

Embajada Cultural Chicana De Aztlán

by Julio Cesar Guerrero

Just before Christmas I received a call from the people at *RADIO CADENA*, a station I co-founded in Yakima, Washington, to remind me they were celebrating 45 years on the air. *KDNA* is only one of my many involvements in my 20 year chapter of developing alternative communications. So, as I turn 81 this week (January 2025) and feel another year roll in, I have to reflect on the seemingly never-ending list of projects I have been part of and wonder how I could have done it better.

Like the two years I spent in the *United Farm Workers Union* developing *Radio Campesina* under Cesar's tutelage where I could have done a series of personal interviews with Brother Chavez, Dolores and other key players in the farm workers' movement to audio-chronicle such an important chapter of our gente's accomplishments, or during *Caravana43*, the *Ayotzinapa* support project that took a group of parents of the forcefully disappeared normalistas from the southern border across

more than 50 cities to the *United Nations* in New York. I should have built a steering committee instead of carrying the coordination of the project on my shoulders, or honoring the memory of my mother Norberta and grandmother Josefa as victims of the Great Depression era repatriation program on the *Los Repatriados* video production, a project that prompted hearings by California Senator Joe Dunn and a subsequent public apology in 2006 to the descendants of the families repatriated.

Sometimes I think retirement is like a state of purgatory where you're supposed to be dead but keep on moving along. Since I became unemployable and forced into retirement almost 15 years ago, I have kept busy volunteering in organizing, advocacy, Labor, immigration, social work and communication projects. One key factor is that since capital and I don't get along (meaning, I've succeeded at being poor after all these years), I consider social capital and good will two of my best partners, if anything, my fortune is to have supportive friends in every region and even abroad which allows me to embark on projects that may touch thousands of lives. By passing, allow me to honor the memory and legacy of said friends and colleagues we lost last year without whom my life would not be even a shadow of what it is now.

Still, at this age I feel very fortunate to keep up and follow through with the projects that cross my path but most important, having the support of great individuals with similar vision and great sense of commitment. But after all these years, each time I get an opportunity for a new project I keep saying, this is the

last chapter before I close the book. Another opportunity of sorts came along in spring of 2024 when conversations with a small group of cultural activists led to conceptualizing the political legitimization of our gente in Mexico since such right has been denied to us in the USA.

The concept is based on the historic fact that the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* separated thousands of Mexican families in 1848 after the appropriation of the northern half of the Mexi-

can territory. As a result, Mexicans have been living as second-class citizens in their own land victimized by a long history of negated opportunities in every political, social, and educational institution. Through the years, their epic resistance has been demonstrated by grassroots movements outside and within the law defying systemic oppression and exclusion.



Self portrait (left) and Julio Cesar with his children (right)

The most significant resistance stand came about during the *Civil Rights* movement by adopting Chicano as a political identity which served as an umbrella for the Farm Workers struggle, the Brown Berets, the fight for Bilingual/Bicultural education and many other fronts for equality on health, education, economic and political representation. It is important to note that culture and art served as effective agents that have successfully conveyed the spirit of Chicanismo throughout several generations as well as geographic dimensions.

Hence, the idea of establishing a *Chicano Cultural Embassy* to extend such legacy and history of resistance into the Mexican territory through art exhibits, music concerts, dance and theatre performances as well as literary lectures and symposiums. The notion is that although the Chicano identity is based on ideology, such a diplomatic outfit would act merely as a non-political, goodwill outfit between Chicano and Mexican audiences.

Through the establishment of the *Chicano Cultural Embassy*, we foresee a continuous cultural exchange between the Chicano and Mexican peoples that will contribute to their general education and development.

And yes, this project seems cumbersome enough to be the one I may close the book with, we'll see.

The question is what do you do after retiring from retirement? I may go back to school and pick up art again.

O no, Volver a empezar...

BIO: Julio Cesar Guerrero, community organizer and pioneer in community controlled bilingual radio has a Master's degree in both social work and telecommunications from the University of Michigan.