

The Inland Communist
Vicente Ximenes

EDITORIAL PAGE: SO THE PEOPLE MAY KNOW

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Hispanos Need Better Schools

VICENTE XIMENES, chairman of the federal Interagency Commission on Mexican-American Affairs in Washington, produced a statistic in Denver the other day which constitutes a scorching indictment of Colorado public schools. The statistic is that only about 100 Spanish-surnamed students will be graduated from Colorado colleges and universities this year.

If Ximenes is right about this—and we can find no one willing to dispute that figure—something is indeed wrong with the state's educational system. There are at least 180,000 Spanish-surnamed people in Colorado; to have only 100 college graduates coming from so large a group is shocking.

What's the trouble?

Ximenes blames the situation on inadequate elementary and high schools. "We just can't get into the running as far as college is concerned," he said.

What he means is that almost all public schools in Colorado try to treat, and teach, children of Hispano background the same way they do Anglo children. This is vastly unfair to the Hispano kids and causes an inordinately high dropout rate.

The rural Hispanic culture of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico, from which most Spanish-surnamed families have come in recent decades, is an admirable culture in many ways. For one thing, it is probably more Christian than the Anglo culture Spanish-surnamed people find in the cities. But it is totally different from the Anglo culture and in several basic ways diametrically its opposite.

For instance, the good man in Anglo American is the individualistic, competitive, go-getter. In the rural, Hispano village culture, the good man is the guy who shares whatever he has—including his time—with not only his immediate family, but with an extended family of uncles, aunts and cousins which may include most of the village.

The teacher in the city public school, in dealing with the children of this culture, has to understand such differences and give these rural human values the respect they deserve. Yet at the same time the teacher must develop in Hispano children an appreciation of the different values and standards they must have in order to compete and prosper in the money-mad, time-conscious world of the crazy Anglos.

Obviously, this is a tough academic task, this bridging of two so dissimilar cultures. But it has to be done, and done well, because when it is not, the children involved are torn apart by the clashing values of their parents and their schools. And they are being torn apart this way, in Denver and other Colorado cities, every school day of the year. The state's reform schools and jails and welfare rolls are loaded with confused, frustrated products of the process.

THIS is why Ximenes is right to stress the necessity of training and recruiting more Hispano teachers for the elementary schools. It seems undeniable that no teacher can understand the problem as well as an Hispano who has lived it all himself.

But in order for there to be more Hispano teachers, the present generation of Anglo teachers and school administrators is going to have to find ways of doing a much better job for the Hispano children now in the schools. That's the only way to remedy the pitiful shortage of Hispano college graduates and potential teachers.