

***La Raza Unida Party, A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two-Party Dictatorship.*** By Armando Navarro. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000. xiv + 360 pp. Photographs and index. \$27.95.

Third parties in United States electoral politics have always generated new ideas and in some cases compelled Democrats and Republicans to incorporate new issues into their platforms. Navarro's reference to the Republicans and Democrats as a "two-party dictatorship" expresses a central thesis of the book. Rodolfo Gonzales, a founder of Raza Unida Party (RUP), echoes the position, "the two party system is one animal with two heads eating out of the same trough" (p. 90).

This comprehensive case study of the RUP is prefaced with a lucid synopsis of the impetus for third parties including disenchantment with the dominant parties and lack of representation. Navarro then outlines the overwhelming institutional, constitutional, and legislative constraints on third parties—limited access to media and funding among the many restraints. According to Navarro,

who participated in RUP, before 1970 no other ethnic group had ever formed a third party. Using interviews, participant observation, and content analysis of primary documents, he traces the rise and decline of the RUP in southwestern states, the Midwest and in Utah. I read this book as a social scientist as well as one who, in the 1970s, walked precincts for a RUP candidate.

Each chapter in the body of the book offers a detailed account of the origins, main leaders, and precipitating events leading to the building of RUP in the particular state or region being discussed. Regional differences existed, as did debates between the main RUP leaders. They split around whether RUP leaders should function as political power brokers for Mexicanos or raise people's political consciousness. Navarro's findings confirmed my perception that most RUP candidates and supporters wanted to raise peoples' consciousness and organize around quality of life issues: educational reform, an end to police brutality, and employment discrimination in Mexican communities. In Texas, where RUP enjoyed the greatest success, the RUP brought about Chicano representation in city administration and educational reforms, such as bilingual and bicultural education, hiring of Mexican teachers and administrators, Chicano Studies curriculum, and an end to punishing children for speaking Spanish in schools.

The book presents a useful political history as the party arose within the context of the anti-war movement, the Chicano Movement, and the Civil Rights Movement. It also raises the broader questions pertinent to political organizations and social movements in ethnic communities. What are the possibilities and pitfalls of building political solidarity along nationalist lines? How do class differences and ideological differences fracture unity initially developed around shared concerns about lack of representation and quality of life issues? Navarro generates a long list of external and internal factors leading to the demise of RUP: internal power struggles, personality conflicts, and differences regarding ideology and strategy; however, group solidarity is always tenuous. As any organization or movement grows and evolves, it changes and factions emerge. A lengthier comparative discussion highlighting what made the RUP more successful in Texas, for example, than in California would have strengthened the analysis.

Finally, similar to most accounts of electoral politics, this is a story featuring male leadership and women as the "backbone of the partido" (p. 268). As one woman stated, "Women would do most of the work and men would take all the credit" (p. 199). Of course, a gendered account of RUP would serve a different purpose and employ a different conceptual framework. Overall, the book is a significant contribution to the history of the Chicano experience in the United States.

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