The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement: Analytical Essay

Chicano, The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement, left an impact on the way I view the treatment Mexican Americans received during this time, specifically in schools. The film was enlightening, powerful, and touching. To a certain degree, watching the barbaric treatment of those fighting for their Civil Rights, was truly shocking. It elevated certain emotions to a whole different level. The film was well written and directed. It was also very impactful, hearing from specific people who actually faced the harsh treatment. These people were a part of the Riots and the legendary massive walkout that took place in Los Angeles. The events were explained in a descriptive manner, that helped the viewers to better understand the cause and effects and the conflict of the time.

In the beginning of the film, Harry Gamboa began to describe the treatment he not only experienced at school, but the experiences his fellow Chicano students faced. What he witnessed and experienced was quite the opposite of the “American Dream,” Carlos Montes mentioned. The United States was, and has always been seen as, a place of equal opportunity and the ultimate key to success and freedom for everyone. Although that was, and continues to be thought of as true, “never judge a book by its cover” seemed to be the case in this situation. While some Mexican Americans lived and live the dream in the United States, many Mexican Americans faced the exact opposite. Many faced brutal opposition, unfair work practices, and overall inequality, with an emphasis in school. The film emphasized one main location and the specific ways Mexican Americans faced this opposition and inequality, and that was in the L.A. school district. It was assumed by teachers and administrators that those from a Mexican heritage would be sent to do labor manual jobs and things in the home, rather than continuing on to College and having increasing success. Due to this assumption, the teachers did not put much effort into actually teaching these children, nor did they give them the educational opportunities they deserved. Throughout the film, the many ways students of all ages were discriminated against and ultimately bullied by not only students, but also teachers, were clearly shown. It was mortifying. After a long time coming, the Mexican American students decided enough was enough and created a survey many took. When they rallied together and realized they were all on the same page, the survey and the students’ concerns were taken to the school board, with hopes these situations would be addressed. The Chicano students desired multi language courses to be offered, Mexican American history to be implemented, an end to unearned punishment, and more diverse teachers. These concerns and requests were pushed under the table and completely looked past. People such as Ralph Richardson explained that the school board can not affect the way society is reacting and that everyone desires ultimate peace, which is ridiculous, to say the least. The Mexican American students anger and displeasure toward the school and the administration only continued to ramp up. Chicano students joined together in efforts to support each other and their community they valued, despite the negativity they received. Sal Castro, an activist for Mexican American rights, helped in organizing the Chicanos as they decided on a massive walkout in the schools. This walkout escalated by the thousands and led to monstrous unrest beyond explanation. Dozens of officers were called in and students all over the place were being beaten on the streets. Many were arrested due to their “dangerous” behavior. Their constitutional riot led to many being hurt and imprisoned. Although the effects of this major civil rights movement was ruthless for many, it

brought great attention to the unstoppable Chicano’s in the city. All together, they were substantially powerful in large numbers and were a force the police even had a hard time controlling. This was just the start for justice.

I personally liked this film because it told the story of this civil rights movement in such a chronological way that I was fully able to understand what happened and the order that it took place. The film truly helped me understand the inequality taking place by how it clearly shared about the difference in the way Mexican Americans were treated compared to other individuals in school. The discrimination took place all over. It was rampant everywhere, every which way they turned: In the police and court system, across all levels of authority, in school, and sadly, also by one's fellow classmates. The plot was informative, poignant, and empowering. Although it evoked feelings of sadness and was heart wrenching, the way Mexican Americans joined together to stand up for themselves was truly empowering. One main factor that made this film was how they set the mood for each scene, specifically through the lighting and music. When describing the arrest of the Brown Berets the lights were dim and dark and the music was deep and spooky. This truly helped me experience the mood of what was happening, more thoroughly experiencing the moment. Along with this, this film gave just the right amount of detail, I never felt like it dragged on too long about one specific subject, but rather effectively explained/communicated and then moved on.

Although there were many positive things about this film, there were also a few negatives. I felt as if the beginning and the middle of the plot was better explained, and more clearly and effectively filmed and shared, compared to the end. I felt as if the build up did not match the ending. There was truly so much discussed, experienced, and fought for throughout the whole film, I was expecting more at the end. Specifically a strong ending. Along with this, when the Mexican Americans were rioting for equal treatment, before the police got involved, it was almost as if the mood was still low, even the lighting used was off. I wish it would have been more empowering and more of a stand out moment, with the choice of light and music used. I do not feel that the tone and mood should have felt heavy until the fighting and brutality broke out. The timing was just a little off here.

In summation, the film was well done and had a lasting effect on me and the way I view Mexican American history, around the 1960’s, and as a whole. While watching it, I felt as if I were a part of what was taking place in defense against the school systems during this time. At the end of the film, I felt informed, empowered, and ultimately gained an increased awareness of the brutality that took place. It seems so unnecessary, and with great sadness, that I realize what it took for the Civil Rights Movement to be enacted. What had to happen, in order for changes to be brought about, and for individuals to be treated better, is appalling overall. The treatment some Chicos experienced is beyond comprehension. Although some parts were more than hard to watch, it was amazing to see the Mexican community come together and walk boldly, in order to bring about the changes they both desired and deserved. Not only this, but they did not let up, no matter the punishment they faced. These people were not only fighting for oneself but also for the younger children, generations to come. The Mexican Americans who participated in such important events, specifically those who were a part of the massive riots, will go down as heroes to many. Clearly America is not the land of the free with equal opportunities for all.