The Fight for Equality in Education in the United States

Lesson #3: Chicano! Taking Back the Schools

Learning Objectives

- Students will understand the motivation for and outcomes of the 1968 walkouts in Los Angeles.
- Students will answer the guiding question, “How did Chicano groups advocate for equal education in the 1960s?”
- Students will compare the two films they saw about the East LA walkouts.

Introductory Activity

- Ask students to identify the main characters from the HBO movie Walkout.
- Explain that today they will see many of those people in real life as adults being interviewed in the PBS documentary.

Information for teachers about the film

- The MLA entry for this film is Chicano! History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement. Dir. Public Broadcasting Service, 1996. TV.
- The documentary is part three in the PBS series Chicano! It was already taken down from the PBS website, but can be found on youtube and then converted into a file that will play on school web servers. (If you are a Mac user, MacTubes works very well!) It is not on Netflix, but might be at the public library.

Activity 1

- Distribute the questions worksheet (last page) or ask students to simply take notes if they are able to do so without guided questions. The questions are provided below with answers but also appear after the procedural plans in a student-friendly worksheet. Show Chicano!.

Questions and Answers for During Viewing

1. How many Mexican Americans lived in East LA in 1968? Was that neighborhood integrated with the rest of the city?
   - a. Almost 100,000 and no, it was completely separate
2. How many Chicanos graduated high school? Why so few?
   - a. Only 25% because their culture was not addressed and their needs were not being met.
3. What happened to Harry Gamboa as a monolingual Spanish speaker in elementary school?
   - a. He had to wear a cone hat that said ‘Spanish’ that he could take off ‘when he learned to speak English.’
4. What message did the schools send to Chicano students about their futures?
   - a. They were not going to get into college. They needed to pay attention in the skills classes because they would be doing jobs that required less education.
5. What was the first step in the students’ activism?
   - a. They took a survey of students to see what their concerns were.
6. What did the students call for?
   a. An end to corporal punishment, bilingual instruction, Mexican American history courses and the hiring of more Mexican American teachers and counselors

7. What did the school board do when presented with the survey results and student demands?
   a. Patted them on the back and threw it out

8. What message was sent to students about being Mexican and speaking Spanish?
   a. The Mexican culture was not as good as others. Speaking Spanish was not allowed and was therefore inferior to English.

9. What happened in 1946 in Santa Ana, California?
   a. Parents filed a lawsuit demanding equal education for their children. *Mendez v. the Westminster School District* declared the segregation of Mexican American children to be unlawful. Despite this ruling, segregated schools remained. This ruling did set the foundation for the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that went before the Supreme Court in 1954.

10. What is UMAS?
    a. United Mexican American Students, an organization at UCLA.

11. According to Sal Castro, whom did the schools blame for Mexican American student failings?
    a. The home

12. What was Sal’s activism shaped by?
    a. His father’s deportation and the Zoot Suit Riots, when sailors and soldiers attacked Mexican Americans.

13. How many schools were affected by the walkouts by the end of the week?
    a. 16 schools with 10,000 students out in the streets

14. Did everyone in the community support the blowouts? Why or why not?
    a. No, some felt that the walkouts were disrespectful and were showing an ugly side of Mexican culture.

15. What role did the Brown Berets play in the walkouts?
    a. They wanted to protect the kids from the police. They’re a paramilitary group of college students that advocated direct action and were often confrontational. They were blamed for the walkouts and caused concern with the police because of their radical tactics in the past.

16. What effect did the Watts Riot in 1965 have on the police?
    a. Law enforcement went to riot training and consequently beat high school students during the walkouts.

17. Why did the principal tell the police they couldn’t arrest the student who broke the lock on the gate at Garfield?
    a. He was the quarterback and they “needed him”.

18. How did the police react to the protests?
    a. They blocked the street at first but then beat the students.

19. Did Bobby Kennedy support the students?
    a. Yes

20. How were parents involved in the movement?
    a. They got involved after the walkouts turned dangerous. They took up the fight for their children and asked to meet with school officials.
21. What does this movement show about mass involvement?
  a. There is strength in numbers and mass involvement can be an effective way to make change.

22. What happened in June 1968?
  a. 13 people were arrested for their involvement in the riots. They were charged with disrupting a public school, a misdemeanor, and conspiracy to commit a misdemeanor, a felony.

23. Who acted as attorneys for the LA 13?
  a. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

24. What is meant by the quote from an ACLU member who said, “the demonstration is the poor man’s printing press”?

25. How and why was the FBI involved in the Chicano movement?
  a. An FBI counter intelligence program was created to deal with civil rights and black power movements. They, along with LAPD, infiltrated the movements and were watching the movement leaders.

26. What did the cops and FBI agents who infiltrated the Brown Berets and the activists do?
  a. They were the organizers of events and were the ones who proposed violent actions.

27. How did the arrests of the LA 13 change the focus of the movement?
  a. They had to go from offense to defense. They were seen as dangerous subversives, just for protesting non violently.

28. What happened after Sal Castro got fired?
  a. Students and parents fought to get him reinstated by picketing. When that didn’t work, they did a sit in for 7 days. At the end, the school board voted to reinstate him.

29. Were the walkouts only in East LA?
  a. No, some schools in West LA also walked out in support of the kids in East LA.

30. What was the outcome of the legal battle for the LA 13?
  a. It continued for 2 years, and then was thrown out based on the Bill of Rights (freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom to petition the government for aggressive grievances)

Activity 2
- Discuss the film with the class either orally or have students respond to the discussion questions in writing. This could be assigned for homework if class time is limited.

Post-viewing Discussion Questions
1. Which movie was more compelling to watch? Why?
2. What information was left out of the HBO movie?
3. Which film did a better job portraying the actual outcomes of the walkouts? Why do you think that is?
4. Why do you think each director chose to include the information he did?
Chicano! Taking Back the Schools

Instructions: As you watch the movie, answer the following questions.

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13. How many schools were affected by the walkouts by the end of the week?

14. Did everyone in the community support the blowouts? Why or why not?

15. What role did the Brown Berets play in the walkouts?

16. What effect did the Watts Riot in 1965 have on the police?

17. Why did the principal tell the police they couldn’t arrest the student who broke the lock on the gate at Garfield?

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Discussion/Reflection Questions
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