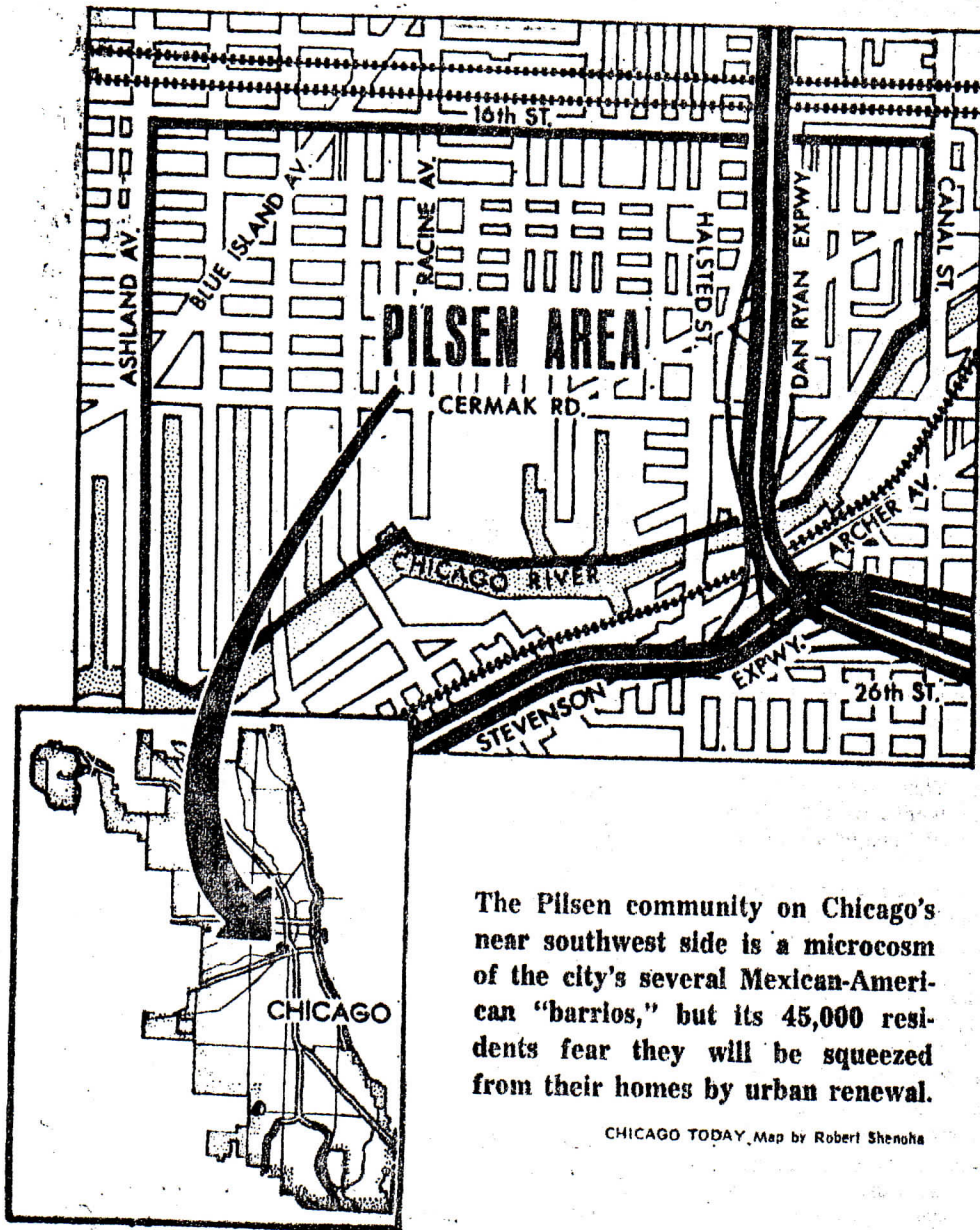


Chicanos here proud, fearful



The Pilsen community on Chicago's near southwest side is a microcosm of the city's several Mexican-American "barrios," but its 45,000 residents fear they will be squeezed from their homes by urban renewal.

CHICAGO TODAY, Map by Robert Shenoh

Chicago's Mexican-American community is a vital part of the city's lifestream that has fought long and hard for survival and recognition. Now a part of that community feels threatened by the political and economic forces surrounding it and is engaged once again in a struggle to make itself understood. This is the first of a five-part series on the plight of a proud people.

7/23/73

"When God decided to make Man, He took clay from the earth and baked it. At first, the oven wasn't hot enough and it came out pale white. Then it was too hot and it got burned black. But by the third time, He had mastered it, and out it came, a beautiful caramel brown. And God was happy. He had made the Chicano."

Raimondo Patlan
Chicano artist

BY LEONARD ARONSON

THE WORD CHICANO isn't even in the dictionary—but it is becoming increasingly important to Chicagoans.

Most Chicagoans aren't aware of it, but there are more Mexican-Americans living in Chicago than in any other city outside the southwestern United States—between 108,000 and 250,000, by latest estimate. That means one of every 13 to 30 Chicagoans is a Mexican-American.

Chicago's Chicanos—as many Mexican-Americans call themselves, tho others abjure the name—have formed communities ["barrios"] thruout the city.

One major Chicano settlement—a microcosm of Chicago's Mexican-American community—is Pilsen, on the near southwest side.

Pilsen has 45,000 residents, and 85 per cent of them are Chicano.

THE PEOPLE OF Pilsen have one overriding fear today: That they will be squeezed out of their homes by the forces of "urban renewal" and "neighborhood revitalization."

To understand their fears takes an awareness of what the Chicano is all about—beginning quite naturally with the definition of the term "Chicano."

To Mexican nationals here as legal residents on work permits, to illegal immigrants ["wetbacks"] who sneaked over the border, and to American citizens of Mexican descent who grew up here, the word has significantly different connotations.

Some use it as a slang word for anyone with Mexican blood, others are offended by it, others see it as a precise political term, while others believe it represents a fundamentally new race of man.

"The first time I heard the word was back in 1949. I thought it was a combination of two words—Chicago and Mexicano," said one Pilsen resident. "Later I learned it meant the people from Mexico."

"I'm not a Chicano," said Manny Monreal, owner of Manny's Steak House, 1332 W. 18th St. "I was born in Mexico and I live in America. I'm a Mexican-American."

"CHICANO TECHNICALLY means people

who were born in the United States of Mexican parents," said Ricarda Saenz, a Pilsen teacher.

"The kids from Mexico generally will not call themselves Chicanos, but Mexicanos. It's a solidarity word of identification with the movement."

Historically, Mexicans, especially in the Southwest, suffered as much discrimination as blacks, with one basic difference: The Mexicans always felt they had a superior religion, culture, and values.

"That is one reason the Mexicans never lost their language, while the blacks did," said one Mexican historian.

The "Movement"—Chicanismo—reflects both the Mexican's sense of his cultural pride and the feeling that he must organize if he is to preserve it.

As the slogans "Black is Beautiful" and "Black Power" gave a new sense of pride to blacks during the 60's, the term "Chicano" is helping many young Mexicans born in the States raise their heads and say, "Soy Chicano"—"I am SOMEBODY!"

"WE'VE SUFFERED an identity crisis since we were kids," said Raul Mosqueda, 27, a Pilsen community organizer. "When I went to school, the teachers told me in different ways how I should join the mainstream, become an 'Anglo.'"

"But I was never accepted into the mainstream, and as the Mexican was always portrayed as lazy and dumb, I was ashamed to be Mexican," he said.

"I didn't know what I was. Then I learned I was a Chicano. Something new. It was beautiful."

Juan Estrada, a "brown beret," the militant organizing arm of the Chicano movement, said, "There is a direct liaison between the Chicanos in Chicago and thruout the country. We are trying to politicize the term."

"We are trying to create a consciousness of a people."

THERE IS discussion over both the means and ends of Chicanismo, however.

Some Pilsen youths, especially gang members, do not respond to the discipline and ideological approach of the "brown berets," just another gang to them, while some middle class Mexicans, tho sympathizing with their goals, question their tactics.

"My Chicano friends are not into the barrios," said Rhea Mojica Hammer, director of Spanish programming for Channel 26.

"They're behind the movement, and yet



CHICAGO TODAY Photo by Bob Fila

Chicago's Chicanos

"The term 'Chicano' is helping many young Mexicans born in the States raise their heads and say, 'Soy Chicano'—'I am SOMEBODY!'"

what the Chicano on 18th Street doesn't realize is that he needs the other Chicanos outside the barrio.

"It's because he's seen as a little too irrational, militant, radical, uncompromising, wanting everything at once," she said.

Ms. Hammer believes Chicanos are a new breed. "We are not Spanish. We are not immigrants. We did not cross oceans. The Old World came to us. We didn't go to it. We were a conquered nation.

"AND YET, I GET emotional when I hear El Jarave a Partio, the national Mexican dance, and I get the same way when I hear the Star Spangled Banner. We're a new breed."

Ell Baca, a parole agent with the Illinois Department of Corrections, believes Mexicans must work thru the system to preserve their identity.

"The best thing that can happen to the Chicano community is to disburse it. These kids are of the opinion that living together means Chicano power.

"I believe that unless they join the mainstream, learn the language, become fluent, they'll always be treated like foreigners and then their community can be wiped out.

"The leaders in Pilsen are like the blind leading the blind in a movement nowhere to the benefit of nobody."

FATHER LUIS Jaramillo, professor of La Raza studies at Malcolm X College, agrees there is little unity among Mexicans now. "It's a sociological law that oppressed people will begin to oppress each other," he says, but denies Baca's thesis that Pilsen is filled with lost souls.

"There is a consciousness arising that is very subtle," said Jaramillo. "The Chicano is beginning to feel torn by the sense that he will never be able to reform the system and keep his identity."

Jaramillo said the Chicano movement

first surfaced in the mid-'60s when Mexican-Americans began organizing in California and formed the La Raza Unida Party as the political arm of Chicanismo. The movement spread to Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and then eastward across the States.

"We believe the Chicano is part of a whole new race, 'La Raza Cosmica,' which involves all the people of Central and South America," said Jaramillo.

"La Raza Cosmica is a mixture of the Spanish people, with 800 years of Moslem, Christian, and Jewish cultures, and the Indian.

"THE CHICANO represents the first awakening that we are ethnically and anthropologically a new people. The Chicano is the Mexican member of 'La Raza Cosmica' living in the United States.

"We are the missing link between what man is and what he must become."

In one sense, the Chicano movement also can be seen as part of a larger phenomenon which represents the breakdown of the old notion of the melting pot.

Cultural groups—Polish and Irish as well as black and Mexican, white as well as yellow, red, and brown, are beginning to seek out and reassert their "ethnicity."

"WE REALLY HAVE given up this melting pot idea," said Bob Ahlgren, a former legal aid attorney who spent five years in Pilsen.

"Theodore Bikel says if you take all the colors in the rainbow and put them into one pot, you'll end up with a dirty gray. People are resisting that.

"It is true that there is a big problem in the Mexican community about what they are going to call themselves.

"I think the most significant reality, however, is that five years ago they weren't calling themselves anything."

TOMORROW: Pilsen — a "gold mine" worth fighting for.

Claim-jumpers eye Pilsen gold

BY LEONARD ARONSON

MIGUEL CENTENO is worried.

In the heavy accent in which he says, "I don' speak good English, I don' speak good Spanish, I'm a Tex-Mex," he tells you why:

"When the ceety decide it wan' thees area, they gonna tear it down."

Centeno is worried because he has the sneaking suspicion he has driven his stake into the edge of a gold mine, and is now

being surrounded by claim jumpers.

The gold mine is called Pilsen.

It is a residential-industrial neighborhood, bounded by the Burlington Northern railroad tracks at 18th Street on the north, Canal Street on the east, the river on the south, and Ashland Avenue on the west.

The claim jumpers include a wide range of real or imagined oppressors—the city's Department of Urban Renewal, the Chicago Housing Authority, Loop business leaders, big land developers, banks, politicians, and even the University of Illinois.

PILSEN IS a gold mine, Centeno and many others believe, because it is located on prime land, close to the Loop, with good access to all major freeways, good public transportation, and old buildings ripe for redevelopment.

It is one of the oldest communities in Chicago untouched by renewal, with buildings dating back prior to the Chicago fire; no major public or private institutions; and no new construction since the late '20s.

Its churches—the Bohemians' St. Procopius and St. Vitas; the Croatians' Holy Trinity; the Poles' St. Anne's and St. Adalbert's; the Germans' St. Paul's; the Italians' St. Michael's; the Slovenians' St. Stevens, and the Lithuanians' Our Lady of Vilna—all mark the area's history as a major port of entry.

The latest arrivals are the Mexican-Americans who, like Centeno, today comprise 85 per cent of the area's 45,000 residents.

Centeno, squat and curly-haired, with dark eyes and carmel skin—the classic mixture of Spanish and Indian blood which

makes up the majority of the Mexican people—is a solid citizen.

BESIDES THE bar he owns at 1001 S. Halsted St., Centeno owns four other lots on the 1600 block of Halsted, a house in Bridgeport, and an apartment building.

He has held one job for 26 years, been married for 22, has three girls, all in college, pays his taxes, and thinks about getting ahead.

But getting ahead doesn't mean "taking off."

"I'm tired of moving," said Centeno, 43, who previously has been forced out of three other homesites, now covered by the Eisenhower Expressway, a hospital parking lot, and a new apartment complex.

"I told my alderman, 'I don' wanna be a gypsy. I been a gypsy all my life. I wan' roots."

Centeno's one comfort is that he is not worrying alone.

"There's always the feeling that they're going to do away with this area and bring in more able, higher taxpayers," said Juan

Morales, president of the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council.

The most recent cause for concern was the release last month by Mayor Daley and downtown business leaders of a plan to revitalize the neighborhoods surrounding the Loop. Pilsen was designated a target area.

THO THE mayor specifically called for rehabilitation and renovation of the area

while maintaining its ethnic identity, something most residents welcome, there is still suspicion that the Pilsen Melting Pot itself may melt away.

Too many residents cannot forget how they were forced into Pilsen when the former Mexican-American community at Taylor and Halsted Streets was razed to make way for the University of Illinois Circle Campus.

Many still feel threatened by the universi-

ty, which, blocked on its north, east, and west sides, must move south if it is to continue growing. Said one observer:

"The only area for a sports stadium, or more parking, or student housing will be in Pilsen. There are a lot of facilities which haven't gone up yet, and Pilsen is the place for them, if the people allow it."

Other factors contribute to the suspicion and insecurity in Pilsen.



7/24/73

Is the look of concern for the future of the Pilsen area reflected in their eyes? This little boy and girl live on the 1800 block of May Street.

CHICAGO TODAY photo by Ernie Cox

FOR ONE thing, the community, basically filled with poorer, working-class Mexicans—as many as two-thirds of whom, by some estimates, are here either illegally or on legal work permits, but not as citizens—is politically disorganized.

Many Mexicans come to Chicago to make money, and when they do, they either return to Mexico or the Southwest, or move out of Pilsen into the older Middle Class Mexican communities at 47th and Ashland, 26th Street, or South Chicago.

"Those who are able to get out usually don't come back, unless it's to buy food-stuffs or other things they can't get anywhere else," said one Pilsen resident. "They generally don't keep strong ties to Pilsen."

Pilsen was first designated an urban renewal planning area in 1967, but urban renewal funds were frozen in 1969 by federal District Judge Richard Austin and the renewal program never really took off.

Nonetheless, the specter of urban renewal has hung over the community for the last five years, frightening off investors and quickening the rate of urban decay.

"I'VE BEEN trying four years to get money to build housing on the four lots I own on Halsted Street, but I can't get no loan," said Centeno.

"I went to all the neighborhood banks and the banks downtown. We need housing. I

had an architecture professor, Fidel Lopez, from Circle Campus, draw up plans. I had collateral. But no banks were interested.

"That's why there's nothing goin' on in this neighborhood. The banks are jes waitin' to give money to big developers. I know at least 40 other businessmen in the same position," he said.

"How you gonna upgrade your property if you can't get loans to do it?"

Richard Parrillo, president of the National Republic Bank, 1817 S. Loomis, denied that his bank was not putting money back into Pilsen.

"Over the last 10 years, about 50 per cent of our real estate loans have gone to Mexicans," Parrillo said. He admitted, however, that investors had been made cautious by urban renewal.

"The main reason there's been no major development in Pilsen is because nobody knows what the city's long-range plans are," he said.

"WE'D BEEN looking for several years for a place to expand in Pilsen, but we ourselves decided to move to Harrison and Racine.

"It was the nearest location to this community where we could move and be in an area which had already undergone urban renewal, where we knew what the final plans were."

Another source of insecurity in Pilsen has stemmed from the supposedly inherent pride and independence of the Latin personality which prevents him from building broad based organizations.

"There's a saying in Spanish that 'Every man wants to be the king.' That's one of the problems with the Latins in Chicago," said Father Pedro Rodriguez of St. Francis of Assisi Church.

Tragedy in Pilsen

'Everybody knows he died for the peace!'

7/25/73

BY LEONARD ARONSON

DAVID [BOOGIE] Gonzales would stand up anywhere and argue for peace, and that's why he took two .38 slugs in the heart last month.

His blood drenched the grass at Harrison Park the same day two youths were found axed to death in Maywood and a woman jumped from Marina Towers.

Perhaps that's why his death went unnoticed outside of Pilsen.

But for the Mexican Americans living along 18th Street, it came as a hard blow, largely because the story of Boogie's life and death seemed to crystalize so many of the community's hopes and fears.

Boogie, 23, was cut down while trying to mediate a gang dispute when two carloads of youths sped by Harrison Park, the 18th and Wood Street hangout of the Morgan Deuces, and fired into a crowd.

The killing had a special sting because Boogie, a chief architect of a fragile truce which has helped maintain peace among Pilsen gangs over the last four months, was trying to prevent violence when he was shot.

THERE IS also fear in Pilsen that his death will spark the resumption of gang hostility which for so long has narrowed the horizons of the community's youths to the limited borders of their own street or "turf."

"The thing to stress about Boogie is that he didn't want to see his people killing themselves. That's why he died. He died for the peace," said Henry Villagomez, who shared an apartment with Boogie in Pilsen.

Villagomez and Gonzales, both employed as outreach workers for El Centro de la Causa, a Pilsen community center, were on the job the night Boogie was killed. Villagomez tells this story:

"We were working around the streets. We had to contact some people. The Morgan Deuces and Latin Kings had had some static over the weekend.

"One of the Deuces got shot. The same night we were supposed to go talk to the Satan Disciples about some trouble they'd had with the Latin Counts.

"We went over to Harrison Park to talk to the Morgan Deuces. Boogie and I were listening. We said, 'Why don't you cool off and wait till we talk to the Kings and try to set up a meeting.'

"BUT THEY weren't too enthusiastic about that. They didn't trust the Latin Kings. I saw there wasn't much we could do. One of their boys got shot. But Boogie kept talking to them.

"I asked a Morgan Deuce if the Latin Kings had been by and he said the guy who shot their buddy had passed by in a car once, and then again for a second time.

"I felt he was insulting me,' the Deuce told me, and he said he took a shot at the car. That was about 6 p. m.," Villagomez said.

"It was about 10 p. m. when we were standing there. We had heard firecrackers earlier, but suddenly we heard some shots. We all hit the ground.

"I turned myself on my back to see if I could see something. I just seen two cars speeding away. This guy behind me, Ghost, said he got shot. We got up and I checked myself out to see if I was hit.

"Then I turned around and seen Boogie. Some of the Morgan Deuces picked him up. We called a squad car and they called a paddy wagon. They put him on a stretcher and I went in the wagon with him to the hospital.

"I THINK he died on the way. When I was holding his hand, I was trying to talk to the dude, 'Don't let me down, you can make it,' we were trying to spark something up, but his hand got cold on me. I more or less knew it was too late."

Seven persons, two of them girls, were wounded by the shotgun and pistol blasts. Maxwell Street homicide investigators reportedly have the names of four youths they are seeking in connection with the shooting.

"Everybody knows that Boogie died for peace," said Villagomez. "After he was shot, a lot of people were real hot. They wanted to go over to 26th Street and burn the Latin Kings."

Cooler heads prevailed, however, and at a meeting of 18th Street "clubs" it was decided to "lay back" and not do anything unless they were provoked.

Last month, both Villagomez and Boogie joined other Pilsen streetworkers in a meeting at El Centro with Police Commanders William McCann and Aurelio Garcia of the Marquette and Monroe Street districts.

THEY DISCUSSED the tension between police and gangmembers, and talked about how the streetworkers could help cool things down.

After the meeting, both commanders paid an oblique tribute to the streetworkers by

confiding that the truce had had a positive effect on the street.

"There have been isolated incidents in the area, but it has been calmer. The shootings and out-and-out violence is way down," said McCann.

"I go along with the truth," said Garcia. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

The truce still appears to be in effect. All the gangs joined other members of the community in a memorial march down 18th Street to honor Boogie the Friday after his death. Only the Latin Kings did not show up.

Boogie was buried the next day, his casket carried by one representative from each club — the Ambrose, Spartans, Latin Counts, Morgan Deuces, and Bishops from 18th Street and the Ridgeway Lords from 26th Street.

AT THE burial, everyone made a farewell toast to Boogie with beer, and then in an unusual ritual, everyone emptied his beer can into the grave.

An important part of the story is how the truce was first achieved.

About five years ago, Boogie was a member of the Rampants, while Villagomez belonged to the Morgan Deuces. Both later dropped out of the gang milieu, said Villagomez.

'Boogie died for the peace!'



DAVID GONZALES

"I had to move out of the neighborhood when I was a kid because of gang static. A gang busted my windows and shot at me with bows and arrows. We had to move out to the suburbs. That's what made me begin to realize we had to change things.

"How would you feel if you couldn't live in the neighborhood you grew up in. We're not savages. It's the system. We see the

real problem as the surroundings we live in."

With a 77 per cent high school dropout rate in Pilsen, many of the community's youths—hanging out on the streets—end up joining gangs.

"BOOGIE AND I knew each other, but we never really associated," said Villagomez. "His brother, Jacob, used to be in the Latin Kings and he was killed and my sister's boyfriend was from 18th Street and he was killed.

"Since Boogie used to associate with the Kings, I was cautious. I didn't know where he was coming from. There was this wall between us, but we both felt the desire to break it down, and we finally did last January."

Villagomez said he and Boogie then became good friends, talked about how foolish gangbanging was, and decided to try and build a truce.

"We felt there was no use for a whole bunch of people getting hurt. Earlier this year a girl got shot and a guy was killed on 28th Street. Things were getting worse.

"There's no use for a whole bunch of people getting hurt because of two dudes

falling out. Everyone had a little turf, but it's all Chicano. It's all Latino.

"Everybody thinks they run this little block. There were a lot of grudges, dead friends, people in jail, people testifying against each other.

"WHEN BOOGIE and I got together, a lot of dudes said, 'Wow, if they can do this, why can't we?' So in March we got the peace going.

"We got this recording group, El Chicano, and we rented the Nuevo Leon restaurant at 28th Street and Trumbull and brought everybody together. We figured summer was coming up and people were getting hurt.

"We told the gangs they should be united for a purpose. The clubs really have a lot of power, power they're not aware of. Instead of destroying, they can be helping to build this community," said Villagomez.

"I just hope this thing doesn't fall apart. Boogie's fight was for social justice. It was all he thought about. He just wanted our people to get together so that we could live better."

Schools key to Pilsen future

BY LEONARD ARONSON

WHEN RAMIRO Gonzales came to Chicago from San Antonio he was 11 years old, couldn't speak English, and was told by his teachers that he was "too dumb to learn anything."

"I couldn't understand them and they labeled me 'subnormal' and sank me into lower vocational' classes. Finally, at 16, they pushed me up to the 8th grade, gave me a diploma, and I dropped out of school," he said.

"Since they had told me I was dumb, I never thought of going on to high school."

The die was cast. For the next 20 years, Ramiro Gonzales "just bounced around" like the prodigal son, working as a dishwasher, nailhandler, busboy, getting in and out of trouble, one of life's apparent losers.

"I couldn't even work as a waiter because I couldn't write or spell," he said. "Everytime I came up for a better job, the reading bit held me back."

HIS STORY captures the fate of thousands of young Spanish-speaking immigrants who, finding Chicago's school system does not deal with their language and cultural differences, become bored, discouraged or bitter, and drop out.

Gonzales is atypical, however, in that unlike many others he eventually pulled himself together:

"One day I just told myself, the only way I'd ever get a good job was to educate myself. I saw my friends were having such a hard time. If I got married and had kids it would have been crazy.

"So I began to study on my own. I studied grammar and did quite a bit of reading. I expanded my vocabulary and got my high school diploma. I was 36 when I started studying.

"I got over 100 college credits thru extension courses, and I found out thru tests that I wasn't dumb, but had average or above average intelligence.

"Now I'm planning to go to Northeastern Illinois University. I need only 15 hours to get my bachelor's. And I'm working with the kids here in Pilsen."

GONZALES, 43 and married, today is student coordinator of two federally-funded night to read programs involving 100 youths in the predominantly Mexican community of Pilsen along 18th street on the near Southwest Side.

He is the prodigal son come home, a man who has started a new life by educating himself, against tremendous odds, and he is

therefore important to a community filled with wayward sons and daughters, where seven out of every 10 high-school-aged youths drop out of school.

"When I started working on this reading program I got the random records of 50 kids at Froebel [a branch of Harrison High School] and didn't find one who was reading at the 9th grade level," said Gonzales.

"They were all at the 3d to 6th grade level. At Harrison, I found one 11th grade student who couldn't read a word."

A growing outrage over the apparent failure of the educational system in Pilsen, manifest in the high drop-out rate and poor reading skills of those children who did remain in school, has galvanized the community over the last year.

DISPARATE FORCES, ranging from parents who never before got involved to gang members who would "fight on sight," rallied around the campaign for a new school, which had become a potent symbol of survival.

Last summer parents forced the ouster of the principal of Jirka Elementary School, who they felt was unresponsive to the community and last month a coalition of

groups shut down Froebel, and battled police.

Ten days later, the board of education culminated eight months of meetings with Pilsen leaders by voting to build a new high school in the Pilsen area, a chief demand of the community.

A great victory. Or was it? The simple commitment to build a new school does not mean the community will help determine its curriculum, or staff makeup.

"What we really must do is make sure that 70 to 80 per cent of the staff in the new school is Mexican," said Ramiro Borja, one community organizer in the new school campaign.

For the main problem is language. Many bright children, especially those arriving from Mexico where the rigorous educational system is considered superior to Chicago's, become turned off by teachers who do not understand or respect them.

"I REMEMBER when I first came here, in 6th grade, I was given a math problem with tons of coal," said Bulmaro Gil, a Mexican-born teacher at the Cooper Upper Grade Center in Pilsen.

"I knew what tons were and did the problem correctly, but afterwards I asked the teacher what was coal. She threw me out of class for being a wise guy," he said.

Ricarda Saenz, a teacher in the bi-lingual center at Cooper, said that tho the school is 95 per cent "Chicanito," "there were no teachers who could speak spanish at the school until this past year."

Since 60 to 80 per cent of the youths in Pilsen, a major Mexican port of entry, speak English as a second language, the community's schools cannot be effective unless they have more spanish speaking teachers, leaders feel.

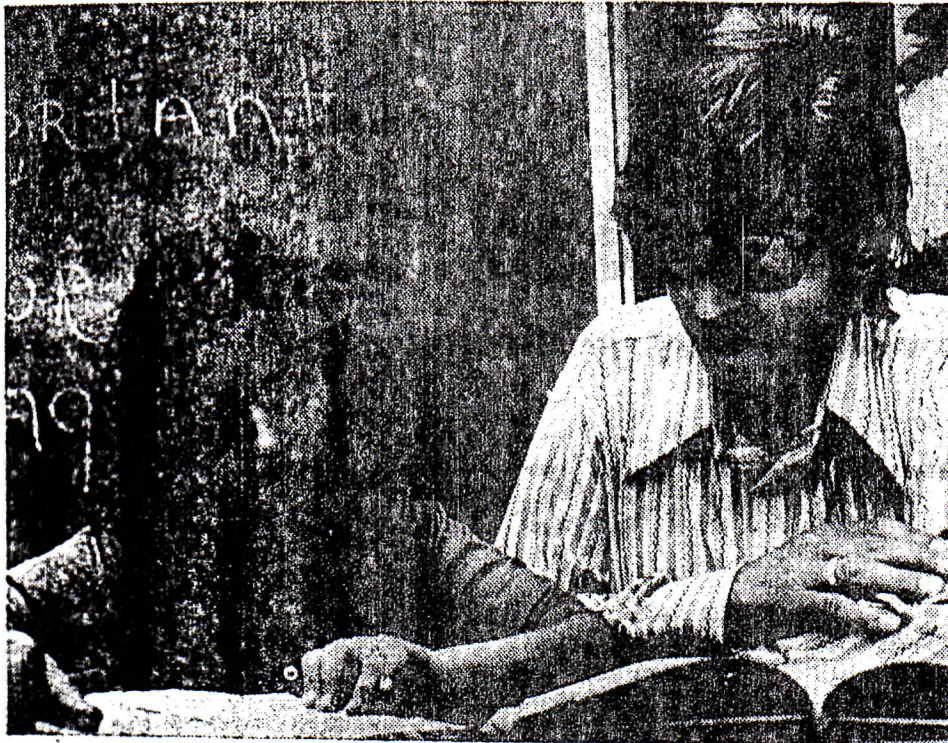
A newly compiled federal study of Chicago's school system shows that of 558,825 students in the public schools in 1972, 61,978—or 11 per cent—are of Latin origin.

Of more than 25,000 teachers, only 390, or 1.56 per cent, are of Latin origin.

THE IMBALANCE is even greater when one considers the student-teacher ratio.

If there is one English speaking teacher for every 30 students in the system at large, in the Latin communities, the ratio is at best one Spanish-speaking teacher for every 159 Spanish-speaking students. Actu-

Education is the key to Pilsen's future



CHICAGO TODAY Photo by Guy Bona

Pilsen Community Council volunteer Ray Gonzales lends a tutoring hand to 10-year-old Mirthala Vega in popular right to read program.

ally, it is higher since Latin teachers are spread thruout the system.

"There are simply not enough teachers in the classrooms who understand the kids," said Carmelo Melendez of the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

"Take the child who goes to first grade and learns in nutrition that cereal and orange juice and toast are the right things to eat. Now, the Chicano or Puerto Rican child may be getting re-fried beans and tortillas.

"It's traumatic for him. 'Why am I different? I must be less,' he thinks. And this is just one example of what begins happening in the very first grade.

"Only when the system begins to recognize that the cultural heritage of the child is his dignity will he be able to relate to other things," said Melendez.

Other factors which Pilsenites feel contribute to their high dropout rate are the fragmentation of education, where children first go to a grammar school, then an upper grade center, then Froebel for 9th grade, and then Harrison.

THE COMMUNITY also cites the distance from Harrison, at 24th and California, as a problem.

The main problem, however, is getting good teachers, said Raimondo Patlan, a Pilsen muralist who last month visited the Republic of China with a contingent of American artists.

"One of the biggest impressions for me was a quotation we saw in a school where Mao went when he was a kid. It said, 'Before you can become the people's teacher, you must become the people's student.'"

"That's especially important here in Pilsen. The teachers must be re-educated. They can't come into Pilsen, sit around, feel they are special, and then teach kids to compete instead of to learn," he said.

"You cannot teach us unless you understand us."

"In a different neighborhood with plenty of cars, school buses, and safe streets the distance would hardly be the issue," said one position paper justifying a new school.

But in Pilsen, with unsafe streets, few cars, poor public transportation, warring gangs, coupled with "boring, irrelevant or even incomprehensible classes for a destination," kids cut school and eventually drop out.

Pilsen is at war with inequality

BY LEONARD ARONSON

FOR JUAN MORALES, Pilsen is the front line.

The some Latins charge that the predominantly Mexican-American working class neighborhood along 18th Street is not representative of the city's diverse Spanish-speaking groups, Morales argues:

"If our fight for equality is going to be fought, it will be fought in places like Pilsen."

Pilsen is a classic example of inner-city decay.

It has poor schools [a 71 per cent high school dropout rate]; dwindling employment [a 28 per cent decline from 57,000 to 42,000 jobs between 1957 and 1970]; bad housing, both old [an average age of 70 years] and disappearing [a 23.5 per cent drop from 8,500 to 6,500 living units between 1940 and 1970]; high crime rates, poor health and recreation facilities, and a host of other problems.

ON THE other hand, Pilsen—a geographically distinct area in which a variety of forces, ranging from a new sense of ethnic and community pride to an active resolve not to be disbursed—may be able to reverse the trend and improve itself.

It is a community in delicate balance between survival and extinction, many residents feel.

"It has been a difficult task to try and get this community together," said Morales, who as president of the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council has surfaced as a

leader and spokesman in a community deeply suspicious of both.

"But if this community can get together it can make a difference in what happens to Latins throughout Chicago.

"A lot of things have happened and will continue to happen in Pilsen before they happen in other communities," he said.

"For instance, last summer members of the Chicano community were able to have the School Board remove the principal of Birka Elementary School who we felt wasn't responsive to our needs. It was the first time any Latins were able to do that."

MORALES ALSO pointed to the commitment by the School Board last month, following eight months of negotiations, to build a new high school in the Pilsen area, and to moves by the CTA to hire more Latins after a riot in Pilsen over discriminatory hiring practices brought that issue to a head.

"Several years back the community organized and was involved in stopping a large scale urban renewal program, and now we are working, with some assistance from the Colleges of Arts and Architecture and Urban Affairs at Circle Campus on

developing our own renewal plan for the area."

Another significant achievement has been the increase in bi-lingual teachers in Pilsen thru Operation Highsight, the community component of a federally-funded teacher's corps program sponsored by the Circle Campus.

Morales, who is director of Operation Highsight, said 24 teachers graduated in the first class, 20 of whom were Latin and 14 of whom stayed in Pilsen. Next June, 38 students, 30 of whom are Latin, will be graduated.

MORALES, 46, has had strong feelings for "my community" a long time. "I first went on a protest march in San Antonio when I was 8 years old," he said.

He was born in Texas, worked as a migrant worker in the fields, and came to Chicago 17 years ago, working a variety of jobs, for nine years as a waiter at the University Club and then as a traffic manager for a printing firm.

He first became involved in community work in 1967 when Maria, the oldest of his four children, began having trouble in school.

"Maria was going to Froebel [the 9th grade branch of Harrison High School] and she told me that a teacher told her not to carry too many books, because the kids would call her a book worm and laugh at her, and besides, she would never get a higher education.

"I had always encouraged my youngsters to get an education and I didn't like that," said Morales.

"NOW, MARIA had always been on the honor roll and she had received a certificate for perfect attendance for the last two years of school before she went to Harrison," said Morales.

"But at Harrison her grades started dropping and she was cutting classes and a counselor told me I had better take her out because she would never make it thru high school.

"I said, 'But she had made the honor roll and had perfect attendance. How could this happen?' And I began looking into it and found that the classes she was cutting, I would have cut myself.

"I asked, 'Why are you cutting music class?' and she said, 'Look Dad, the teacher yells at the kids all day and the kids yell at the teacher. Nothing else happens.

"If I took the side of the kids it would be disrespectful, which you taught me never to be, and I can't join the teacher. So I stopped going."

"IN PILSEN," Morales said, "I think people are more aware of the problems because they are living so close to them—because it's housing, unemployment, poor education, or lack of youth facilities.

"The people who have left this community for more affluent areas haven't really stopped to meet the problems face to face, to recognize them as discrimination, and to fight them on behalf of all Latinos.

"If you are going to change these things, you have to work together. That's what I want to do. Help create a community that will be able to stand up and get justice."

Last of a series.