

"Blowout!" informs and challenges readers

Mario T. García | May. 3, 2011 NCR Today

This past weekend, I was on a panel at the *Los Angeles Times* Book Festival at the University of Southern California (USC). The panel, in part, had to do with my recent book *Blowout! Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011) and co-authored with the subject of the book, Sal Castro. The book came out in February and is selling quite well.

It is an oral history of Castro who, as one of the very few Mexican-American teachers in the East Los Angeles public schools in the 1960s, inspired and led his students to stage perhaps the largest high school student strike in U.S. history when more than 20,000 walked out of their schools in what came to be known as the "blowouts" or walkouts.

The students struck for a week in early March 1968 to protest years of public school segregation and discrimination affecting Mexican-American students not only in L.A. but throughout the Southwest in what were literally called "Mexican schools."

The blowouts also commenced the urban Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s in contrast to the farmworkers' struggle led by César Chávez in rural California.

The student protests shook the expansive L.A. school district and began a slow process of reform to deal with such problems as the high number of dropouts, the tracking system that processed many Chicano students into vocational education, the lack of college counseling to students, the low expectations by too many teachers and principals, and, in general, a lack of respect and understanding of the history and culture of Mexican-Americans.

Regrettably, while certain reforms over the last four decades have been achieved, many of these problems remain. While the book pays particular attention to the blowouts, it is also the personal story of a remarkable, charismatic and devoted teacher, Sal Castro, who retired in 2003 after more than four decades of committed teaching.

But the book is more than an oral history or autobiography told through me. It is also what in Latin America is referred to as a *testimonio*. A *testimonio* is an oral history between an activist involved in social justice issues and a scholar or journalist. But it is more. While an oral history produces facts, a *testimonio* also challenges readers to take up the cause of the subject's story.

Perhaps it is like an epistle. In this case, the text calls on others to further the Chicano struggle for educational justice and, in general, for democratizing our educational system that has relegated too many minority students to a dead-end education.

My hope, and that of Sal Castro, is that our book will inspire others to take up this challenge.

Source URL (retrieved on 12/12/2013 - 08:43): <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/blowout-informs-and-challenges-readers>