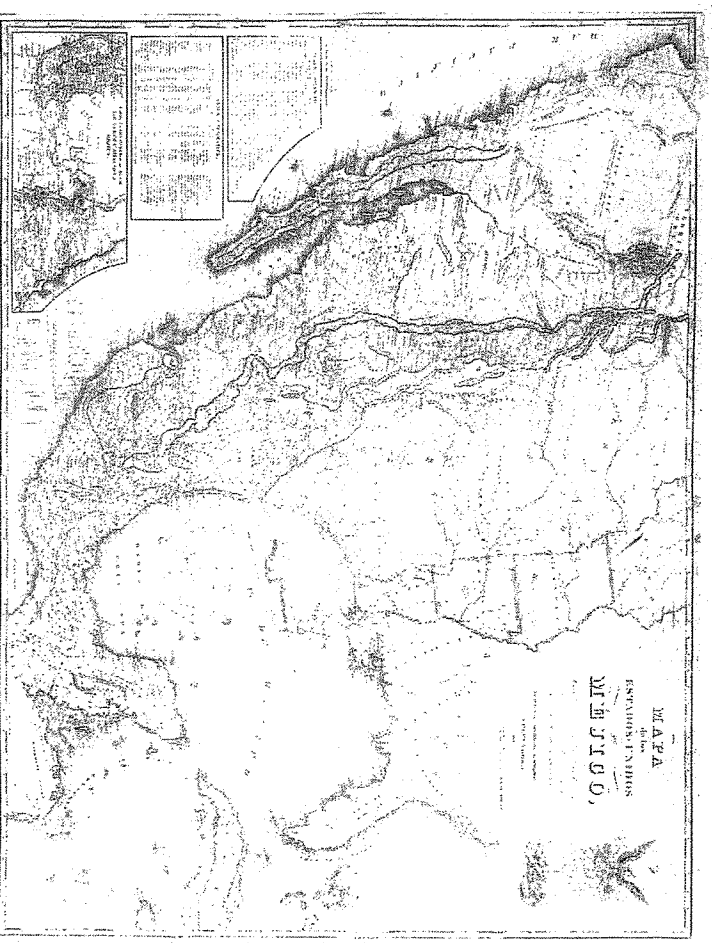


Stolen At Gunpoint:



Interview with J. Sakai On the Chicano/Mexicano Question

Written by Ernesto Aguilar
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Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist Movement – Denver

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*We see therefore that, if imperialist domination has
the vital need to practice cultural oppression,
national liberation is necessarily an act of culture.*

-Amilcar Cabral

(The text here is from an interview originally from the Anarchist People of Color site at www.illegalvoices.org. It has been formatted into pamphlet form by the Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist Movement – Denver in 2007. All text from the interview below, except noted, is from the website in its entirety. The graphics have been added by RAIM-D).

Interview with the author of Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat, covering Chicano Mexicano liberation, the Southwest and settlerism, for the Latino-culture program Sexto Sol. The show originates from KPFT in Houston, Texas. The collective assessment of Sakai and Aguilar was that the interview was 'ok'; part of the challenge is making larger revolutionary concepts accessible to a possibly uninitiated radio audience. Please read on with this in mind.

J. Sakai wrote a book in the 1980s called Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat. In it, Sakai takes apart U.S. history, examining the development of the U.S., the white working class and oppressed nationalities, especially Mexicanos, Africans, Native nations and Asians. He tears down popular lies about history, and posts fresh perspectives for revolutionaries of color.

Ernesto Aguilar conducted this interview on June 17, 2003.

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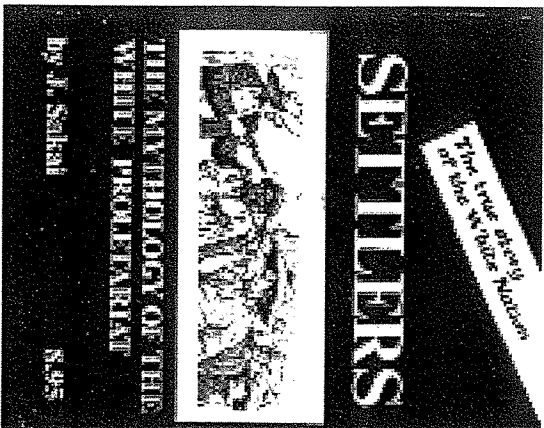
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EA: Can you give people an idea of some of the things you're up to?

JS: Well, along with some other comrades, I've been working on trying to understand the popular wave of far right-wing politics and fascism in the world, because, to us, that's the new threatening phenomenon happening. Not just in Europe, but here, in India, etc. You've always got to watch the new semi trailer coming in your rear view mirror, threatening to drive you off the road.

Please contact apoc@illegalvoices.org for permission to reprint.

Settlers can be obtained from the Crossroad Support Network, c/o Spear and Shield Publications, 5206 S. Harper, Chicago, IL 60615. The Sexto Sol radio show can be contacted via KPFT, 419 Lovett Blvd., Houston, TX 77006.



In many ways J. Sakai's *Settlers* was a groundbreaking book for that sliver of the North American left that one may term "revolutionary". People from all strains of the radical left took notice of its analysis. It was promoted by the Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, the Maoist International Movement and various radical feminist, anti-imperialist and anti-racist organizations. The book is still being debated, interpreted, and re-interpreted today.

<http://www.kersplebedeb.com/settlers.html>

Ernesto Aguilar: In the early eighties you wrote "Settlers: Mythology of the White Proletariat," a book that took a deep historical look at the role of white workers in lives and histories of oppressed people. Can you break down for listeners what inspired you to write *Settlers* and the ideas you put forward in it?

J. Sakai: Well, I wrote it because at that time -- and we're talking about the mid-'70s when I started working on it -- it seemed to me that every time there was a struggle or an outbreak of something, or an act of injustice happened, racism, there were always more and more calls to study people of color. More books piling up about us, we're getting funded to do things, but actually, we're not the problem. The problem is white people. So I said 'what about them?'

The other thing, of course, is, at the time, I was working in an auto parts plant. As a revolutionary, I had been taught all this stuff about class unity and how white workers and workers of color were going to unite. Except in real life I didn't actually see that. What I saw was there were some good guys who were white, to be sure, but basically the white guys were pretty reactionary and they were always selling us out. So I was trying to figure out where did racism in the white working class begin? Is there a point when they started selling out or got misled or something?

EA: And where did that lead you?

JS: That led me all the way back to Plymouth Rock! I'm not a historian, or wasn't then. I started reading and figured 'maybe it happened in the 1930s, before we were born.' Or 'maybe it was the 1920s,' going back and back. It was like treading water. I never found ground.

I figured out that actually there wasn't any time when the white working class wasn't white supremacist and racist and essentially pro-empire. Yet I couldn't figure, 'how did this happen?'

That's when this whole idea came to me, which isn't my idea. But at the time I knew a lot of African revolutionaries in exile from Zimbabwe and South Africa, whose people were waging guerilla wars against the colonial powers. They were always talking about white people, but they didn't really mean race. They kept using the term 'settlers' and they kept talking about 'settler colonialism.' Then I ran into some Palestinians and they talked about the Israelis that way. It was 'settler colonialism,' i.e. that European populations had been imported to these countries to act as the agents for capitalism and for the ruling classes. And at that point, of course, the light bulb went on over my head and I said, 'my god, that describes America.' That's the central idea in Settlers -- that the U.S. really isn't a society in which there's different races and we're trying to get along. That may be true on the surface, but, in its actual history, it's an empire of imported European settlers who always were given special privileges to be the occupation army over all the rest of us.

I can't say that made my book popular, but it certainly raised a lot of controversy at the time.

EA: Do you think some of the historical points you brought out were the most important points of the book? Especially when you look at revolutionary literature, particularly anti-imperialist literature over the past 30 years, 40 years, 50 years even, you don't see that brought as clearly as it is in Settlers.

JS: In part because it was written at a juncture where we were going through all these intense struggles, in the '60s and '70s, and my feeling and I think a lot of people's feeling was 'we've waited 400 years for the unity, so if it can't come in 400 years, then how long are we supposed to wait? How real is it? Why don't we look at this idea instead of taking it as a given?

I've gotta tell you that, even in integrated stuff, the difference between different people really meant a lot back then. One of the things I tell young people I know who are starting to learn is not to believe what's in the history books and television because a lot of it is not true.

Germany. They got killed. That was the real concentration camp. You weren't really in a concentration camp.' Oh, thanks.

Actually, I would never say I've never met a Japanese American who said what we went through was anything like what the Jews went through under Nazism. Literally never heard anybody even hint that that could be true, because that would be crazy. You'd have to be a nut to think that. But it doesn't mean what we went through wasn't real. It doesn't mean that there weren't terrible human losses out of it. It doesn't mean that the reparations program that Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton did isn't just a piece of junk, in my opinion, compared to what happened. And not that it's any actual reparations or justice.

There's this funny thing where middle-class people are always inventing trendy ways to be oppressed, in which their oppression is somehow just as real as yours. I don't think so, but it's not my appointed task in life to argue with them.

I do think, and this is true, that because the interconnection of oppressions is still something we still don't understand real well. Like a lot of people were having this political fight over Oliver Stone's movie JFK? It was supposed to be so radical because it says he was killed in a conspiracy? Well, it's this complete piece of junk. I was sitting in this movie and couldn't believe what I was seeing. The conspirators were this group of gay, stereotyped, mincing kind of queens, who, at one point, even wore dresses. So, gay people were the conspiracy that killed JFK? This is the progressive, radical, threatening movie? Gimme a break. It's nothing but homophobic junk. If you really wanted to have a movie in which you really showed the people who killed JFK, they'd be white guys wearing three-piece suits, sitting in corporate boardrooms and hanging out at the Pentagon. They wouldn't be gay people from Latin America. The fact that that could go over in America without people burning down movie theaters shows how deeply ingrained homophobia in this society is, for real.

Since it originally arose over law school -- not something I would ever myself want to do, nor would I urge any sane person do, I really could care less.



EA: Another question from the audience. To what extent does this analysis depart from traditional Marxism that reduces everything to class? To what extent does it share (or depart from) anti-racist feminism by people like Gloria Anzaldúa, who argue that all systems of oppression are interconnected and cannot be looked at in isolation?

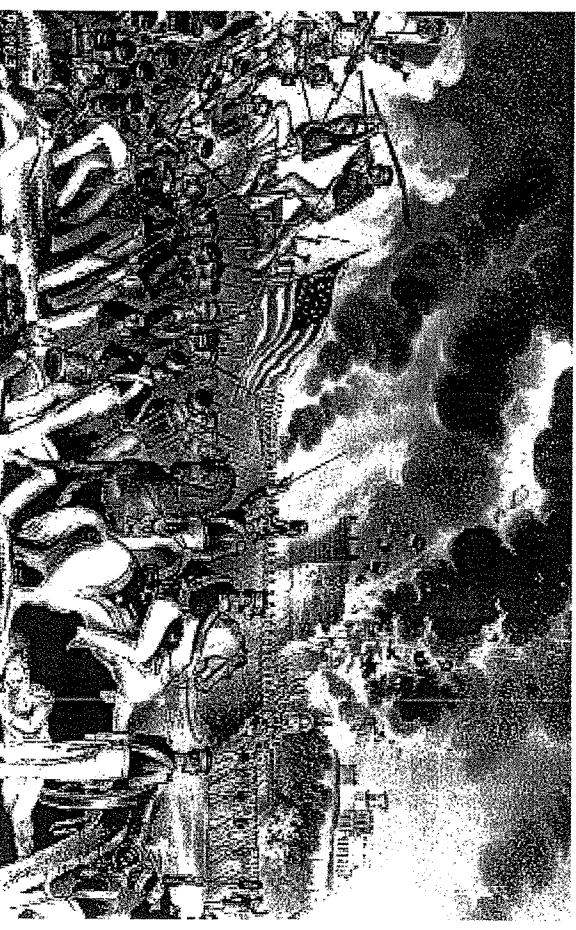
JS: To the last, I really agree. All systems of oppression are connected. The difficulty is in figuring out what these connections are. Part of the problem I have with anti-racist feminism is that a lot of it is very middle class, and it's used to actually muddy the question of oppression, i.e. suddenly everybody's oppression is equal. Well, actually, everybody's oppression ISN'T equal, and I tend to be very concrete about those things myself.

EA: Thank you!

JS: Growing up in a Japanese family, you've been to camp. When I was a little kid, people talked about camp, 'going to camp,' 'this happened at camp.' When I was a kid, I didn't know that -- and this happened in everyone's family -- it was a way of talking about being in the concentration camps without being blunt and saying it, so if you were overheard by the kids. They then won't know what you were talking about. I didn't actually find out about concentration camps until white people started stopping me on the street and giving me various explanations of why I shouldn't blame them for it. When I was a young kid, I can't count the number of people who told me, 'that wasn't a real concentration camp you and your family were in. That was the Jews in

EA: To put this in a context for the gente, what was Mexican land was settled in the early 1800s and resulted in the U.S. seizing over half of Mexico's land in 1848. The places we know as Texas, Califas, Arizona and many of the other states in the Southwest were ancestrally held by Mexicans, and became part of the United States as part of a forcible campaign to take the land. It isn't taught that way in history books. How was the American West settled, and how does that differ from popular conceptions you were just mentioning? I can think of off the top of my head, cowboys and rugged individualism, with buffalo just dancing around and ready for the taking.

JS: The mythology of the West and Southwest is that all this land was empty, and the Europeans came and filled the land because there was hardly anyone there. And, if they were there, they weren't important because it was a few people, they didn't know what they were doing, or were just wandering around in the sun and so on. No idea is given to the fact that these are whole other nations, whole other societies. The settler invasion, powered by immigration from Europe, and the development of capitalist armies, mechanization and industrialization, over the course of centuries, completely overwhelmed all these other societies on the continent.



The United States is a unique nation because it's always been an empire. It's never been just a nation with ordinary people. From its very beginnings, it has been an illegitimate nation in the sense that, in order to become a nation, it had to conquer other people, take their land and enslave them. There literally has been no point in American history where that wasn't true, because that's the basis of what being American is -- which is, of course, the whole problem in the social character of the question of justice

EA: Certainly.

JS: So you see these struggles going on. I remember in the '60s when Reies Tijerina and the Alliance were fighting on the Spanish land grant question in the Southwest. A lot of people had no idea that these grants had ever even existed, or that legal title to much of the land in the Southwest was held, and still is held, by Mexican families and Chicano families. Or that this land was never, ever legally part of the United States in terms of being owned by white business interests. This land was all stolen at gunpoint. Time after time, Reies and his people would hold meetings and produce documents, records from Mexico City, proving all these things. So this whole delusion that the Southwest, for example, was not populated and they just expanded into it, filling the empty space with shopping malls, factories and whatever they did, is just nonsense. This is just conquest. It's no different than Japan invading China in the 1930s, or any other conquest of empire.



(Reies Lopez Tijerina)

EA: Another question from the audience: What are the most common misconceptions about your writing, and how do you address your critics?

JS: Actually, although I've heard a lot of criticism, there hasn't been a lot of writing criticizing it. I always tell people I don't have a problem with criticism, just write down factually where the mistakes are and we can argue about that. At that point, people disappear, because they can't seem to locate those things.

I'd say the biggest misconception, though, is that people think I'm talking about race alone, that everything in America is determined by race alone, and that's not really what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that race in America has been used as an identifier for capitalism to form and control classes, that race is not just a metaphor for class, but an identifier of class in real terms. Everything is upside-down -- things that are racial are really about class. Like Affirmative Action. The real Affirmative Action is the enormous built-in advantages that white middle-class people, particularly from the suburban school systems have, that get them into universities, and getting corporate jobs and networking. Everybody knows this. It's not a big deal. It's just a fact, right? So that's the actual Affirmative Action. These other programs are really to compensate for that, and are just the warped forms that the civil rights victories of the 1960s forced upon the society. I mean, I don't personally view them as significant. The fight over them is, in a funny way, within settler society, within imperialism itself, over how it's going to manage itself.

In the University of Michigan case, where Bush -- supposedly on the advice of Condoleezza Rice, his African American advisor -- weighed in on the side opposing the university's Affirmative Action policy. All of a sudden, the three former Joint Chiefs of Staff, former heads of West Point and Naval Academy, as well as Ford Motors, Microsoft and dozens of other major corporations all filed briefs supporting Affirmative Action. So we're not in this fight actually. This is a pure ruling class fight, having it out with each other. That's what interesting about it -- it's their problem.

migration that is a migration not just geographically, but is changing politics just as surely as when Black people left the South and emigrated to the Northern industrial cities, or when we Asians came to Hawaii and the West Coast in the nineteenth century.

EA: Is that how you see desettlerization working, where you see this migration of peoples? It sounds like how that is working in practice? Would you say that is how desettlerization will happen?

JS: That's the underlying historical thing that can happen, but it isn't going to deal with the whole political struggle, which we're now engaged in, because, of course, the white settler population has essentially had a historic 400-year pact with capitalism, which is that they will get the best of everything. Maybe that won't be a lot, but it will be the best of the little. They will get the best of everything that is available in return for supporting capitalism and the U.S. empire and its conquest over other people, as well as its exploitation. Well, frankly, globalization and the desettlerization of North America is threatening that. How long can you have a population in which more and more people don't actually work? I mean, you say the word 'welfare' in America and everybody's supposed to picture a Black woman in a housing project. But the real welfare is for white middle-class people. You have entire office buildings and cities full of people who don't actually produce anything. They move paper around, they bill people, they do things, but they don't actually produce anything. Everything that is produced is produced somewhere else by somebody else. And the question is how long can that be maintained?

I would say it's breaking down even now. It certainly is in Europe, and that's why there are fascist movements and all this right-wing stuff happening in Europe. Because the social compact is breaking down, and it's going to happen here too. And the political struggle is not going to happen peacefully, in the sense that it's not going to be some gradual social process. The underlying economics are one thing. The political struggle over who gets what out of that and whether there will be a just society or not is a whole 'nother question.

That produces a peculiar dynamic inside America because this is a country where the various citizens, the various parts of the population, their fundamental relationship was formed by war, not by peace. And that still echoes into our lives today.

EA: One of the important things about Reies Tijerina's work around land grants, was that a lot of the grants and treaties were violated. Not that it's much of a revolutionary concept to a student of history to see that the United States violates land grants and treaties. But it exposed to a lot of young Chicanos and Chicanas that the U.S. doesn't have a good track record at all. I know we're getting into topics of settler colonialism and its implications. Just so we're clear, how does settlerism differ from racism and white supremacy?

JS: That's a good question. Certainly racism is a phenomenon that's worldwide; you have it in Japan and France and Russia and so forth. But what's different here, and in countries like Canada, Israel, South Africa and other places, is that the European population is not indigenous. The European population actually was imported as part of the process of colonization, to be an army of occupation over the conquered territories and peoples. And that's formed the essential character of the United States as a settler country, so that the question isn't just racism. The question is national divisions between people. For example, the question of self-determination for all colonized peoples always is at the heart of political matters.

During the '60s, there was a lot of revolutionary nationalism. People talked about liberating Aztlan, the whole Southwest. Black revolutionary nationalists talked about liberating a Black nation in the historically Black-majority South, five states, the Black Belt. And, of course, Indian activists talked about their Native lands.

A lot of people didn't understand what this was about, and viewed this almost as legal questions of 'are you entitled to this territory or that territory.' But this isn't a legal question, but a question of self-determination.

The essence of decolonization is really simple: the oppressor can't decide for the oppressed. In America, that means the white majority has no right to decide for the oppressed. How could that ever be just? It's true they could have the majority of votes -- under their system -- but I think only Mexican people, indigenous people, Chicanos, various Native American people have the right to decide the destiny of the Southwest, because that's theirs. I don't think white people have any vote in it at all. Not because I think there is something wrong with them as a race, but frankly the oppressors have no vote in deciding what the oppressed do with their society and their lives. That's the simplest kind of understanding of decolonization one can have, but it's essential. The revolutionary nationalism that a lot of people in '60s talked about gets confused when people talk about it today, but it's really all about self-determination for oppressed people.

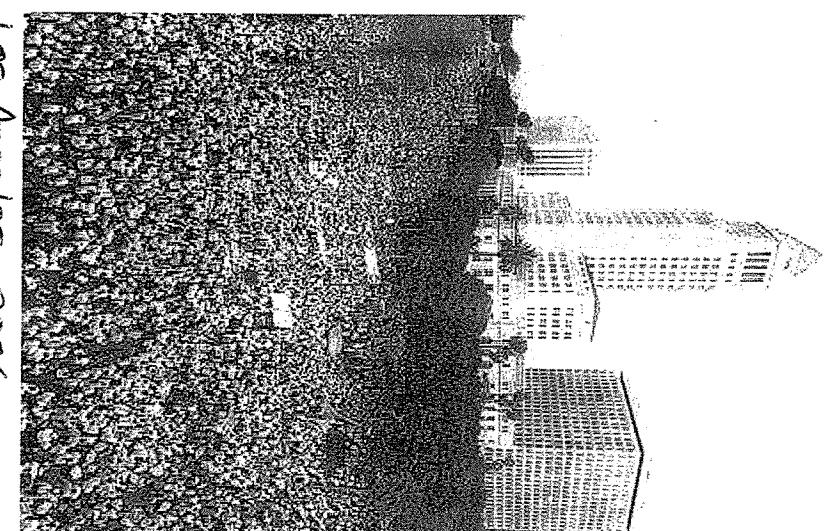
EA: I think it is critical to see that consciousness about Aztlan and nationalism is clear. Particularly as it relates to Raza, one of the criticisms I have heard from white theorists is this: although Chicanos identify as opposing the miseducation and genocide unleashed by the colonizing society, our identification with historical or cultural icons such as the Aztec warriors is no better. You've analyzed the counterinsurgencies directed at oppressed people. Is this kind of ideological warfare common, and how should young Chicanos, in your view, look at this criticism?

JS: Well, all I can say is this. As an Asian guy, Bruce Lee was an enormous cultural divide to us, because, before Bruce Lee, we had no role models. I guess it sounds funny to people today. We had no images. We weren't on TV or movies. We just weren't there. Although we were the cooks in the Westerns, where there were almost no Mexicans because I guess they'd been killed. And the Indians were being killed, but there'd always be one Chinese guy who'd be cooking because the goddamned cowboys couldn't cook for themselves, I guess. We had no image of ourselves that was strong.

Bruce Lee was fantastic, in terms of that. It just made an incredible difference, even though there was nothing radical about his ideas, per se, but culturally it doesn't work like that. A lot of the political

And they're not nationalistic in any narrow sense about it. They talk about the fact that, 'yeah, Mexican guys live here.' One guy knows a guy who married a Polish woman, who immigrated from Poland, and he thinks that's great. But to them, America doesn't belong to the people who call themselves Americans. That's where they differ from Republicans and George Bush. They're part of an actual reversal of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that's going on, only it's happening in a very postmodern way. It isn't simply reversal in terms of the Southwest. Clearly the whole character of the Southwest is changing year by year.

I'm in the Midwest, and when the Mexican Consulate said it was going to issue the ID cards so that people could get bank accounts and everything else, we literally had a traffic jam. There were 10,000 people lined up on the main business street. Completely bizarre. And

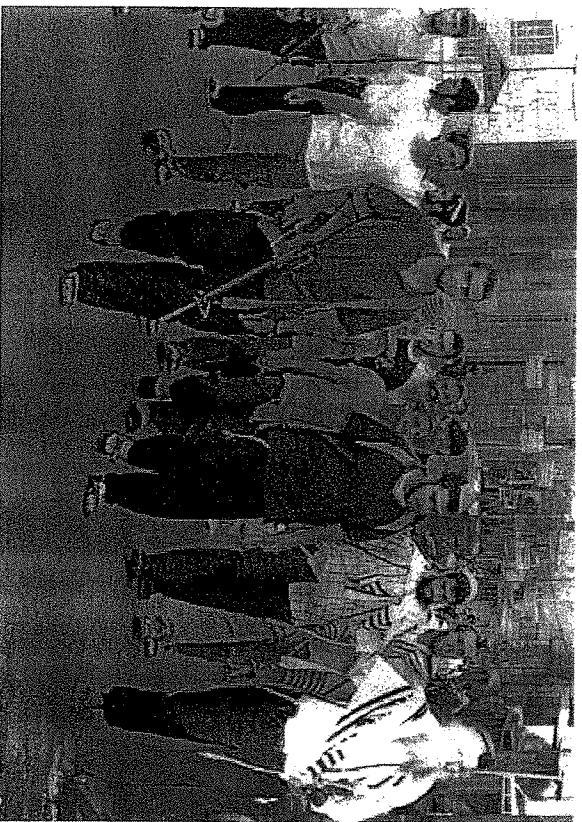


all the right-wingers are having fits! They're writing letters to the newspaper saying, 'this Mexican ID card is as good as an American birth certificate. How could you let this happen?' But the logic of modern globalized life is that they have to. The banks want bank accounts with this money in it, so they want these people to have consular IDs, which aren't American in any way whatsoever. You can just see, year by year, the whole shift starting to happen socially, culturally. That is has to happen in a political sense, of course, and it hasn't yet. But you certainly can see the underlying

Los Angeles, 2006

But it's interesting when you talk to them about America. They don't believe in the United States. At all. What they think is that the United States and Mexico are one country. To them it isn't just Aztlan. It isn't just the Southwest. It's that, there's Mexico, which is, to them, a special place, a really good place. Too poor, but a good place. As they say, 'it has everything but money.' And then there's America. Lots of different people live there. They think that's great, and just how it should be.

But, they've noticed this funny thing. And I don't want to insult anybody, but the way they look at it, Americans don't like to work. We're in the suburbs, and there are Mexicans all over the place, of course. All the landscaping, porters, guys unloading trucks, people laying masonry for the patios, all the workers are Mexican. So their view is they don't quite understand America, but they've figured out one thing: real Americans aren't into working. They don't understand it, but ok, fine by them. To them, there's this huge land, which frankly needs them, because they're the people who are going to do the work. They actually don't believe in a separate United States in any sense of the word -- immigration laws, borders. They think that's nonsense. It isn't just because of the legal history, but really, to them, it's their country as much as it is anyone else's.

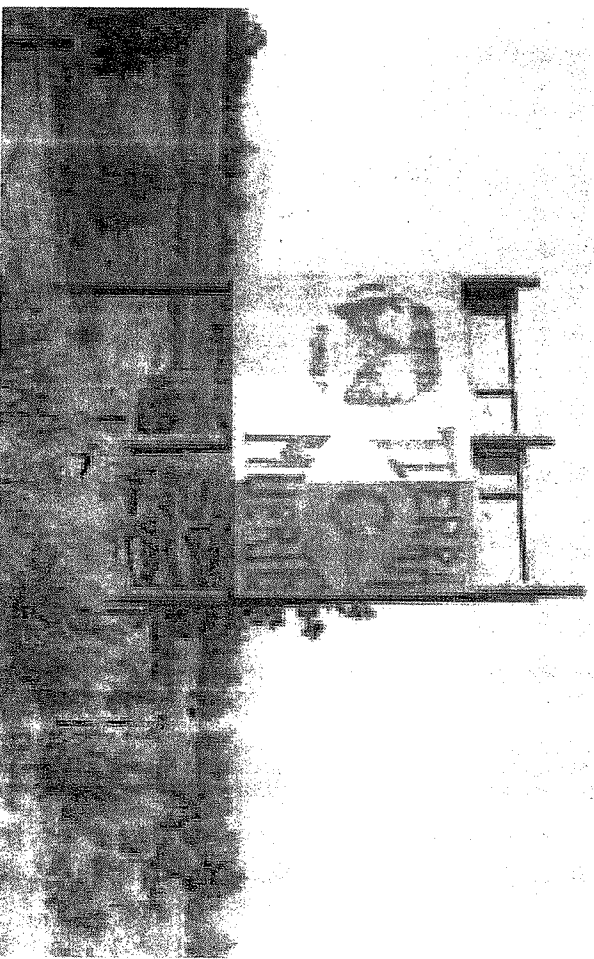


correctness theory about who you should identify with or not is pretty artificial, and a lot of it is worse than artificial.

This is a long explanation, but if you read Occupied America by Rudolfo Acuna--

EA: Great book!

JS: Great book. It's heavy. Incredibly detailed. Rich. Fantastic. He talks about Reies Tijerina, and he mentions in a line, "In May and June 1968, Tijerina participated in the Poor People's Campaign. There he proved to be an independent leader, threatening to pull the Chicano contingent out unless Black organizers did not treat them better." That's only one sentence. But to somebody who was there, for a lot of us who were there, Reies Tijerina was like a lightning strike upon us. It was just tremendous; meeting him and watching him and the other people from the Alliance, although I think at that time they were calling themselves the Confederation of Free City States.



EA: Jose Angel Gutierrez, one of the founders of La Raza Unida Party, calls Reies "the Chicano Malcolm X" for the way he approached his politics and the way he was out front about it.

JS: He was an incredibly strong guy. I heard there's been criticism of him later because he got more conservative or tactical, but back then, it wasn't just that he'd led his men and women to occupy Kit Carson National Park, took over land and arrested sheriff's deputies and things like that. Their illegal acts are tremendously just. It's just wonderful! And this is the kind of thing you don't get out of these history books.

We're talking around 1968, and those of us who had been through the civil rights movement that had brought us into politics. A lot of us were pretty cynical and pretty disillusioned. Things had changed. There was a lot of money to be made in the civil rights movement if you wanted to sell out, cater to various interests -- political interests and businesses and such. A lot of corruption was starting to take place at the top. Lots of bureaucracy. The Poor People's Campaign is what got Martin Luther King killed because he got out of the straight civil rights thing and said 'we need to unite all the poor people in America, and I'm calling on everyone to come to Washington, D.C. and we're just going to take over the D.C. Mall. We're going to pitch tents and live there until our demands are met. We want an end to the Vietnam War, we want all these things.'

King had always very consciously had a policy, which he was public about. He fought local white Southern racists. He did not fight the federal government. He kept saying he wouldn't fight the federal government. This is when he decided he had to fight the federal government, and he was proposing that all poor people unite in one movement against the government. In my opinion, that's why they killed him. That was too much. He was supposed to be the safe alternative to Malcolm X, but he was turning radical himself.

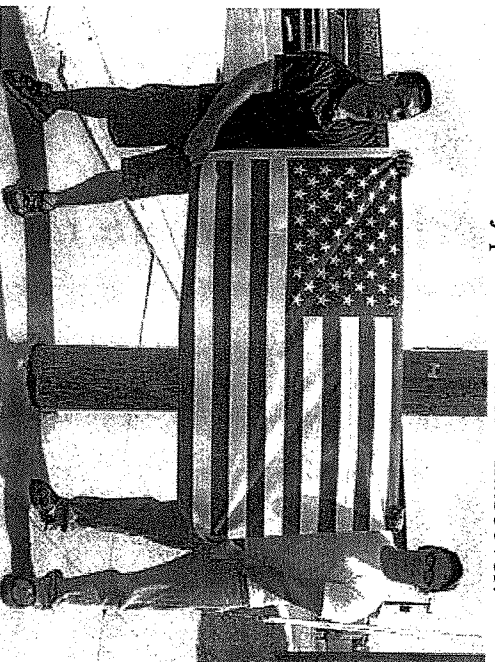
So even though he'd been assassinated during the preparations, his group went ahead and held a Poor Peoples Convention. Just imagine a sea of tents taking over the Mall in Washington, which, with the rain and everything else over the summer, was a sea of mud. Thousands of

French army occupying it. Finally they all had to leave. Yeah, Algeria has a lot of problems, but it IS Algerian.

I don't think that's going to happen here, obviously, because there's no place for that kind of migration to happen. But desettlerization isn't happening that way. Like in Israel, the problem is not that Jewish people live in Palestine. The problem is there are special laws, unjust laws, that deny land to Palestinians who live there while, of course, giving land to Zionists, even though they may have no connection whatsoever to Palestine that anybody can prove, except they say they follow the Jewish religion. They come from Russia, they come from Brooklyn, they come from wherever.

People look at America and they don't see how America could be desettlerized, but it's being desettlerized right now.

It's funny. The place where I work, the other guys who work there are Mexican. They're not Chicano. Mexican. First-generation. This is not their home -- their home is back in Mexico. Very conservative family people in a social way. More conservative than I am, for sure. They're exactly the kind of Mexican that the Republican Party and Bush are aiming at as the ideal minority. In fact, some of the guys voted for Bush, because he sounded like a better leader or something. So they're not radical in any political sense whatsoever.



you to do. So we're going to get you to do this or we're going to shoot you, one or the other.' This is their standard approach, as we can see in Afghanistan and Iraq.

EA: I was about to mention that!

JS: They're bringing democracy to Iraq, although they don't seem to be doing a good job to it right now.

EA: Lots of mounting resistance.

JS: The thing is, they're invading the whole world essentially, and it's true they can conquer any of it they want to, but that doesn't mean people are going to like them, or put up with it, or not resist. Of course people are going to resist, from all kinds of points of view. I don't think this is ever going to end until they leave. That's actually what I think. And I think the same thing is true for America. I don't think there is any solution to any of these problems until America is desettlerized.

EA: One question from a listener is 'how do we 'de-settlerize' a country like the U.S. or Israel? Especially in a place like the U.S. where many righteous national liberation movements, such as the Black/New Afrikan and the Chicano movements especially, overlap and may contradict Native land claims and national liberation?'

JS: I don't think any of us are going to have problems solving our relations with each other as long as we get the U.S. empire and capitalist rip-offs out of the way. There is plenty of land in America. Everyone could live here who lives here, quite well, with a lot of autonomy, lot of justice, lot of room for expression and development. But the obstacle isn't each other, in that sense.

As for desettlerization, it's already happening, because settlerism is a phenomenon of the past, really. All over the world, settler societies, as we saw in Africa, are going out of business. In Algeria, which was officially a province of France until the 1950s revolution, you had a million French settlers living there, and virtually the whole of the

people were living there and trampling there. And, frankly, conditions were miserable -- there was no food. I remember a lot of mornings for adults, there was no food, because the inside civil rights bureaucracy had stolen all the money that had been donated for food. Some of the kids would get little boxes of dry cereal, no milk and no fruit. So when we met Reies and he heard about this, he just invited us all, 'bring your kids, come to our place for lunch. He had taken his people out, totally out of the mud. He said he don't have to live like this to make our point. He demanded that they find someplace better, and, in fact, they found a private school that was unoccupied during the summer, and got permission for the Chicanos to use it. So hundreds of Chicanos moved in, fired up the kitchen, just a tremendous place. It was like a carnival, and school. Reies invited us and our kids to come eat lunch. He was an incredible guy.

We were used to these top-down leaders. I don't want to mention any names, but the big leader would appear. He wasn't staying with us, of course. He was staying at a luxury hotel in D.C., and literally, I'm not fooling you, a limousine would pull up, and this guy would get out. This guy would get out and have his overalls, but they were brand-new, starched, just taken out of the bag. Brand-new starched t-shirt. Lead us in a few chants, pop back into his limousine and drive off.

EA: That's messed up!

JS: Y'know, and Tijerina was a one-man leadership type guy, but he interpreted that as meaning, if he wanted everybody to get up for a demonstration at 8, he'd be up at 7. If there wasn't enough food, he'd eat less. And it was just really impressive. Actually one of the things that impressed me about him most is he had this phenomenal memory. You'd talk to him for two minutes. And a week later, you'd meet him. He remembered your name; he'd remember every word you said, because he was really listening to you. The Crusade for Justice people from Denver, Corky Gonzalez' people?

EA: Yeah?

JS: They were really incredible. There were about 400 of them. They were about half-Chicano, half-Black. I could be wrong, but it seemed to me very much Black, and very shoulder-to-shoulder, very tough group of people.

EA: I spoke with Jesus Salvador Trevino, a writer who documented a lot of Corky's work, and the Raza Youth Liberation conferences in Denver, and I think one thing he mentioned as he came to consciousness is key to that. He said as he grew up that it was a given that there were Chicanos and oppressed people who were working lawns, going to jail and such, but something he learned from people involved in the movimiento and talked about history was that they put these things in context. They made sure people understood there is a systemic reason why oppressed people are at lower economic rungs in this society. The reason they're there is not because they're lazy or shiftless or whatever else the education system puts on you. Jesus said Corky brought a lot of these ideas out to young people to understand that oppression does not occur in a vacuum, but is deep and historical, and there's a reason for it.

JS: The other thing is -- and I really remember this of the Chicano movement of the 1960s and '70s -- people really practiced solidarity between oppressed peoples that you hear some people talk about, but sometimes is more lip service than real. When AIM [American Indian Movement] did the takeover at Wounded Knee, and got surrounded by the U.S. Army and then the siege? The largest demonstration in the U.S. was in Denver supporting them. The only large one, and it was the Crusade for Justice, it was mostly Chicano.

When Affirmative Action first started getting attacked in California in the early '80s -- the law school I think it was at Berkeley -- ended the quota for Asian Americans, and the Chicanos offered to give part of their slots to Asians to fight for the principle of representation. And a lot of that spirit has been lost.



This thing that's happening: what used to be militant politics against systemic injustice, against capitalism as a system, has turned into ethnic politics for a lot of people, with the veneer of seeming to be militant, protesting about this and that, but underneath it is an attitude of 'we should just look out for ourselves. We really shouldn't care about anybody but ourselves. And as for everyone, we should say nice things, but potentially they could be an enemy, so we really should only think of us.' I know that Asians are told that by conservative forces in our communities, and certainly Black people are told this, because it's the American way your subvert militant consciousness in people's movements by trying to make them more capitalist.

Jefferson tried to do that with the Indians in the Iroquois Confederacy. He sent them messages saying, 'you should join the United States. You're good people, we want to get together with you, but your laws aren't any good. That's why we need to bring you into our country instead of just leaving you in your country, because your laws don't protect private property. You share everything in common.' And although he didn't say it, of course, he knew in the Iroquois Confederacy that women had tremendous legal powers under their laws and government. You couldn't have a war unless three-quarters of the mothers, women who had borne children, had voted for the war, for example, under their laws. No man could vote for war. This was the indigenous way of a society that Jefferson thought was crazy. 'You really need to join us, have our laws, which protect private property, you can get rich, and you'll like it much better.' Of course, what he really meant was, 'we want to take you over and, if you don't have private property, you can't sell us everything you have, which we want