

HISPANIC AFFAIRS

The National Commission on Hispanic Affairs

In 1620 when the Pilgrims founded Plymouth Colony, all of the Southwest and parts of the Southeast of what is now the United States had already been colonized by Hispanic peoples. Out of this colonization, which was brutal more often than not, and out of the fusion of the conquered and the conqueror, a new people emerged—*el Mestizo. La Raza* arose like the phoenix out of the ashes of the decadent Spanish empire.

In the Southeast, St. Augustine had been established by people who came from the island of Puerto Rico. California, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona, were all inhabited by a strong race which exhibited distinctive cultural values, style of life, educational attainment, family structure, and a strong love for nature and fellow human beings.

The history that follows, from the arrival of what was to become the predominant "Anglo" people, is one of political, economic and demographic, displacement of the Hispanic people, in which avenues for self-development are largely denied to them.

Most of the land that had belonged to the Hispanic people for centuries before the systematic westward expansion of the dominant culture was incorporated and added to the United States by a process of interaction and strife, and by concordats and treaties that were merely stop-gaps in a continuing thrust for displacement and that were never honored.

Over and above the political, economic, and demographic, displacement, in recent decades there has surfaced a more pervasive and horrible displacement, which strikes at the very root of Hispanic culture and morality, namely, the acceptance of stereotypes which portray the Hispanic person as either a "suave lover", a bongo player, or a fat, lazy, greasy, irresponsible character, etc.

In the housing and employment arena nowadays, the Hispanic people are subjected to discrimination and exploitation by a soulless system that forces children to grow up in squalor and filth, in slum dwellings that are notoriously over-priced, where the infant mortality rate is high, malnutrition is common, and the children attend inferior schools; while the parents are under-employed in seasonal and often irregular employment and further handicapped by the availability of underpriced labor under contract with land companies and factory owners.

Statistics show that Hispanic people generally have a low attainment-level in formal schooling. Since education has increasingly become the gateway to more desirable occupations and higher incomes, the schooling gap is a fundamental cause of depressed economic conditions.

The National Commission, concerned with the progress of the Hispanic people, has made a thorough research of this field, only to discover that the policies and characteristics that prevail in the educational establishment fail to respond adequately to the educational needs of *La Raza*. On the other hand, it seems to be one of the best allies of a social system that functions to segregate, discriminate, and increase the handicaps of Hispanic people to participate in the dominant society.

Hispanic people being of different colors and shades, discrimination and racist practice are frequently exercised against them. There are places which dark "Hispanos" are not allowed to enter, to buy a house, or to attend school because of their color. Racism, the subordination of a person because of his color, has been condemned, explained, and analyzed; but for the "Hispano" the mainland attitude on race is simple-minded and malevolent. Therefore, Hispanic people refuse to accept a place in an outworn American pattern that reflects a battleground in which whites and blacks

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are polarized, and in which the dominant "Anglo" expresses a behavior pattern which injures those at whom it is directed.

Census statistics and scientific research show that what has been said so far in relation to the political, economic, demographic, educational, and housing areas, is also true in the area of health, Federal and local governments, welfare, police protection, religion, and penal institutions.

In the penal and correctional system of this country, for example, a great number of reports, legislative bills, and demands by concerned citizens and organizations have called for ways to improve conditions and to institute significant programs for reform and rehabilitation at correctional facilities. However, absent from these reports is any recognition of the Hispanic inmate community within the correctional institutions. The specific social and economic problems confronting the Hispanic people in the society are carried into the social microcosm of the prison.

This would be an incomplete presentation of data if we were not to recognize that Hispanic people are, in a great number of areas, worse off than other disenfranchised groups. They are in essence poorer, their housing is more crowded and dilapidated, their unemployment rate is higher, and very few of them graduate from high school and move on to college.

Because the plight of the Hispanic people has been either reported quietly or only timidly treated, their problems have never weighed on the Church conscience in the way that the situation deserves.

In 1970, at the General Convention in Houston, Texas, a group of "Hispanos", who were representative both of the community and this Church, sought, and were successful in making available to, the 16-million Hispanic people a measure of the Church's resources. This result was in accordance with a new style of mission which had begun at the 1967 General Convention: a commitment on the part of this Church to stand with the disenfranchised and oppressed. And it came at a time when the Hispanic people in this country have begun to look to the Church as the last source of hope.

Three years ago the definition of the Hispanic as an oppressed and a disenfranchised people was almost a novel idea to the Church and society, as was the plight of the people. The Church has, therefore, only recently become aware of the fact that people of Hispanic descent form a sizable and also a permanent part of American society. This awareness has not as yet penetrated deeply. Nevertheless, it speaks to the fact that the mission expression of this Church has been enriched by a move away from an exclusive pre-occupation with race, which obscured the real issues that were developing. By defining the problem as one of race, and by making race refer only to white and black, all other people, though unconsciously, were systematically excluded. On the other hand, by the Church's move in the direction of the Hispanic people, she is moving away from the aforementioned fixation and toward an affirmation of principle that recognizes more than one group and establishes the basis for a multi-racial Church.

At this critical juncture, when Episcopalians are engaged in a process to determine the Church's program for the next triennium or biennium, the National Commission on Hispanic Affairs comes to the Church with a set of goals and objectives that speak to the Hispanic condition specifically. We believe that all roads lead to personal and group affirmation. But the obstacles faced by each group are different and call for different solutions and techniques.

The financial and human resources that the General Church Program has made available to implement the mandate of the General Convention have not only been unrealistic, but have been much less than that mandate envisaged. The 63rd General Convention in 1970 spoke of making available a percentage of all grants. In reality,

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the resources actually made available can be seen as no more than a small and insignificant symbol, a token, and not in accordance with the Convention's wishes.

The Commission comes to this Convention, nevertheless, convinced of the fact that the "Anglo", the Black, and the Indians are brethren in the faith. To the Church, therefore, we want to make clear that the oppressed condition of the Hispanic people has barely been touched on the surface. The resources made available in the past have made possible a beginning of a new commitment in Mission between our Church and our people; but not much more than a beginning.

The Commission asks, therefore, that the Church re-affirm and strengthen its stand with the Hispanic people as they carry out their struggle for self-development. Specifically, we ask that the General Convention endorse the following goals and objectives:

Resolution A-107

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That this 64th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, affirm and endorse the following Goals and Objectives of the National Commission on Hispanic Affairs:

GOAL 1

To continue to stand by and with all the Hispanic people in the search for, and development of, the resources, skills, and alternative criteria, necessary for direct access to, and full participation in, the democratic expression—of voice, vote, changing, organizing, and directing—which affects their lives and in which the Hispano has little or no participation.

Objectives 1

- (1) Direct grants to community groups engaged in efforts for self-development.
- (2) Development of an educational program based upon Pablo Freire's pedagogical theory of *Concientización* as an alternative system of education.
- (3) Initiate and support legal programs designed to develop and test the U.S. system of jurisprudence in relation to "Hispanos".
- (4) Initiate, support, and co-ordinate special and unusual programs among "Hispanos" in the following areas: (a) refugees, (b) penal reform, and (c) farmworkers.
- (5) Work in direct relationship with the Ninth Province in the areas of problem solving that should be dealt with jointly.
- (6) Development of national archives in order to safeguard, contain, and spread the sociological and moral aspect of Hispanic culture in the U.S.A.

GOAL 2

To continue providing the direction for the strengthening of the on-going work of the Church among "Hispanos" by assisting, supporting, and stimulating, the Church to continue to re-affirm its mission, keeping a proper balance between the sociological needs and theological implications.

Objectives 2

- (1) Direct grants to Dioceses to be used as seed money for the development of work among "Hispanos".
- (2) Development of religious material resources in the Spanish language to be used in the nurturing of the work.
- (3) Development of highly specialized programs for both clergymen and laymen at national, regional, and local levels.
- (4) Development of a specific model of mission.

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(5) Continuation and further development of a Hispanic ecumenical cadre of leadership in consortium style to engage in joint programs and issues and to serve as advocates for self-development.

(6) Establish one effective regional ecumenical effort among the various jurisdictions, by making grants available to the Dioceses within guidelines, so as to provide a place where the struggles of Hispanic people can be heard and acted on by the Churches working in a collaboration style.

HISPANIC-AMERICANS: THE CONDITIONS

Hispanic-Americans have been the overlooked minority in this country, heirs to all of the problems that have plagued blacks—racial and cultural discrimination, under-employment, poverty, poor housing, lack of educational opportunities, police brutality and unequal administration of justice, inadequate health care, and political powerlessness. Unlike blacks, however, they have no substantial middle and upper class (except for the Cubans), and in many areas their situation is even worse than that of blacks, as the following statistics indicate.

Chicanos

- 29.7% of all Spanish-surnamed families in the Southwest occupy deteriorating or dilapidated housing, compared with 27.1% of non-whites, and only 7.5% of "Anglos".
- 1/3 of all Mexican-American families fall below the federally defined poverty level of \$3,500 for a family of four.
- In Texas, the median family income of the Spanish-surnamed is \$2,913, compared with \$5,636 for the "Anglo".
- Migrant laborers, most of whom are Spanish-speaking, share the worst living conditions of any group in the country. Among Spanish-speaking migrants, infant mortality is 125% higher than the national rate, influenza and pneumonia 200% higher, and TB and other infectious diseases 260% higher than the national rate.
- 49.8% of the Chicano population has not gone beyond the 8th grade, compared with 34.6% of the non-whites and 26.4% of the total population.
- Only 5.4% of Chicanos in the Southwest graduate from college, compared with 8.3% of the black population and 23.8% of the "Anglo" population.
- Chicano children are frequently relegated to classes for the educable mentally retarded simply because many teachers equate linguistic ability with intellectual ability. In California, Spanish-speaking children account for more than 40% of the so-called mentally retarded.

Puerto Ricans

- The Puerto Rican unemployment rate in New York City poverty neighborhoods in 1969 was 9.6%—more than 2 ½ times that of workers generally, and half again as high as for the black labor force.
- In 1968-9 80% of Puerto Rican male workers and 89% of Puerto Rican female workers in the barrios of New York City held low-status, low-skilled, jobs, while only 2% of the men and 5% of the women were in the technical and professional class.
- 4 out of every 5 Puerto Rican men in the labor force, 18 yrs. and over (N.Y.C.), and 3 out of every 4 Puerto Rican women in 1969 did not complete high school.
- A number of Puerto Rican suicides in the jails of New York City have pointed up the tragic plight of the Puerto Rican male in his contacts with the criminal-justice system.
- In N.Y.C. 38.6% of Puerto Rican families live in overcrowded housing, compared with 22.1% of black families and only 8.7% of "Anglos."

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Cubans and Other Latin Americans

- There are more than 600,000 uprooted Cubans living in Florida, Newark, New Jersey, California, and New York.
- As self-exiled migrants, Cubans struggle to become a part of an alien culture and environment, handicapped by little knowledge of the language.
- Originally, Cubans saw themselves as temporary exiles. Political and military crises have dramatically changed their hopes for an early return or for a return at all.
- Dominicans and Colombians comprise the largest number of "illegal aliens" found in the City of New York.
- As "aliens" they are exploited economically. They pick the harvest, wash the dishes, and, when the job is done, if caught, are exposed to the penalty of the law.