COMMUNITY MEDIA CENTER PROJECT

THE VALLEY CONSUMER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

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February 1978
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I INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The development of our complex society has been accompanied if not engendered by the growth of the mass media. The media has changed our lifestyles and affected aspects of community development. Because of its rapid growth and power, the media has characteristically been profit-oriented, and has neglected and abused minority and poor communities.

Since the establishment of the printing press in the U.S., minorities have been victims of vicious stereotypes which engendered racism in the majority population and inferiority in minorities. Mexican-Americans have been characterized as lazy, stupid, cowardly, greedy, dirty and dishonest.

Although civil rights efforts have attempted to correct this situation, as late as July 6, 1970, Mayor W.W. McAlister, of San Antonio portrayed Mexican-Americans on the national Huntley-Brinkley News Report in this manner:

"You have to bear in mind there is a special temperament...a difference of temperament between the Anglos and our Americans of Mexican descent. Our citizens of Mexican descent are very fine people...uh...they're...they're home-loving...they love beauty...they love flowers...they love music...aah...they love dancing...uh...perhaps they're not quite as let's say as ambitiously motivated as the Anglos are to get ahead financially, but they manage to get a lot out of life.

The result of commentaries such as these is a pervading attitude, even among Mexican-Americans themselves, that they are somehow second-class citizens with little or no viable contributions to society.
The situation of Mexican-Americans in the Rio Grande Valley today, is so critical that they call it the "valley of tears". The median educational level is 7.2 years. In August of 1975 the unemployment rate was 11.2%. Fifty-eight per cent of its people, or 32,400 persons live in near poverty. The three county region which includes Cameron, Willacy, and Hidalgo counties has a total population of 337,473; the majority of the population is concentrated in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties which is approximately 94.4%. 25.4% is considered as the portion of the population indentified as rural, subsequently, either migrant or seasonal farmworker. The Regional Human Resources Committee has identified education as being a high area of need and subsequently a priority for the region.

The stereotype of "Dance-loving" Mexicans and the Frito Bandito often portrayed through the media does not in any manner, motivate or give any real perspective as to the talent, problems, culture, and history of Chicanos. Youth are often quite unaware of the tremendous historical contribution and participation of their ancestors in the development of this society, and the poor continue to be uninformed as to their ability to develop their own communities.

The media cannot be blamed nor can't it alleviate all the problems of Mexican-Americans. But it is a documented fact by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights that the media does almost nothing to help Mexican-Americans.

The Rio Grande Valley Coalition on the Media, a conglomeration of Chicano organizations has attempted to negotiate a better situation for Chicanos in the local media. It has done so with the help of threatened lawsuits. Though major stations are presently cooperating, the records of KGBT and KRGV, as far as the Chicano community is still lacking for effective community service. Over the years it has become clearly evident that the mass media will always put economic priorities before community service.

It is for these reasons that Chicanos have turned to alternative means of reaching the poor. Vehicles such as through alternative newspapers, films, slide presentations and recordings for an answer. Those few who have received skills in the mass media look for a way in which to implement these skills so as to benefit poor Chicano families. Two broad areas of media efforts have been developed and they are the following:
Community Media Center Project

1. **Media Advocacy.** Defined primarily through negotiations with commercial broadcast stations. Includes acquiring skills in FCC laws, news, public affairs programming, etc. This effort is primarily a pressure effort for more sensitive programming about community needs. It can provide employment, and educational opportunities in the broadcast field.

2. **Production.** This effort is primarily directed towards injecting information directly into the community, and producing documents which will serve to give a proper historical and social perspective of Mexican-Americans. It can also provide direct media training and skills to the poor.

A community Media Center would concentrate efforts in these two areas, and provide materials to the poor for the documentation and presentation of their history, problems, needs, and their struggle for self-improvement.

**II GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

**Goal:** To establish a central body which will utilize the mass media and media skills to publicize the problems and characteristics of the Mexican-American poor in the Valley in an effort to more effectively mobilize the community for self-improvement.

**Objective 1:** To centralize the dissemination of much information to poor communities, e.g., low income agencies' services, regulations, structures; historical events; educational and employment opportunities; and social rights struggles.

**Objective 2:** To provide basic media equipment for the documentation of the activities of the poor, to be developed eventually into films which will provide perspective on their activities, and publicity on their complex problems.

**Objective 3:** To monitor local print and broadcast media in order to direct pressure efforts for more sensitive community programming.
III ACTIVITIES

Under Objective 1 will be the development of a community-oriented newspaper which will be the main trust of local information dissemination activities. Newsletters in special areas such as health, immigration, education, etc. A representative mailing list will be developed in order to effectively inform the poor. Subscriptions will be made to various relevant publications, such as newspapers, newsletters, magazines, etc., in order to provide a nation wide perspective on the different issues of the poor. Historical publications will be utilized by community members. A film library composed of Mexican-American films, will also be made available for organizational efforts.

Activities under Objective 2 will include the acquisition of the following equipment:

1. Cassette tape recorder
2. 35 mm still camera
3. Super 8 movie camera
4. Still camera flash attachment
5. Portable movie screen
6. Darkroom supplies
7. Slide Projector
8. Record turntable
9. Lay-out supplies for newspaper/letters

This equipment must be made available in a training/restrictive lend-out basis and will be used to record the activities of the poor, and to aid in organizational efforts. The acquisition of production skills through the use of this equipment will hopefully encourage the interest of Mexican-American producers, writers, artists, etc. The results of production efforts with this equipment will eventually provide a financial self-sufficiency.

Under Objective 3 will be the clipping and documentation of information and reports relevant to the community. Radio and television will be monitored in order to evaluate their performance and organize letter-writing campaigns/meetings, etc., if necessary.

IV ADMINISTRATION

The Community Media Center Policy Board will oversee the operation and establish policy for the center. It will seek the resources necessary for its operation and maintain communication with difficult community organizations in order to identify community concerns.
It will be responsible for all equipment and for the content and printing of the media center. The Board is composed of community members who will provide input and direction for the center.

### Community Media Center Policy Board

- **Center Co-Ordinator**
  - **Trainees**
    - **Components**
      - **Media Advocacy**
      - **Resources**
      - **Production**
        - **Film Library**
          - **Books, Periodicals**
            - **Newspapers**
          - **Films**

### Budget

(One year effort)

I. **Personnel - Part Time**
   - Communication specialist .......... $2,400

II. **Printing Supplies and Materials** .... 1,500

III. **Consummable Supplies** .......... 1,200

TOTAL .................................................. $5,100