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Talk by Cesar Chavez with Joan Paulus, Jan. 3, 1970

Question: How is this movement unique for the Chicanos, and what unique effects will it have for them.

It's very dangerous, it's very dangerous, you know to say what I'm going to say because this is putting it in its full context. You see, well, as you can tell, I'm Mexican. And with me I've never had any, any problems and most of the poor people have never had any problems about identity. I mean, we had no choice but to identify with being Mexican, because the moment we thought any other way we were pushed right down there. And also it goes with the degree of the color of your skin, you know; the darker you are the more Mexican you have to be so if you're dark and poor you have to be more Mexican; if you're, you know, if you have a little better job and your skin is lighter you can get away with things. And so I don't think that I ever, I ever, I might have, you know, unconsciously felt estranged from my culture or from my race but I never really did, you know, so there was no big, what's happening now, you know, is no big thing to me, this identity, you know, I've lived with it, it's been my life. Now, I think it's a good thing that it's a good thing that's it's happening. I started organizing in 1948 and I was very young and the only kids in these days were the ones that had problems with the police; well, like us, you know. In these days, just after the 2nd World War, coming out of the great movement among Chicanos that was known as Pachucoes, I don't know whether you've heard of them, and it was no different from the kids today. We had long hair and wore peg pants, you know, and everybody picked on us and we were jailed for wearing them, you know, and we wouldn't speak English and all that. We were drop-outs from school

and most of us were farm workers and most were poor; and so, and then they had the other groups among Chicanos who wanted to be, Italians who wanted to be Spanish, you know, the whole bit. Now, so because so many are identifying now that have a need to identify, I feel great, you know, but it's like the greater the sin that's been committed in the past, the more vocal they are about identifying with la raza, and I'm saying pretty dangerous stuff here but that's the way I look at it. Now, I, you know, sure we like the music and the art and all these things that are going on in the Brown studies now, terrific, but I'd like to go a step further and I'm more concerned about the spirit of people, you know, than I am about the custom (?) things, about the material things, much much more. I would, well, let me see if I can put it this way, I would much rather see, much much rather see people go back to the old days when we were migratory workers. Look, see that little trailer there? That's the trailer we used when we were migratory workers. I brought it from San Jose just so we could someday put it in a museum or something. But anyway, see in those days, we were going down the road and the car was broken and especially if they were Chicanos or anybody, but more especially if they were Chicanos, we wouldn't, we would stop, we'd stop and we'd help them, not only us, this was, this was 30 years ago, people would stop automatically. They wouldn't, it was incumbent upon you to stop, it was part of the tradition, part of the Chicanismo, part of that, you know. So we talk about the art and the music and all that crap, you know, which is O.K. and we forget about the spirit of service, then I don't think we're getting any place, we just aren't, those aren't the important things to me. Now, the other thing is, that also, you know, I have great fears, I don't want it to become a racist thing, I'm very afraid of that. I mean, oh sure we should

eat our tortillas and put on our hats and speak our language and there, ~~should~~ Spanish should be spoken in the schools, but...I don't believe that every gringo's a son-of-a-bitch or that every black man is no good, you know, I can't accept that, so my raza is the human race, and I get criticized by some of the Chicano leaders very much, but you see our movement here, it's the people, you know. Let me give you a very good example. The Chicanos, one of the great mistakes that people make, particularly people from the outside, they tend to think Chicanos are a monolithic group, it isn't. Let me give you some examples, for instance, in 1950 the 1st attempt to organize all the Chicanos throughout the Southwest, the few little organizations that were in existence, I was working then with an organization called the C.S.O., the Community Service Organization, the 1st meaningful group in the history of the state and we went to a place and met with six other groups and we came with no hidden agenda, we just came to participate. Well, the first thing was that the other groups a 5 groups had gotten together a night or two nights before we got there and they had a constitution that stated that you had to be at least 75% Chicano or else you couldn't join, and it blew our minds, you know, and then they had things, ne-to be an officer, you had to be at least 75% Chicano to be an officer, I wonder how in the hell you're going to judge that, and then #2 there couldn't be no more than 10% non-Mexicans, ah and #3 no black people were allowed. We blew our minds, we walked out of that meeting. We had a big fight with them, it lasted about a day and then we took off. I've never been to another one of those meetings since. Now, let me tell you what happens, they're all Chicanos, right? Now of course you have to understand all this bologna is coming about lately

trying to make the Chicanos as one united family, it's not so. Watch. We've got people who are racists; we've got Chicanos who hate Negroes. I can't associate with them. They're Chicanos, in my spirit and the way I feel I just couldn't. To me they're, oh, I don't hate them, but I could never agree with them. We've got Chicanos who are anti-labor and I couldn't agree with them, and we've got those who are pretty, you know, what would be the word for them, they're really right wing in the Chicano movement and I couldn't associate with them. So, see what I mean, so it's not one big, I'm trying to tell people, you know, that to judge a Chicano, there are parallels, the Jewish, and the Irish, and the Italians. You have the Murphy in California and you have the Kennedys. Oh, it's, this is the way, we're all people, you know. But I do, I'm very happy with what's happening, for instance the big revival, it seems, among kids, particularly in school, to come back to the culture. I think it's fine, it's not enough but it's fine. Now, next step's got to be, the most important thing is not that, the most important thing is developing a spirit of service, literally being servants to people and on that I speak, very strongly and very loudly, you know. And, well, I've been criticized because we have gringos here, black people, Filipinos, one Korean, but that's the way I feel, you know. I feel really that our base is the poor people and whether. Now, we have a lot of Anglo volunteers, we, I think most of us in the union, there's still some feeling, but most of us are, we've been able to let people understand that leadership comes in our union not because you're blonde or brown or black or white or in between, it comes if you can do it, if you can do it, we don't care what color it is. I guess you've seen the union. The best kind of

Chicanismo we can have is the kind that reaches out and embraces mankind. And that is basically, that's why a handful of Spaniards conquered our ancestors in Mexico, because you, this is the kind of spirit we have; the Indian blood in us, the kind that wants friendship. And you know, see, we're very very alien to material possessions by tradition. These new things that are happening in this country, wow, we're learning, you know, but, you know, literally we're alien to them, we don't aspire to material possessions. This movement we have among ourselves here, well, these people haven't got a thing to really, they haven't gotten any paychecks now for 52 months and, oh sure, it's a hardship, not really. We have something, we have the spirit, so what else can I say.