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THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF CHICANO NATIONALISM,
CLASS AND COMMUNITY IN THE MAKING
OF AZTLAN: 1800-1920

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To ascertain origins is a difficult process. In considering the social origins of Chicano nationalism, the difficulty is compounded by the unique circumstances surrounding its development. Although Chicano nationalism appears to be most conspicuous by its absence during the nineteenth century, it is significant to view both the forces working for and against it during this period in order to understand the background for effective Chicano nationalism today. Consideration of Chicano nationalism must begin with the observation that it is an on-going phenomenon. It is a process which began with the first permanent settlement in the rugged northern marches of New Spain. Over time, it was forged in the common struggle against outsiders and in the attending growth of a collective sense of pride and identity among social groups, or classes, which made up the community.

It is against this backdrop that Chicano nationalism must be understood. The major focus of this exploratory essay is to establish a framework for further examination of the social origins of Chicano nationalism. The primary investigative tools, class and community, as developed here are but a fragment of an interrelated and complex set of concepts. By suggesting new lines of research, this initial inquiry may generate further insights which can be developed into working hypotheses that can undergo more thorough investigation.

Consideration of two variables, class and community, allows the historian to place the development of commonly held Chicano

attitudes and values in their proper perspective. They pose the key question of what Chicano group holds the attitudes or values, what attitudes or values are held, and how the possession of these attitudes or values affects the relationship among social groups within the Chicano community. Before going on to further investigate this hypothesis, a suitable working definition of nationalism must be established.

ON EUROPEAN AND THIRD WORLD NATIONALISM

The relevance of nationalism in any discussion is dependent upon the particular definition given it by the historian. A brief overview of the European experience and a short critique of one of the more sophisticated third world theories, by Anthony D. Smith, will be helpful in providing a comparative framework for assessing the utility value of nationalism and developing a model applicable to Chicano history.

What some writers call the "core doctrine of nationalism" grew out of the forces unleashed by eighteenth century rational thought and the Industrial Revolution. In this sense, nationalism was based on the principle that men naturally grouped themselves into nations in order to optimize their potential as producers and consumers. According to this theory, each nation had its own peculiar character, or General Will, which was expressed through the instruments of the State. Collective loyalty to this entity overshadowed all other loyalties; the fundamental prerequisite for global harmony and commerce, was the strengthening of the nation-state under the nationalist motto: liberty, equality, fraternity. Viewed uncritically, the notions of liberty, equality and fraternity, appear to be highly abstract and philosophical principles. When unwittingly separated from their social and economic nexus, they resemble disembodied intellectual metaphors. Linked to the social groups which give them birth, however, they become sound and practical alternatives to the problems facing a society undergoing rapid change.

By tracing these notions back to the formation of new commercially minded groups among the landed upper classes, town dwellers, and peasantry caught up in the changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution, an insight into the social origins of nationalism is achieved. As the market potential for agricultural and manufactured commodities expanded with the growth of the population and cities, these formative groups sought to minimize internal restrictions on commerce and industry, and to overcome regional and class conflicts by embracing the cohesive and shared values of liberty, equality, fraternity.

For the industrializing bourgeoisie and commercially oriented landed upper class, the primary concern, however, was liberty--political and economic freedom from the feudal restrictions of the *Ancien Régime*. For the hard-pressed peasant and urban proletariat, on the other hand, the first consideration was not

liberty but equality supported by economic rights. This principle was predicated on the thesis that political forms of liberty were meaningless and useless to men who were starving.

Liberty and equality, although shared by all to some degree, were distinct expressions of two antithetical social groups within the national community. The cohesive function of fraternity temporarily worked to resolve this dilemma by stressing the unifying values of a common culture and homeland. It was not until the late nineteenth century, subsequent to the demographic expansion of the working classes which threatened to undermine the hegemony of the middle classes, that bourgeois nationalism began to falter. Working classes took up the banners of international socialism and the alarmed middle and upper classes took up the banners of national socialism--a merging of fascism and "integral" nationalism producing a nationalism movement seeking to turn back the clock and restructure society along authoritarian, corporativist, and totalitarian lines.

Turning from a discussion of the European experience to an examination of third world nationalism, Anthony D. Smith has tentatively suggested a model based on diffusion to underdeveloped countries of western scientific and technological knowledge. This finds nationalism's origins in the displacement and uprooting of key interest groups who experience the shock of status loss and cultural alienation due to the process of westernization.

The intelligentsia, a cross-class group in contact with western ideas begin the process. Progressive ideas are diffused to the intelligentsia from the outside. Because they are among the first to perceive their current situation through a new perspective, Smith argues that they tend to become the vanguard of nationalism and modernization among their people. They develop conflicting relationships toward the West: they resent foreign dominance yet they admire western institutions, values, spirit, and benefits. A crisis grows out of conflicting traditional and progressive sources of authority, and in an attempt to resolve this dilemma, the intelligentsia is faced with three alternatives: (1) denial of the new values; (2) assimilation of the new values and thus, integration into the common system, i.e., acceptance of "world citizenship"; or (3) synthesis of the new value system with traditional attitudes and beliefs.

Smith sees nationalists adopting the third alternative and attacking both traditional and modern values alike in an attempt to provide a unifying theme to the disintegrating strains of modernization. Nationalism, through the mechanism of communication and empathy provides the ideological framework for mobilizing all sectors of society without forfeiting the group's unique cultural and historical heritage.

Limited to a discussion of nationalism as ideology, this concept excludes consideration of commonly held attitudes and values and their relationship to the social classes which hold them. Smith consigns these subjective elements to the concept of national sentiment. National sentiment, from this point of view, does not necessarily indicate the existence of nationalism. In considering the social origins of Chicano nationalism Smith's hypothesis can be misleading.

An analysis restricting nationalism to an ideological movement initiated and led by an elite group of westernized intellectuals has a low utility value in assessing the social problem of Chicano nationalism. Any serious evaluation of the social origins of Chicano nationalism must begin by assessing the relationship between attitudes and social classes in the community. Students and the intelligentsia do not constitute a social class. Moreover, the premise of diffusion raises more questions than it answers. A more fruitful avenue for analysis can be found in considering the social function of Chicano nationalism.

THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF NATIONALISM

Perhaps the most useful definitions of nationalism have been developed by K. H. Silvert and Karl Deutsch. Silvert has viewed nationalism as a social value, a set of common attitudes and values, shared to a certain degree by all members of the community. Deutsch has carried this line of inquiry even further. According to his definition, nationalism "essentially consists in wide complementarity of social communication. It consists in the ability to communicate more effectively and over a wider range of subjects with members of one large group than with outsiders." These two viewpoints are useful because they suggest the social function of nationalism. As shared attitudes and values, nationalism is not restricted to ideology and movements; it becomes a cohesive social force working to protect the community from outside threats and to resolve intergroup strife without completely dissolving class conflict.

A theory of nationalism must account for the unique circumstances surrounding the development of Chicano nationalism. From a preliminary review of the general literature on Chicano history, nationalism as a social value appears to have the greatest potential for meeting this prerequisite. Utilizing this definition, some of the basic elements of Chicano nationalism, the way in which nationalist attitudes are produced, can be distinguished.

To begin with, Chicano nationalism is not an aggressive or expansive force but has as its rationale the promotion of social cohesion and unity among members of the community; it is not an all exclusive end-in-itself. Thus, other values and interests,

such as regional, religious, family, class, are not terminated but continue to function within a nationalist framework.

Chicano attitudes have also been produced by the biological fusion of originally antagonistic groups--indio, mestizo, mulatto. Mestizaje has tended to create pride in a common ethnic background. Also, innovations in transportation, which have helped to break down regional barriers to communication, and the development of mass communications media, have stimulated the rise of nationalism. Continuing immigration, internal and external, between the Mexican Republic and Aztlán has been a significant element in reinforcing Chicano culture and quickening the growth of a sense of national community.

Chicano nationalism has also been characterized by conflict. From its inception, the community has struggled against depredations by hostile nomads, control by Mexican centralists, and pressure by Anglo expansionists. Since 1848, Chicanos have constituted an oppressed national minority without direct access to the instruments of power. Any effective nationalist appeal from Chicano cultural heroes, or social bandits, as well as any anti-social act, organized or spontaneous, which sought to express common Chicano goals, has been repressed, termed a criminal act, and stripped of nationalist meaning by Anglo police, judiciary, and mass media.

Through decades of collective struggle, the commonly held principles of self-determination, economic development and cultural autonomy have emerged as significant Chicano nationalist values. The social function of Chicano nationalism, raises the questions as to which group or class holds these principles and how their possession affects class relationships within the Chicano community. Variants of Chicano nationalism develop according to the stress different groups place on these shared concepts.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

In order to assess the central hypothesis of this paper, the formation of nationalist attitudes among classes in the Chicano community, three interrelated factors must be considered: (1) the regional economy, (2) the nature of the landed upper class, and (3) the work force and small landed class.

(1) In the process of production, men work not only upon raw materials and the instruments of labor, e.g., land or machines, but also upon one another. In order to produce, they enter into social relations with one another and only within these relations does the production of wealth take place. Changes in the social relations of production bring about changes in the distribution of wealth and, subsequently, in the orientation of human attitudes and values. Ownership of land is central to this process; land ownership is equated with power and prestige. With control of the land goes control

of whatever is on it, whether people, animals, or commodities. Whatever wealth is extracted by the workforce goes to those who own the land.

An important consideration in the development of regional economies, is whether or not a landed upper class has turned from subsistence production to commercial production for the market, and the form that this commercialization has taken in each region. If the transition to production for the market is made under a repressive system of labor, the landed upper class is likely to need a state with a powerful repressive apparatus and thus one which imposes a whole climate of political and social conditions unfavorable to human freedom. The brutalizing consequences of this relationship is especially severe in those economies where the workers belong to a different nation.

(2) The second factor, concerning the composition and commercial inclinations of a landed upper class, is important in determining the social origins of nationalism. Four variables must be considered here. (a) The first is the response of the landed upper class to the requirements of production for the market. It may be weak or strong depending on the market and the availability of transportation facilities. The needs of the local towns provide the first markets. With the development of new innovations in sea and surface transportation, the stronger demands of the world market come to bear.

(b) Relations with the town dwellers is the second variable. The strength or weakness of a town bourgeoisie is decisive. A coalition between landed and urban elites can play an important role in quickening or repressing the growth of nationalist attitudes. This possibility becomes more apparent when the last two variables are considered. These are (c) the relationships between the landed upper class and the government, and (d) relationships of the landed upper class with the small landowning class and the rural and urban work force. In the turn to commercial production, the landed upper class may devise a new social arrangement to squeeze the economic surplus out of the lower sectors. As pointed out above, this system can become part of an institutional complex of repression leading to the need for political maintenance and police methods to maintain stability.

(3) The third and final factor in considering the formation of Chicano nationalist attitudes, the small landed and rural/urban working classes, can be examined by taking a look at three variables which have a direct impact on the growth of nationalist attitudes. These are (a) the character of the links between the landed upper classes and the lower sectors; (b) property and class divisions within the lower sectors; and (c) the degree of solidarity and cohesiveness among them.

The first variable has already been touched on and needs little further discussion. The second and third are inter-related and provide an insight into the growth of nationalist

attitudes. For example, in the late nineteenth century, in Nuevo Méjico, the means by which a vigorous but small landed class struggled to free itself from the grip of a repressive landed upper class had ramifications far beyond the immediate problem at hand. These struggles coincided with the interests of Chicano urban workers who were undergoing rapid changes brought on by the economic affects of the encroaching Anglo community and their railroads. At a crucial point in time, the interests of the lower sectors came together to provide a degree of solidarity and cohesion which helped to promote the growth of Chicano nationalism.

SUMMARY

In assessing the social origins of Chicano nationalism, this exploratory essay has suggested an approach utilizing two interrelated hypotheses. The first is predicated on the social function of nationalism. General information substantiated by numerous historians and scholars will be examined to determine the validity of nationalism as a social value which becomes a cohesive force to protect the Chicano community from outside threats, and to resolve intergroup strife without completely dissolving class conflict. The key question raised here is that of which Chicano class holds the attitudes or values, what attitudes or values are held, and how their possession affects the relationship among social groups and classes within the Chicano community.

The second hypothesis will lend support to the first by providing a means for ascertaining the actual changes in the regional economy and in the social relations of production. By methodically examining the relationship between the landed upper classes and the lower sectors, a fruitful and useful investigation can be made into the social origins of Chicano nationalism.