

Coalition is formed to save Barrio Logan and unite with other communities

# GENTRIFICATION IS NOTHING BUT A FORM OF GENOCIDE AND DESTRUCTION OF OUR CULTURE!

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The practice of forcing people off their lands and homes is nothing new. This is exactly what happen after the United States military invasion of the northern half of Mexico in 1846. Literally every home, ranch, and the traditional lands of the Mexican/Indian peoples was stolen and illegally occupied by White/European settlers. Within 30 years after the invasion (by 1880), through the worst type of violence, murder, destruction of whole villages, hangings, and brutal beatings, the European/Anglos (who today call themselves “Americans”), stole and occupied almost every inch of our lands.

## THE GRINGO MEDIA AND SCHOOLS HIDE THE TRUTH

Like so many other things, the causes and results of this genocide, exploitation, and destruction of the Mexican/Indian people have been downed played and kept secret by the media, schools, museums, libraries, and other “settler intellectual institutions”. These institutions have been extremely successful in hiding history and “twisting things around”. They have been able to turned illegal European/White settlers into “Americans”, and the “real Americans” (the Mexicans and the Indians) into “illegal aliens”. They effectively keep the great majority of the people within the borders of the United States, especially Mexi-

cans and other oppressed people, ignorant of the truth and with no idea of the history of genocide, racism, and forced relocation, that has been waged upon our communities. It is something that continues today in the form of “gentrification”: a process that literally destroys working class and poor communities and rebuilds them for the benefit of middle class and rich European/White people.

This is why it's so important for Mexicano/Raza media workers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers, to “stop talking” and get involved in real-concrete struggle. We need those with “professional”



Community residents and activists at Encuentro 1/7/10. Don Diego Post Hall, Barrio Logan, San Diego.

skills to join the workers and the poor to oppose this campaign of destruction being waged against our people and culture.

It was to address this on-going campaign against Mexicanos and other oppressed people, that in November of 1999, Unión del Barrio joined to formed the “Save Our Barrios Coalition”. The coalition wanted to specifically concentrate its immediate attention to stopping the destruction of “Barrio Logan”. Located in the City of San Diego, Barrio Logan is one of the oldest Mexican communities in the United States. It is the home of Chicano Park and a city where literally dozens of successful struggles have been waged by the Barrio Logan residents.

The Coalition is currently made up of the Brown

Berets de Aztlán, Chicano Park Steering Committee, and Unión del Barrio. It has officially been endorsed by MEChA San Diego



Cathy Espitia representing Unión del Barrio/Chicano Mexicano Prison Project

State and the Raza Rights Coalition. All of these groups are committed to Mexican/Raza self-determination and are independent of (free from) government and corporation funding.

## ONLY THE RICH BENEFIT FROM GENTRIFICATION

Throughout November and December (2009), the Coalition held meetings to discuss and define the question of gentrification and what this means to Barrio Logan and other working class and poor communities. Out of these discussions, the Coalition circulated a flyer that explained Gentrification

as a “process where ‘working class’ neighborhoods are ‘renovated or redeveloped’ for the benefit of rich corporations. Longtime residents are forced out of the community and only wealthy people are able to afford the ‘new homes, apartments, or condominiums’ that are

being built. This is what is happening to Barrio Logan. The city government has created ‘community planning/development groups’ who have very little connection to the community. These state-sponsored planning groups are stacked with government representatives and lawyers of rich and powerful developers (corporations).” [Read flyer: *Unless We Act Now Barrio Logan Will Soon Be Gone!*]

## POLITICIANS AND THE RICH USE “PUBLIC” MEETINGS AS COVERS FOR THEIR CORRUPTION

From these discussions, the Coalition identified the “bag of tricks” used by the “system” to keep people from effectively struggling against Gentrification. They are tactics designed to tire-out, demoralize, confuse, and frustrate community people. For example:

1. Meetings are held at times or days that working class people cannot attend.
2. The terminology and “plans” presented at meetings by government officials are almost impossible to understand.
3. The meetings are purposely made boring, making them unbearable, especially for people who have just worked an 8 to 10 hour-day.
4. The meetings themselves are extremely long and rarely productive.
5. Meetings are often canceled and moved, frustrating community residents.
6. Lawyers and representatives of the corporations and city/county/state governments, who are paid to attend the meetings, “hog” and manipulate the meetings. They effectively maneuver to keep community people from having any real input to decisions being made.
7. Representatives and lobbyists for the rich, regularly meet with government officials and make “deals behind close doors”. The “open” community meetings become a farce and “dog and pony shows”, as decisions and agreements have already been made.

## **GENTRIFICATION IS PART OF A CAMPAIGN OF WAR BEING WAGED AGAINST OUR COMMUNITIES**

8. Those attending “public planning meetings” are often tricked and used as pawns by government and rich corporations (developers) to cover their corrupt-underhanded dirty deals.

As part of Coalition’s strategy as to how best approach the struggle to fight against the destruction of our barrios, on Thurs. Jan. 7, 2010, a community “encuentro” was held at the Don Diego Post Hall, Logan Ave, San Diego. The objective of the encuentro was to inform and get “feed back” from community residents and activists.

The encuentro speakers were Pablo Aceves (Unión del Barrio), Joe Cremeans (Brown Berets de Aztlán), Cathy Espitia (Chicano Mexicano Prison Project/Unión del Barrio), and David Rico (Brown Berets de Aztlán). Over 60 people attended the meeting, which included old and young, and representatives from the Chicano Park Steering Committee, Brown Berets de Aztlán, Unión del Barrio, SDSU MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), and Latinos Unidos, a group from East San Diego who is also suffering the attacks from “Gentrification”.

### **GENTRIFICATION IS ABOUT FIXING THE HOOD FOR THE RICH, NOT LA RAZA!**

The message from the Coalition, given at the encuentro and in a flyer disseminated in the community explained the goals of the Coalition as:

1. To work with all honest forces who are on the side of the community.
2. Organize an Encuentro to listen and discuss how the community feels about the development taking place in their community.
3. Work on a series of community actions to stop the gentrification and save Barrio Logan.
4. Unite with other barrios as a means to save all communities that are currently under attack.
5. DEMAND the voice of our communities be heard!!!

Cathy Espitia (member of Unión del Barrio, and whose family has lived in Logan for generations) gave an excellent presentation summing up the situation by explaining that gentrification is an attack on the Mexican community, our culture and our heritage. She describe how “renovation” is all about fixing the hood for “rich white folks” and about “destroying” anything that has to do with Mexicanos. The police station, the gang injunctions, eminent domain, the rezoning, the ICE raids, the police road blocks (which take away cars from people), raising of rents, etc., explained Cathy, are

all ways that the rich white corporations are using to kick our people out of our own homes and our own community.

David Rico (of the Brown Berets de Aztlán, Barrio Logan resident, and activist for over 30



**Joe Cremeans (Brown Berets de Aztlán) and Pablo Aceves (Unión del Barrio) speaking at the Encuentro to Save Our Barrios 1/7/10**

years), talked about the power of the people when they are united. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to hear from everyone; for everyone to have a voice and give suggestions or ideas on how we can save our community. Compañero David said that everyone is important; that even if you don’t live in Logan, this is a struggle of all Raza, because gentrification impacts all of us –in one way or another.

Joe Cremeans (a Brown Beret de Aztlán leader in San Diego) explained how the government and developers make decisions and no one in the community really knows about what is taking place. He told everyone that Gentrification is happening everywhere. Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, etc. Compañero Joe said that we should not give up, that it is not too late to stop the destruction of Barrio Logan. He gave an example in New

York, where the community scored a victory against a rich slum lord. Joe went over the committees that need to be formed in order to make our work effective. These committees included (a) Publicity-monthly bulletin or newsletter, (b) Research, (c) Fund Raising, (d) Outreach, and (e) Logistics



**Long time activists David Rico (Brown Berets de Aztlán) and Irene Mena (Chicano Park Steering Committee and Chicano Mexicano Prison Project)**

### **THE GOVERNMENT NEVER REPRESENTS THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE**

During the last part of the encuentro agenda, which the Coalition saw as the most important part of the meeting, those present gave their opin-

ion and feed back on the issue and what they felt should be done. People were extremely angry at the past and current representatives on the city council. They questioned why they are never present to defend the rights of the people. Some severely criticized past city council members Juan Vargas and Nick Inzunza, and the current council representative, Ben Hueso. The community residents said that these “so-called representatives” are not only useless when it comes to defending the rights of the community, but actually of being on the side of those violating the rights of the people. They felt that these council representatives have been and continue to be in the “pockets” of the rich white developers. And in the case of Inzunza, he was accused of being one of the worst slum lords in the city.

### **ORGANIZATION IS THE SOLUTION!**

Many in attendance volunteered to join subcommittees to begin immediate work on this issue. Finances, outreach, publicity, research, logistics, and so forth, were committees signaled out as important to this struggle. Also, that a press/media conference and other actions such as protests, marches, etc. calling for an immediate moratorium on gentrification projects be held ASAP. There was a consensus that until the interests of the community are taken into account, all deals with corporations and rich investors be stopped.

Compa Pablo Aceves (a leading member of Unión del Barrio) was the translator of the event. He did an excellent job summing the essence of what the speakers were saying. Pablo’s interventions, calling for community power, were very motivating and he ended the forum with a loud and militant “Chicano Movement hand clap”.

Unión del Barrio sees the question of Gentrification as part of a campaign of war directed against the Mexicano/Raza community that includes ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raids, incarceration of our youth, cut backs in education, and destruction of our culture. Therefore, the struggle to save our barrios must include all sincere and honest elements within our community,

which must include workers, the unemployed, students, professionals, small business owners, homeboys/girls, and social service workers. Only united into an organization that is disciplined and politically advanced, will we win our liberation. Venceremos! [Photos by Monica Bernal/RPMA]

### **OUR BARRIOS ARE NOT FOR SALE! LET’S PRESERVE OUR CULTURE, HERITAGE, AND HISTORY!**

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