

Philosophy of MEChA:

Preface

Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (M.E.Ch.A) hereby establishes the following principles based on our knowledge, ideas and opinions to enhance the progress of M.E.Ch.A. In order to have an understanding of M.E.Ch.A., we bring forth this document to guide Mechistas in their principles, values and conduct.

Historical Foundation

The Chicano Movement of the late 1960's helped spark cultural and historical pride in our people. Chicanas/Chicanos demanded to be treated as equals and denounced acculturation and assimilation. Brown pride began to express itself through poetry, literature, art and theatre. The contributions of the Chicano Movement are numerous and continue to be very valuable to our society. Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (M.E.Ch.A.) is a student organization that promotes higher education, cultura, and historia. M.E.Ch.A. was founded on the principles of self-determination for the liberation of our people. We believe that political involvement and education is the avenue for change in our society. In March of 1969, at Denver, Colorado the Crusade for Justice organized the National Chicano Youth Conference that drafted the basic premises for the Chicana/Chicano Movement in El Plan de Aztlán (EPA). A synopsis of El Plan stipulates:

- 1) We are Chicanas and Chicanos of Aztlán reclaiming the land of our birth (Chicana/Chicano Nation);
- 2) Aztlán belongs to indigenous people, who are sovereign and not subject to a foreign culture;
- 3) We are a union of free pueblos forming a bronze (Chicana/Chicano) Nation;
- 4) Chicano nationalism, as the key to mobilization and organization, is the common denominator to bring consensus to the Chicana/Chicano Movement;
- 5) Cultural values strengthen our identity as La Familia de La Raza; and
- 6) EPA, as a basic plan of Chicana/Chicano liberation, sought the formation of an independent national political party that would represent the sentiments of the Chicana/Chicano community.

In April of 1969 over 100 Chicanas/Chicanos came together at UC Santa Barbara to formulate a plan for higher education: El Plan de Santa Barbara. With

this document they were successful in the development of two very important contributions to the Chicano Movement: Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (M.E.Ch.A.) and Chicano Studies. The fundamental principles that led to the founding of Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán are found in El Plan de Santa Barbara (EPSB). The Manifiesto of EPSB sees self-determination for the Chicana/Chicano community as the only acceptable way for our people to gain socio-economic justice. El Plan argues that a strong nationalist identity is a necessary step in building a program of self-determination. Self-determination, in this regard, challenges those involved in principle struggle to respect the rights of all Chicanas and Chicanos.

EPSB stresses that in organizing M.E.Ch.A. every opportunity must be taken to educate Raza. At the same time, El Plan guides Mechistas to preserve Chicana/Chicano culture in this culturally diverse society, both in community and on campus. Thus, a Chicana/Chicano Nation is a necessity defined as an educational, socio-economic, and empowered Chicana/Chicano community. The Manifiesto of EPSB warns us in part: We recognize that without a strategic use of education, an education that places value on what we value, we will not realize our destiny. Chicanos [and Chicanas] recognize the central importance of institutions of higher learning to model progress, in this case, to the development of our community. But, we go further: we believe that higher education must contribute to the formation of a complete man [and woman] who truly values life and freedom. (p.10) EPSB Both El Plan de Aztlán (EPA) and El Plan de Santa Barbara (EPSB) served as the historical foundation for the establishment of a viable Chicana/Chicano Movimiento and are therefore fundamental to the M.E.Ch.A. Philosophy.

M.E.Ch.A.'s Philosophy

The Chicana/Chicano student movement has been plagued by opportunists that have sought to rechannel the energies of our people and divert us from our struggle for self determination. The educational plight of Chicana and Chicano students continues to be ignored by insensitive administrators. Overall, Chicana/Chicano junior high, high school and college pushout rates have risen since 1969, forcing many Chicanas and Chicanos to a life of poverty. These factors along with a growing right wing trend in the nation are combining to work greater hardships on Chicanas and Chicanos. New repressive and racist immigration laws are continuously directed at our Gente. Along with this, the current administration has started the process of dismantling Affirmative Action and Civil Rights protections. Just as Hispanics seeks to deny our indigenous heritage, so does Latino. The terms Hispanic and Latino further ignore our unique socio-economic and historical aspects of our Chicana/Chicano Gente. This cannot be ignored. We cannot coin terms for unity sake when these terms fail to fully represent our diverse communities.

Chicanismo does not seek to use the word "Chicano" as an umbrella term when representing all of "La Familia de La Raza". Rather, Chicanismo seeks to educate our barrios and campos about our history y cultura to further create a movement of self-determination for the Liberation of Aztlán, something that Hispanic and Latino has yet to represent or recognize. These factors have made it necessary for Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán to affirm our philosophy of liberation (i.e. educational, socio-economic, and political empowerment) for our Chicana/Chicano Nation. We, as Mechistas, see the process of Chicanismo as evolutionary.

We recognize that no one is born politically Chicana or Chicano. Chicanismo results from a decision based on a political consciousness for our Raza, to dedicate oneself to building a Chicana/Chicano Nation. Chicanismo is a concept that integrates self-awareness with cultural identity, a necessary step in developing political consciousness. Therefore the term Chicano is grounded in a philosophy, not a nationality. Chicanismo does not exclude anyone, rather it includes those who acknowledge and work toward the betterment of La Raza. Chicanismo involves a personal decision to reject assimilation and work towards the preservation of our cultural heritage.

Recognizing that all people are potential Chicanas and Chicanos, we encourage those interested in developing a total commitment to our movement for self-determination for the people of Aztlán to join Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán. Thus, by all means necessary, We Chicana/Chicano estudiantes or Aztlán, dedicate ourselves to taking our educational destiny into our own hands through the process of spreading Chicanismo, in the spirit of carnalismo. M.E.Ch.A. is committed to ending the cultural tyranny suffered at the hands of institutional and systematic discrimination that holds our Gente captive. We seek an end to oppression and exploitation of the Chicano/Chicana community. As Mechistas, we proclaim that we are the people of Aztlán and that we recognize our indigenous unity with our brothers and sisters of Ixachitzlan (Alaska to Tierra del Fuego). We declare that we are the descendants of El Quinto Sol. Our fundamental drive is to organize and challenge Chicana/Chicano estudiantes to maintain self-respect and dignity to overcome historical prejudices and discrimination against the Chicana and Chicano Gente.

The historic mission of M.E.Ch.A. involves an educational plan of action that builds an educational ladder for the advancement of our people. Recognizing that the strength of our movement is rooted in our barrios, M.E.Ch.A. pledges itself to reach out to the community and schools, to establish new educational opportunities. We also recognize that our M.E.Ch.A. chapters are much stronger when they are rooted in and accountable to the Chicana/Chicano community. Consequently, We, Mechistas commit ourselves to return to our community and contribute to the development of the Chicana/Chicano Nation. The Challenge of the Future Despite growing repression and a lack of progress by our people in

this society, we must be optimistic. As, M.E.Ch.A., we must accept the challenge to combat all forms of oppression, and manifestations as experienced through racism, sexism, and homophobia, both inside and outside of our Movement, in order to better develop a more meaningful educational plan of action (refer to Goals and Objectives). Advocating an educational revolution, we recognize that our bullets are our books and our victories are an increase in Chicana/Chicano graduates committed to our people's progress.

We, as Mechistas must dismantle the co-optation of Raza students from becoming "corporate Hispanics" claiming to be leaders of our community with no understanding of El Pueblo Chicano. Instead, M.E.Ch.A. seeks to train future community leaders to be consciously committed to serve the people of Aztlán. M.E.Ch.A. also supports Chicana and Chicano worker struggles to abolish economic and political exploitation. In the final analysis, we recognize that the destiny of the movement will be determined by each Mechista accepting responsibility for carrying the Movement forward.

Each MEChista's Responsibility

Accepting our responsibility for the Movement requires self-discipline and understanding that our behavior becomes a reflection of M.E.Ch.A. For this reason, we must be consistent in our thinking and our actions. Rationalizing our inconsistency and accountability. Mechistas in leadership roles setting poor examples only betray the Movement. Since we are seeking the freedom of our people, our motivation should be high, recognizing the need to commit ourselves fully for the sake of La Causa. Finally, as Mechistas, we vow to work for the liberation of Aztlán, leading to socio-economic and political justice for our Gente. M.E.Ch.A. then, is more than a name; it is a spirit of unity by comadrisimo/carnalismo, and a resolution to undertake a struggle for liberation! Tierra y Libertad!

M.E.Ch.A. Structure

In the past, the structure of M.E.Ch.A. allowed any individual wanting to organize a chapter on any particular campus the opportunity to do so. This could occur without prior knowledge of the history and philosophical objectives of M.E.Ch.A. Thus, vast numbers of M.E.Ch.A. chapters with dissimilar and contradictory objectives as well as conflicting philosophies. Recognizing the ineffectiveness of this previous M.E.Ch.A. organizational structure and the philosophical polarity that it allowed, we propose that the following structure be adopted which makes every Mechista accountable to its Region, and every Region accountable to the National. Campus M.E.Ch.A. General membership shall consist of any student who accepts, believes, and works for the goals and objectives of M.E.Ch.A. including the liberation of Aztlán. College students shall be limited to six years active membership (excluding high school) as an undergraduate and two years service at the graduate level in a non-voting advisory role. Active membership

will be officially recognized by their campus M.E.Ch.A. Graduates are encouraged to refrain from voting to allow new leadership to develop. When M.E.Ch.A. meetings are being conducted and M.E.Ch.A. business is being discussed, voting shall be limited to active members only.

Affiliation

Each M.E.Ch.A. Chapter shall gain its affiliation through and only through the recognized M.E.Ch.A. Central they geographically fall under. In order to be a M.E.Ch.A. Chapter recognized by the Central, they shall accept and adopt the following responsibilities: 1) Orient all members by discussing and reading historical documents of our movement including El Plan de Santa Barbara, El Plan de Aztlán and the Philosophy of M.E.Ch.A.; 2) Make important aspects of the Chicana/Chicano Movement relevant to Mechistas; and 3) send two representatives to Central and Regional meetings to be recognized as a voting chapter. Central Centrales shall outline and implement plans of action for their particular region. The Centrales shall be divided by counties with isolated campuses going to the nearest active Central. Each campus shall one vote and a meeting shall be official when 50% plus one of the voting membership is present. The Central shall have two standing positions including the External and Internal Directors. Member campuses shall alternate hosting Central meetings with the hosting campus in charge of notifying participating campuses.

Responsibility of the M.E.Ch.A. Central includes: 1) screen, recruit, and educate campuses wishing to form a M.E.Ch.A.; 2) keep a record of all officially chartered M.E.Ch.A.s in their Central; 3) seek fund-raising strategies to fund activities, academic outreach, and a newsletter. Responsibility of the Central Representative includes: 1) one year of M.E.Ch.A. experience (except new chapters); 2) take a written report back to their campus for discussion of Central issues; 3) bring campus M.E.Ch.A. minutes to Central meetings; and 4) vote on Central issues in the manner that their campus has decided. Responsibility of the Internal Director includes: 1) one year of M.E.Ch.A. experience (no exceptions); 2) non-voting status in Central meetings; 3) official spokesperson for the Central; 4) shall set up visits by Central members at new, prospective campuses for membership recruitment into the Central meetings; and 5) head the Central newsletter committee.

Region

The M.E.Ch.A. Region shall consist of all representatives from the M.E.Ch.A. voting campuses. The Region is a logistical planning committee and receives its direction from the voting campuses. Region shall convene once a month. Responsibility of the M.E.Ch.A. Region includes: 1) Screen, recruit, and educate campuses wishing to form a M.E.Ch.A.; 2) Keep a record of all officially chartered M.E.Ch.A.s in their Region; and 3) seek fund-raising strategies to fund activities, academic outreach, and a newsletter. Responsibility of Regional Representatives

includes: 1) Take a written report back to the campus, outlining issues under consideration (i.e., actions, workshops, or speakers); 2) Vote on issues in the manner their campus has decided; 3) Each campus shall have one vote; and 4) A quorum shall be 50% plus one of all Regional Campuses.

Statewide

There will be two Statewide conferences during each year that will focus on one and no more than two major issues at which time a plan of action will be discussed. The purpose is to come out of each conference with a well planned strategy to take action on the imminent issue. Statewide Rules includes: 1) Only M.E.Ch.A. campuses certified by a M.E.Ch.A. Regional process will be allowed to vote; 2) Community people shall be allowed to participate as observers only; 3) Individuals and/or groups with a history of party-building and cadre raiding inside of M.E.Ch.A. are not welcome to attend; 4) All entertainment shall be culturally, educationally, and/or politically oriented; 5) Non-voting individuals attending the conference shall not be allowed to participate in debate or discussion of questions before the assembly; and 6) In a general assembly, there will be one vote per campus and in the workshops, voting shall be done by students, certified by a M.E.Ch.A. Regional Process.

National

A M.E.Ch.A. National Conference shall be held once a year. The purpose of this conference shall be to bring all M.E.Ch.A. chapters together in an effort to form a M.E.Ch.A. National Conference structure that advocates a common M.E.Ch.A. philosophy, works towards unified goals and objectives, and reaffirms the principles of M.E.Ch.A. to consolidate our Movement. At the M.E.Ch.A. National Conference, steps will be taken to establish ties amongst the M.E.Ch.A. chapters throughout Aztlán. As a vibrant and responsive network of activists who will respond as a unit to oppression, racism, sexism and homophobia, we will work in harmony when initiating and carrying our campaigns of liberation for our people.