the boycott to include those not directly affected by the pairing order. More specifically, he called for a "sympathy" boycott on Friday of all students still in school.[68] This sympathy boycott would coincide with the school administration's announced plans to observe El Día de la Independencia (Mexican Independence Day) on September 16.

Abe Ramírez supported Lauro Cruz's statements and encouraged the crowd to continue the boycott. "It is an effort supreme to any other issue now before us," he said.[69] Leonel Castillo, chairperson of MAEC, told the crowd that talks with the school administration would begin Tuesday. "We will argue only one point—that is that we are an identifiable ethnic minority group," he said, adding, "It will probably be a short meeting."[70] After several more speakers and a great deal of clapping and chanting, the rally ended on a positive note.

WEEK TWO: MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7—SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

During the second week of the boycott community leaders continued to picket, to encourage nonattendance in the paired and nonpaired schools, and to focus on educating in the huelga schools those boycotting the schools. Community leaders made plans to negotiate with school officials. The first meeting, with Superintendent George Garver, took place on Tuesday, September 9.[71] Five MAEC members as well as state representative Lauro Cruz met with him on this day.[72]

The group raised several concerns. One pertained to intimidation by school officials. Cruz and Ramírez specifically charged that some truant officers and principals told parents that they would be forced to pay fines if their children continued to boycott the schools. A second and more important concern was recognition by the board of Mexican Americans as an identifiable minority group for purposes of desegregation. Superintendent Garver sympathized but told them that the identification of Mexican Americans was a policy matter for the school board and not an adminis-

trative one. Leonel Castillo then asked to meet with the board in order to get "a policy decision" before discussing any further issues of triethnic desegregation.[73]

Once other members of MAEC were informed of the meeting's results, they were angry. Abel Álvarez probably best summarized their sentiments when he said, "Our pleas have fallen on deaf ears." "We have no alternative but to go to the people, unite them and continue with the boycott," he added.[74] Mexican American leaders then went ahead with the proposed plan to encourage all HISD students to boycott classes Friday, September 11, as a gesture of sympathy with the strike against the schools. A second day-long statewide boycott was called for Friday, September 18.[75]

Later that day Dr. Leonard Robbins, board president, stated that the recognition of Mexican Americans as an identifiable minority group could be granted only by the courts, not by the Houston school board. He also told MAEC members that a lower court decision declaring Mexican Americans an identifiable minority group in Corpus Christi was "not germane to Houston."[76] State representative Cruz and Abe Ramírez criticized this position and said that the school board should "do more to get another ruling." Dr. Robbins defended the principals' actions pertaining to truancy, stating that state law required children to attend accredited schools until they reached the age of seventeen or else the parents would face charges of truancy and fines.[77]

These comments only served to fan the flames of anger toward the presumed intransigence of the local school district. The following day, Wednesday, Cruz and Ramírez, acting without official authorization of MAEC but supported by its chairperson, held a press conference. They called for a general one-day boycott of the Houston schools for Friday, September 11, as a gesture of sympathy for the estimated thirty-five hundred Mexican American students who were protesting the pairing order. They called for an additional general boycott of Houston schools to be held on Friday, September 18. This would be coordinated with a statewide boycott of schools called by MAYO and other members of the Mexican American community. Cruz and Ramírez also stated that MALDEF was planning on filing a suit in federal court embodying a twenty-step plan for racial integration of the Houston schools.[78] Leonel Castillo later said that the proposed twenty steps could not be divulged because "other Mexican American leaders had not approved all of them."[79] These actions, they argued, were necessary due to the negative attitude of school officials and to their

failure to meet the demand of MAEC and other community organizations for a change in the legal classification of Mexican Americans.[80]

At the press conference Cruz also stated that he planned to meet with Gov. Preston Smith on Friday to see whether Smith would assist the Mexican American community's efforts to be declared an ethnic minority group. In a related issue Ramírez reported that MALDEF was beginning to document cases of intimidation of Mexican American students by teachers and other school officials.[81]

On Thursday, September 10, Superintendent Garver, probably in response to the possibility of escalation of boycott activity and in order to encourage dialogue between HISD and the leaders of the Mexican American boycott, issued a statement recognizing Mexican Americans as an "identifiable minority group within the total community." "This recognition," the statement read, "should not be confused with the legal recognition of an ethnic minority. Legal recognition can only be granted by a Court." Since Mexican Americans were a distinct minority, the statement implied that "they may have special educational needs." According to Garver, "It is, therefore, vitally important that any effective educational system address itself to meet adequately the needs of all children." In a concluding statement the superintendent encouraged the participation of the Mexican American community in resolving the issue of integration: "In recognition of the special educational needs that Mexican-American children may have, the School district will continue to attempt to work with representatives of the Mexican-American community, including parents and other interested groups, to determine their suggestions and recommendations which can be implemented or submitted to the Board of Education for their consideration."[82]

Members of the Mexican American community viewed this statement as a positive sign and decided to meet with Superintendent Garver that Thursday afternoon.[83] In a meeting that lasted more than five hours state representative Lauro Cruz and MAEC members discussed the group's twenty-step plan. Among other things, MAEC wanted school officials to do the following: (1) recognize Mexican Americans as an identifiable minority group; (2) place eight Mexican Americans in responsible positions within the school administration; (3) refrain from punishing or reprimanding Mexican American students boycotting the district; (4) grant all usual privileges of school activities to boycotting students when they returned to class; and (5) have proportionate representation by Mexi-

can Americans on all study groups and commissions appointed by the district.[84]

Garver told MAEC representatives that parts of their plan were "workable" and promised to support them in a meeting with the board to be held on Friday.[85] Despite the favorable reaction by the superintendent to their "concerns," MAEC, after the meeting, reissued the call for a one-day general sympathy boycott for Friday by all students.[86]

The organization's response was issued in the context of two other actions taken by more radical students and by a new conservative Mexican American group. First, there was a press conference held by some fifty Mexican American junior and senior high school students that Thursday. Militant students involved in the boycott activities called the press conference. Although they did not obtain MAEC's authorization, the students were supported in their efforts by the chairperson and the group's membership. These students reported that doors and gates were being locked at certain schools and that principals and coaches were threatening and intimidating those who joined the boycott. Gregory Salazar, a representative of MAYO who also spoke on behalf of this group, said that the students believed they were being threatened with arrest by police officers. When asked about the superintendent's statement, he said, "The administration doesn't have the power to set policy. They only carry out policy." The superintendent disagreed with this sentiment, stating, "While this is a statement by the general superintendent, it is the policy of the school district until changed by board decree." Salazar, however, was not hopeful that anything significant would occur unless the school board took further action. "I hope that the school board will file an appeal and that the ruling will be favorable," he said.[87]

The second incident dealt with formal opposition to the Mexican American community's boycott of the schools by a conservative group headed by John Coronado, editor of the Spanish language newspaper *Observatorio Latino.* Coronado was the spokesperson for more than four hundred Mexican American business leaders in Houston and founder of the Mexican American Chamber of Commerce. He felt that the courts should settle the issue of ethnic identity raised by MAEC. Those seeking recognition as a separate ethnic group "have a genuine case," he noted, "but they shouldn't play political football with those kids." He urged all the parents to attend the public schools and not to be "misled by political agitators." He noted that he would appear before the school board on Monday night to voice his objections to the Houston school system.[88]

No additional voices of support or opposition to MAEC or its issues emerged during this crucial period. "Old-guard" organizations such as LULAC and new ones such as PASSO were strangely silent and did not take a public position on this burning issue.[89] These organizations, for the most part, opposed the tactics and the new racial identity promoted by MAEC and were unwilling to endorse these actions officially.[90]

The following day, Friday, September 11, a group of Mexican Americans met with the school board while another group went to court to file a lawsuit asking for intervention status in the *Ross* case. About twenty members of MAEC were present at the meeting with the board and the superintendent at which the twenty-point plan was presented to them.[91] Following is the list of demands presented by the Mexican American Education Council to the Houston Independent School District, September 1970:

1. The School Board should immediately and officially recognize the Mexican American as an identifiable ethnic minority group, subject to the due protection of the law and that the School Board immediately implement this policy.
2. The School Board should immediately file an appeal to the Fifth Circuit Court on the basis that the proposed desegregation plan is a sham while [it] emphasizes the pairing of the Mexican Americans and Blacks.
3. The School Board should immediately place eight (8) Mexican Americans in responsible positions within the administration of the District. At present there is not a single Mexican American administrator with any real responsibility.
4. The School Board should immediately assure the Mexican American Education Council that the school children and parents who participated in the boycott will not be punished or reprimanded in any way by any school officials.
5. Students who participated in the boycott will be granted the usual privileges and rights in school activities, extra-curricular activities and all other school related activities.
6. The School Board should have proportionate representation of Mexican Americans on all committees, commissions and study groups appointed by the District. Particularly important in this regard are the Desegregation Committee, the Legislative Committee and the Financial Committee.
7. The School Board will publicly guarantee the Mexican American Education Council that the bilingual education programs and other pro-

grams designed for the Mexican American will not be diluted, decreased or hurt in any way by any desegregation plan.

8. All poor children, regardless of the area in which they live, will be assured free and safe transportation to school. Low-income neighborhoods present more safety hazards to parents and children and therefore there is a great need for assistance in assuring free and safe access to school.
9. The School Board will not pair or group any schools until a reasonable plan for pairing or grouping has been developed. Elements of a reasonable plan include:

    a. Identification of the Mexican Americans as a separate ethnic minority group.
    b. Transportation or assistance through or around hazardous streets and areas.
    c. Notification, in Spanish, if necessary, and full discussion with the parents of the children to be grouped or paired.
    d. Acknowledgement of the various difficulties involved in separating low-income families which have many members who might attend different schools.
    e. Participation of Mexican Americans in planning.

10. The School Board will immediately begin an intensive program to include Mexican American teachers, counselors, administrative staff and other personnel with a view toward having proportionate representation within the District by January, 1971.
11. The School District will begin immediately to develop curriculum and textbook material which adequately portrays the role the Mexican American has played in this country's history.
12. Bilingual teachers using Spanish as a part of their daily work, who have a proficiency rating of at least an FS-4 (foreign service rating) will receive a 10% pay differential.
13. The School Board will insist that Mexican Americans receive more academic preparation rather than continuing the emphasis on vocational training.
14. The School Board will immediately create a career information office which will assist qualified, needy Mexican Americans to go to college.
15. The School Superintendent will use uniform regulations to each school principal, providing for the personal safety of every school child in and

around each school. Responsibility for enforcement of the regulations will not be delegated by the principal, but will be his personal responsibility. Personal safety may necessitate the use of parent hall patrols.

16. The Houston independent School District will implement recognition of the Mexican American as a separate ethnic group by insuring that a share of funds proportional to the population of Mexican Americans be allocated from funds received by H.I.S.D. under the Nixon Desegregation Bill to programs benefiting the Mexican American school children.
17. The Houston Independent School District will use the services and technical assistance provided by TED-TAC in implementing desegregation plans of the United States Circuit Court.
18. The School Board will declare the 16th of September and the Cinco de Mayo as official school holidays. This will be done with a view toward stimulating recognition and acknowledgement of the cultural heritage of the Mexican American.
19. The School Board will actively begin a program whereby minority contractors and businessmen and financial institutions will be able to participate in the business function of the District.
20. The School Board will publicly announce its support of the election of board members by district.[92]

After the meeting the superintendent publicly noted that parts of the plan to recognize Mexican Americans as an ethnic minority group could be worked out "administratively." Specifically, Garver argued that sixteen of the twenty "issues" were within the superintendent's authority. The remaining four required school board action and were to be seriously considered by the board members.[93]

Leonel Castillo stated that the meeting with Garver was a fruitful one. Although he appreciated the superintendent's favorable reaction to MAEC's plan, the crux of the problem was not an administrative matter but a policy concern. Until the matter was resolved, Castillo said, the Mexican American student boycott of the schools would continue.[94]

MAEC filed suit in federal court to intervene in the Houston school district integration case. This lawsuit, filed by MALDEF lawyers with the assistance of Abe Ramírez, Jr., alleged that pairing Mexican Americans with blacks did not achieve integration. The suit stated that the integration order failed to consider Mexican Americans as a distinct and separate identifiable minority group as required by the Fourteenth Amendment to the

Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The parents asked that the district integrate its black and Mexican American students with Anglo students.[95]

Political unity of the entire Mexican American community supporting the boycott held out during the second week, but minor differences in strategy emerged on Saturday when state representative Cruz and Ramírez prematurely announced that the boycott might be called off if the board continued to negotiate with the Mexican American community. At a Saturday press conference Cruz and Ramírez praised the superintendent for his "good faith and concern" in talking with them and said that they would reciprocate by canceling a statewide sympathy boycott of schools that had been called for Friday, September 18.[96] They also suggested that striking Mexican American students in Houston would "probably" return to the public schools and end the walkout. Ramírez announced that the strike of the schools would continue until "we are assured of justice and quality education." "At this time, however," he noted, "we have every reason to believe that if talks go on in the same vein with the school administration, all our children will be back in Houston schools Friday."[97] Leonel Castillo clarified later that only he and MAEC could issue such a call for ending the boycott.[98] The apparent rift was closed almost as soon as it emerged.

WEEK THREE: MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14—WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

During the beginning of the third week of the boycott a potentially distracting event occurred that almost halted the negotiations with local school officials. This event occurred on Monday, September 14, at the regularly scheduled monthly school board meeting.[99] MAYO and the Chicano Student Committee, a new group of high school students, engaged in militant action that led to violence and the arrest of fourteen individuals. This "mini-riot," as the media called it, had a potentially negative impact on the conduct of boycott activities since it undermined peaceful negotiations.[100]

To the surprise of MAEC leaders, the violent incident at the school board meeting actually strengthened their hand by encouraging school board members to complete the negotiations and meet their demands.[101] The following day MAEC reported that the school board had agreed to its central demands of identifying Mexican Americans as an ethnic group and of appealing the pairing decision to the Supreme Court. In addition to these two demands the board also met fifteen other demands. In total,

it agreed to meet seventeen of MAEC's original twenty demands.[102] This good-faith effort on the part of both the superintendent and the school board was sufficient for MAEC to end the boycott. On Wednesday, September 16, an important Mexican holiday, Leonel Castillo, Abe Ramírez, and others announced an end to the boycott: "We urge Mexican American parents to return their children to school on Monday peacefully."[103] The parents, students, and community members wholeheartedly supported the termination of boycott activities.

Also on that day Superintendent Garver announced the establishment of a three-member committee to implement the pairing plan and, in keeping with the spirit of the settlement, appointed a Mexican American, Ernesto Valdes, to the committee.[104] Garver also issued a policy statement directing principals to admit the formerly absent students without penalty or comment.[105]

CONCLUSIONS

The boycott that began the first day of school thus came to an end almost three weeks later. During that period MAEC brought together militant, novice, and established activists to achieve its major goal of gaining official recognition of minority group status in local school matters, especially desegregation. This was accomplished by resorting to boycotting the public schools and establishing huelga schools.

Huelga school development was extremely time-consuming, but determination on the part of MAEC eventually led to the location of over twenty schools, the selection of instructors, and the enrollment of several thousand students. Although instruction was uneven, those in charge of the huelga schools taught reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as courses on political awareness, racial identity, and cultural pride.

Boycott activities taxed the abilities of MAEC and the hundreds of individuals responsible for organizing, coordinating, and implementing them. In the first week alone over thirty-five hundred students walked out of the public schools to protest the local district's failure to recognize them as a minority group. During the second week of the boycott MAEC received support from local politicians, especially an African American state legislator and the first Mexican American state representative. The boycott expanded to the secondary grades, and plans were made to include all the schools. The expanding boycott and its increasing support by legislators encouraged the superintendent and later the local school board to officially

recognize Mexican Americans as an identifiable minority group and to meet the diverse demands made by MAEC.

These significant concessions were granted despite the militant actions by MAYO and the Chicano Student Committee at the September 14, 1970, school board meeting. The "mini-riot" almost disrupted the ongoing negotiations between MAEC and the school board. It also momentarily shifted public emphasis from MAEC's demands to the militants' tactics and roused a violent reaction on the part of the community to this incident. The next chapter will explore the dynamics of violent militant involvement in the midst of peaceful negotiations and what this suggested about the limits of radicalism.