

## March 8, 1970: Daybreak Star's Groundbreaking

It's not often — and not often enough — when indigenous peoples invade the lands of their erstwhile invaders to reclaim what was theirs in the first place. In the early 1970s, emboldened by the Black and Chicano liberation movements then transpiring across the United States, Native American tribes nationwide began demanding rights and lands long denied them by the U.S. federal government. One of the first noteworthy events of this movement occurred in Seattle on the date in focus here.



UIPC demonstrators outside Fort Lawton, Seattle, March 1970

On that fateful Sunday morning, more than 100 members and supporters of the United Indian People's Council (UIPC) took direct action to reclaim a portion of Fort Lawton, a 1,100-acre U.S. military base located in Seattle's Magnolia neighborhood. The fort had recently been decommissioned and declared surplus by the U.S. Army, and was up for grabs, with Seattle's city government expressing strong interest in turning the land into a public city park. Earlier that year, UIPC had approached Henry M. Jackson, then Washington state's junior U.S. senator, about the possibility of using the land for a cultural center and social services provider for Pacific Northwest indigenous peoples. While Jackson politely referred UIPC to the U.S. Department of the Interior, both Jackson and Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman made it clear to the press that they intended to deny that possibility.

Undaunted, UIPC decided upon nonviolent direct action as a means to acquire the land at Fort Lawton. They took their inspiration from another group of Native American activists with similar aims who had recently staged a successful occupation of Alcatraz Island, the former federal maximum-security prison near San Francisco. Their claim to legal ownership of the land at Fort Lawton was based on rights granted under certain U.S.-Indian treaties signed in 1865 that promised reversion of surplus military lands to their original owners. Participants in the action included Bob Satiacum, a Puyallup tribal leader and native treaty fishing rights advocate; Bernie Whitebear of the Colville Confederated Tribe; and Leonard Peltier, the future American Indian Movement leader and political prisoner, at the time a Seattle resident.

The activists invaded the fort from all sides, some scaling the western bluff overlooking Puget Sound, some climbing over fences, some attempting to enter through two heavily guarded gates

using diversionary tactics. When some of the activists were first discovered by a roving military police patrol after setting up a tepee and a small campsite inside the fort, Satiacum attempted to read a statement explaining UIPC's action. The statement read, in part:

*"We, the native Americans, reclaim the land known as Fort Lawton in the name of all American Indians by the right of discovery.*

*"We feel that this land of Fort Lawton is more suitable to pursue an Indian way of life, as determined by our own standards. By this we mean 'this place does not resemble most Indian reservations.' It has potential for modern facilities, adequate sanitation facilities, health care facilities, fresh running water, educational facilities, fisheries research facilities and transportation facilities."*

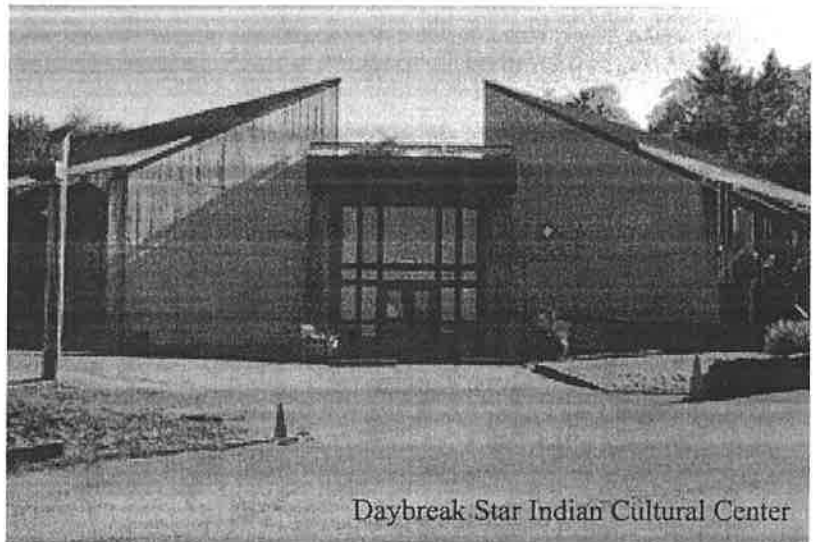
The remainder of the proclamation was drowned out by the shouts of a Military Police sergeant, leading a 40-man MP platoon that had been dispatched from nearby Fort Lewis onto the scene, ordering his men to "move in and take them away." The MPs then began carting any activists they could catch into the Fort Lawton stockade. Eighty-five persons were detained, questioned, and released that evening with letters of expulsion.

The symbolic "invasion" was thus repelled, and the activists' expulsion from the fort appeared at the time to be a defeat for UIPC. However, UIPC continued to confront the federal and Seattle city governments concerning their claim to the land at Fort Lawton, immediately calling for demonstrations the next morning at both the fort (where many of the activists involved in the invasion remained camped outside the front gates) and the U.S. Federal Courthouse in downtown Seattle. Allegations of brutality by the MPs inside the stockade on the first day of the invasion were quickly reported and would remain a point of contention among protesters as the story unfolded.

The protesters remained outside Fort Lawton for three weeks. The encampment and vigil they kept there became known as "Resurrection City," and local community members kept them supplied with food, clothing, and moral support. Another attempt to invade the fort occurred on March 15. While 77 were arrested that day, the protesters agreed not to resist arrest, and this incident was thus peaceful. On April 2, the day UIPC agreed to break down Resurrection City and shift their strategy from occupation to negotiation, one final, unsuccessful attempt to occupy the fort was made, more as a symbolic gesture than the first two attempts.

During the following year, negotiations between UIPC and the Seattle city government slowly unfolded, often at a frustrating pace. Actual formal negotiations did not begin until June 1971. UIPC's persistence finally led to a formal victory in November 1971, when it was agreed that UIPC would lease twenty acres of the Fort Lawton property for a 99-year period, with options for successive 99-year leases without renegotiation. The agreement was approved, executed, and incorporated on March 29, 1972.

The resulting local institution, Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center, officially opened on May 13, 1977, under the auspices and operation of UIPC (known today as United Indians of All Tribes). The center's name, as well as the architectural design of the building, was inspired by the legend of the vision of Black Elk, a Dakota Sioux medicine man. Daybreak Star was originally the name of an herb which, when dropped upon the earth in Black Elk's vision, exploded into the tree of life, representing the uniting of all races. The building's design was a groundbreaking attempt to integrate Native American symbolism into contemporary architecture.



Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center

Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center was directed by Bernie Whitebear until his death on July 16, 2000. A lavish ceremony to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the Fort Lawton occupation was held at the center on March 8, 2010.

—Jeff Stevens. Sources: "Jackson Checks Lawton Scene," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 1, 1970, p. A6; "Army Repels Indians At Forts Lawton, Lewis," *The Bremerton Sun*, March 9, 1970, p. 7; Richard Simmons, "Indians Invade Ft. Lawton," *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, March 9, 1970, p. A1; "Army Disrupts Indian Claim on Ft. Lawton," *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, March 9, 1970, p. B; Jerry Bergman and Paul Henderson, "Indians 'Invade' Army Posts," *The Seattle Times*, March 9, 1970, p. A11; Don Hannula and Jerry Bergsman, "Indians Drum Up Support for Fort Claim," *The Seattle Times*, March 10, 1970, p. A1; "Indians Put Pickets Outside Ft. Lawton In Effort For Site," *The Bremerton Sun*, March 10, 1970, p. 24; Richard Simmons, "MP's Arrest 77 Indians at Lawton," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 16, 1970, p. 1; "Geronimo's Revenge," *Helix*, March 20, 1970, p. 4; "Proclamation," *Helix*, March 20, 1970, p. 5; Brenda Dunn, "The Indian Arts Center that nobody thought would happen," *Seattle Weekly*, May 18, 1977, p. 7; Lossom Allen, "By Right of Discovery: United Indians of All Tribes Retakes Fort Lawton, 1970," *Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project* ([http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/FtLawton\\_takeover.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/FtLawton_takeover.htm)).

# Vision, Mission, and Goals Statement

*Adopted by the UIATF Board of Directors, October 19, 2013*

## VISION

To be a social service provider, community center, and cultural home for urban Indians.

## MISSION

Provide educational, cultural and social services that reconnect indigenous people in the Puget Sound region to their heritage by strengthening their sense of belonging and significance as Native people.

## GOALS

Please click here to read our [United Indians Strategic Plan](#) approved by the Board of Directors on October 19, 2013

## UNITED INDIANS STRATEGIC PLAN

### STRATEGIC PROGRAMATIC PRIORITIES

While United Indians will continue to provide and maintain its programs in its primary service areas, Educational, Cultural, Social and Socio-economic, it has identified the following strategic priorities for expanding its services and strengthening its infrastructure in order to best meet our community's current and emerging needs:

1. Promote UIATF as a community – based organization and cultural center for the urban Indian population
2. Ensure that Elders are able to access cultural and social support services
3. Strengthen support services for Native Youth
4. Expand Family Services Programming
5. Increase Department of Corrections Cultural Programming
6. Develop Economic Opportunities for Native population

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## Central Area Civil Rights Committee & CORE

African Americans in Seattle faced segregation in housing, employment practices, commercial and social establishments, hospitals, schools, and restaurants that was almost as rigid as that of the Jim Crow South. Although Washington State had laws against racial discrimination, they were inadequately enforced. Civil rights activists in Seattle, then, needed to prove the extent of institutionalized discrimination, as well as struggle to change it.

Housing segregation, officially instituted in the early 1900s, confined the majority of Seattle's African-American community to the neighborhood known as the Central District, located between downtown Seattle and Lake Washington. By the 1960s, the Central District had developed into the heart of civil rights struggle in Seattle, and several organizations were founded in the neighborhood to combat the institutionalized segregation and lack of services.

Earlier civil rights groups, like the municipal Civic Unity Committee, drew together city officials and African-American elites to lobby for small changes. By the early 1960s, however, the civil rights community in Seattle began to combine these lobbying and legislative tactics with large-scale campaigns that involved grassroots organizing and the direct action tactics being popularized in the south. The Central Area Civil Rights Committee (CACRC), founded in 1961, drew together the Seattle-area leadership of longstanding organizations like the NAACP, the Urban League, and the newly-formed Seattle Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) chapter into a united force that could mobilize around specific campaigns.

The leaders of CACRC were drawn from the elite of Seattle's African-American community, and its most prominent members were First AME Church minister Reverend John H. Adams; Seattle NAACP President Charles V. Johnson; CORE Director Walter



Seattle CORE activists taking a rest from picketing a discriminatory real estate office, 1964. (Photo courtesy of the Seattle Municipal Archives.)

Hundley; and the Urban League's Executive Director, Edwin Pratt. The combined membership of CACRC's groups reached almost 3,000, and pulled many more supporters into their orbit.

One of the most active groups within Seattle's CACRC was the Congress of Racial Equality, or CORE, a local chapter of the national organization founded in 1942 to employ non-violent direct action tactics to combat segregation in the South. Inspired by CORE's freedom rides in the South, a CORE chapter was formed in Seattle in 1961. Seattle's CORE chapter brought the national political strategy to bear in their campaigns for open housing, against employer discrimination, and for education reform in Seattle. In October 1961, CORE launched a campaign, in conjunction with other CACRC groups, against employment discrimination in the downtown area. Activists alternated formal negotiations with boycotts, pickets, and direct action techniques like the "shoe-in" or "shop-in," where protesters filled grocery carts or tried on numerous pairs of shoes and left without buying or taking any items, tying up the stores' business. Seattle CORE achieved its first boycott victory in 1962, and by 1964 had won more than 250 new jobs for African-Americans in downtown stores. [CORE's Campaign Against Employment Discrimination in 1960s Seattle]

CORE's focus on hiring practices culminated in the 1964 Drive for Equal Employment in Downtown Stores, or DEEDS, campaign, intended to use the previous campaign's victories in individual stores to win policies that would benefit larger layers of black workers. CORE formed research teams to poll downtown businesses to determine the extent of job discrimination, and then used the results to request business owners to change their practices. When their polite queries went unanswered, CORE, in conjunction with CACRC, the NAACP, the Greater Seattle Council of Churches, and other organizations initiated a boycott from October 1964–January 1965. The boycott, however, was not a success, for it had little impact on the downtown Christmas season and garnered scant citywide attention. The failure of the DEEDS campaign, despite initial successes, nearly bankrupted and demoralized the cadre of activists in CORE. [CORE's Drive for Equal Employment in Downtown Seattle, 1964]

Much of the chapter's momentum during the period came from their involvement in the open housing campaign. Beginning in the 1950s, Seattle's civil rights community had advocated for fair, non-discriminatory housing, and by 1962, African-American community leaders led small protests for open housing. In 1963, CORE initiated "Operation Windowshop," encouraging African-American families to visit open houses and realtors outside of the Central District. When these earlier protests met huge resistance from white neighborhoods and realtors, CORE and much of Seattle's civil rights movement focused their energies on changing city legislation. Open housing

advocates won the creation of the Seattle Human Rights Commission to draft a citywide open housing ordinance, and successfully lobbied the City Council to put it on the ballot for March 10, 1964. The prospect of the ordinance generated a vicious backlash against anti-discrimination activists, who used bombs and cross burnings to harass open housing advocates. [The 1964 Housing Election: How the Press Influenced the Campaign]

Despite a vigorous campaign by CORE and other activists in the city, the measure was defeated. Convinced that legislation and lobbying was not enough, in March 1964, the Seattle chapter launched a picketing campaign against Picture Floor Plans, a large realtor who refused to sell to black buyers. The Picture Floor pickets revealed a shift in CORE's strategy. Employing more aggressive tactics, activists sang, chanted, heckled, and tried to force their way into the building. When a Picture Floor Plans employee struck a protester, the chapter suspended the pickets altogether. Though this was a minor incident, it revealed a new wave of activists within Seattle CORE and CORE nationally who were becoming frustrated with an adherence to nonviolence and non-retaliation, and moving toward other methods of activism.

By 1968, younger, more militant activists were abandoning a weakened CORE in favor of newly formed organizations like the Black Students' Union and the Black Panther Party. The CACRC, too, which had presented itself as the voice of Seattle's African-American community in the early 1960s, realized that they could no longer hold together a coalition of groups that were beginning to develop divergent aims. The differences came to a head in 1968 when the conservative leadership of the CACRC took a stance against black control of schools in the Central District in favor of closing the schools and "forcing integration" by busing black students into other parts of the city. To many residents of the Central District and a new wave of activists, this would disadvantage Central District children and was a single-minded focus on integration as a principle, rather than an emphasis on development and empowerment within Seattle's black community.

The emphasis on community control in the Central District, realized in different ways by CAMP and the Black Panther Party, inspired the development of new movements in Seattle's other racially confined communities. Following the examples of the Central District, these groups worked to reclaim and revitalize their own neighborhoods. In March of 1970, Native Americans occupied Fort Lawton Army Base in Seattle and claimed it for all "urban Indians." In the International District, Asian-American activists worked to preserve the ID and expand affordable housing and social services in Seattle's traditionally Asian community. In 1972, Chicano/a activists reclaimed an abandoned school in the Beacon Hill neighborhood to found El Centro de la Raza community center. Tyree Scott founded the United Construction Workers of America and combined a

campaign for racial and economic justice within the previously all-white building trades. Emphasis on community control and empowerment would continue to inform the next chapter of Seattle's civil rights activism.

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## Chicano/Latino Activism in Seattle, 1960s-1970s

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, many in Seattle's Chicano/Latino community felt an acute isolation. The then small community would see a transformation as a result of the Chicano Movement emerging throughout the United States. Locally, the movement gave rise to institutions such as El Centro de La Raza, which helped build a Chicano community where none had existed before. Alliances with other communities of color were essential to the movement's success. The broad alliance for civil rights that emerged allowed for further progress within the Chicano community at a time when the local population was miniscule compared to the urban Chicano communities of the Southwest. This collaboration across racial lines was a unique development in the Northwest, and is an integral part of the legacy of civil rights activism in the region. The development of the Chicano community also resulted from work done on both the eastern and western sides of the state, with activism in the Yakima Valley providing an impetus for activism in the Puget Sound region as people, especially students, migrated to Western Washington.

### The Brown Berets

Throughout the period, activism on campuses was accompanied by activism in the community. The Brown Berets emerged as a key organization linking students to communities and to young people not enrolled in college. Brown Beret chapters formed in both Yakima and at the University of Washington in Seattle, and by 1970 had attracted more than 200 members. Originally founded in California, the Brown Berets gave a new and tougher look to the movement in the late 1960s.

What would become the Brown Berets originated when six young Chicanos formed the core of the Young Citizens for Community Action (YCCA) in May 1966 in Los Angeles, California. Far from radical, the group participated in the Community Service Organization (CSO), where they met with political leaders who, according to historian Ernesto Chavez, "schooled them in the ways of practical politics and community organizing and who also introduced them to the now famed Cesar Chavez." With financial help from Father John B. Luce, rector of the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany in Lincoln Heights, the group opened La Piranya, a coffeehouse that doubled as an office and meeting place where prominent civil rights speakers spoke to increasing numbers of Chicano youth.

This activity attracted police who began harassing young people at the coffeehouse. YCCA responded by organizing protest demonstrations at nearby sheriff stations. Young leaders such as David Sanchez viewed harassment at the coffeehouse as symptomatic of the larger problem of police abuse in the Chicano community and advocated a more militant stance. In January 1968, the YCCA adopted a new image and uniform, becoming the Brown Berets. As Chavez writes, "Law enforcement abuses had transformed them from moderate reformers into visually distinctive and combative crusaders on behalf of justice for Chicanos" (Chavez). By 1969, *La Causa*, the Berets' newspaper, reported that the Brown Berets had approximately 28 chapters throughout the West Coast and Midwest. Two of these chapters were in the state of Washington.

### Chicano Activism at UW

The UW Brown Berets most likely originated in Granger, Washington. The group was then transplanted to Seattle as students from the Yakima Valley were recruited to the University of Washington in the late sixties and early seventies. According to former student activist Pedro Acevez, it was Carlos Trevino, Trevino's brother, and Luis Gamboa, who first "came up with this Brown Beret thing."

The organization consisted mostly of motivated, militant university students and youth from Seattle's Chicano community. Rogelio Ribjas recalls that the Seattle chapter was a "group of men and women that wanted to work at the community level." Much like the groups in Southern California, the UW Brown Berets donned their distinctive headgear and military fatigues as a symbolic statement that they were willing to fight for their communities, bringing attention to the war at home in the *barrios*, and working against racial discrimination, poverty, and police brutality. The Brown Berets uncompromising stance on these issues attracted Chicano youth to the organization.

Referring to instances when the Brown Berets acted in defense of students being harassed or intimidated by others, Pedro Acevez recalls, "I perceived them as a positive. [Sometimes] the muscle of the brown berets came in handy." On the other hand, older members of the community were more reluctant to support the confrontational tactics of the Brown Berets, reflecting the generational differences in the Chicano community.

The Brown Berets initiated or participated in a number of programs targeted at the specific needs of the local community. According to Jesus Lemos, "In the winter of 1970, the Seattle chapter organized a 'Food for Peace' drive to gather food, clothing and money in order to make and distribute Christmas baskets to the Chicanos in the Yakima Valley who were in the most need" (Lemos). The UW chapter also engaged in other activities such as the creation of a legal defense fund for Chicano activists and active involvement in support of United Farm Worker Union activities such as the grape boycott. As Riojas recalls, "We were raising money for UFW, going to Olympia, and helping [in the] community." The Brown Berets financed most activity through collection drives and by requesting funds from sympathetic staff and faculty at the University.

### **Emergence of Las Chicanas**

Another key group that emerged in the early 1970s was a women's organization called Las Chicanas, which focused on women's issues within the Chicano/Latino Community. Composed primarily of students and staff at the University of Washington, the organization was born in 1970 out of the need to address issues pertinent to women who struggled both against sexism and racism.

Out of its concern for racism, the group walked out of the Coalition of University Organizations for Women's Rights in 1971 to address the issue of race, which was a secondary concern for the mainstream women's movement. They later joined the Campus Third World Women's Coalition. However, they eventually decided to meet separately and support other ethnic women's groups when needed. As noted in UW MEChA's Newsletter, *La Chispa*, in 1972, Las Chicanas communicated, "In [deciding to break away from the first coalition in 1971], we are not an extension of Women's Liberation. We work in our own way and strive to work by the side of our men in struggle."

This philosophy, which attempted to address the issue of varying levels of oppression (i.e., sexism, racism, classism), was also key in organizing with other groups. This was especially true as many members were also active in MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/Chicano de Aztlan, founded at UW in 1968) as well as in the UW Brown Berets.

As time progressed, the Seattle Brown Berets served more in the capacity of a subgroup under UW MEChA. For the remainder of the group's "official" existence, it was the wing of the Chicano student movement most closely rooted in the community. In Seattle, the Brown Berets acted as the "muscle" during many of the demonstrations that MEChA undertook on the UW campus and, much like the Black Panthers, raised a red flag in conservative sectors of the white community. Along with Las Chicanas, the

Brown Berets were also an integral part of the contingent that occupied the old Beacon Hill elementary school in October 1972 and demanded the creation of El Centro de La Raza.

### **Occupation of the Old Beacon Hill School**

The site of what is now El Centro de La Raza lay abandoned by the Seattle school district for some time before October 12, 1972, when it was occupied by activists determined to turn it into a community service center for Latinos and others. At the time, many of the services provided for Seattle's Chicano/Latino community were scattered throughout the city. This decentralization made it difficult for many who sought services to obtain them.

The economic crunch of the early seventies saw many programs sent to the chopping block, as was the case with one English as a Second Language program in the south end of Seattle that had a social justice component. The takeover of the Beacon Hill school was a response to the cancellation of the ESL program for the Chicano community at South Seattle Community College. Students and community members affected by the sudden closing of the program were instrumental in planning the takeover. Juan Jose Bocanegra remembers, "We brought in Chicanos from the University of Washington. Everyone just popped out of the cars and started walking toward the door. The press started showing at around 9:00."

The effort was orchestrated with three main contingents that allowed for occupation while keeping lines of communication open to the community and the city. "We would have a team that would bring food and support, another group dealing with the cops, and another to deal with the city," recalls Bocanegra. The takeover lasted into 1973 as negotiations took place with the Seattle City Council and the Seattle school district, all while demonstrators occupied the old Beacon Hill school and made do without water or electricity throughout the duration of the standoff. Ricardo Martinez, one of the UW students involved in the takeover, recalls his experience: "I remember the first few nights we were there. It was cold! It was really cold, there was no heat, there was no power. ...The eventual takeover lasted months. ... We would come and go, and spell each other."

### **El Centro de La Raza**

The struggle for El Centro proved difficult. Although the campaign was spearheaded by the Latino community, alliances across racial and ethnic lines were instrumental in keeping up the fight with the Seattle City Council. At one point, activists occupied the City Council chambers in an effort to force city leaders to turn over the building. After much debate, the city of Seattle finally conceded and allowed the use of the property for the creation of El Centro de La Raza in 1973. As former Brown Beret Rogelio Riojas put it, "someone opened the door and we went in and never left."

At a time when there was no distinct Chicano *barrio* in Seattle, the creation of a center that housed many of the services that Chicanos lacked was a necessity. El Centro became not only a community center, but also a civil-rights organization that developed progressive coalitions with activist groups rooted in other ethnic communities, especially Native Americans. According to Ricardo Martinez, "The genesis" of the Beacon Hill takeover "was that the Native Americans had taken over the Daybreak center" at Fort Lawton. These alliances continued throughout the 1970s and to the present day.

Much of the social justice work done by El Centro is outlined in its mission statement, which includes "ensuring access to services and advocating on behalf of people regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, gender, level of income, age, ability and sexual orientation." In later years, the organization also became involved in issues of labor, including farm-worker organizing in the state of Washington and

supporting work done in California by Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and the United Farm Workers Union.

El Centro also worked in solidarity with international struggles, most notably in Central and South America. Roberto Maestas (1938-2010) recalls an event El Centro hosted on behalf of earthquake victims in Managua that attracted numerous Nicaraguan exiles living in Seattle, many of whom had escaped the U.S.-backed Somoza family dictatorship. This solidarity with the Central American community continued throughout the 1970s as El Centro helped maintain communication with the Sandinista government, which ultimately (in 1979) overthrew the Somoza dictatorship. In 1983 El Centro de La Raza sent a delegation and a crew from Seattle's KING-TV on a fact-finding mission to Nicaragua. The Sandinista government hosted the delegation for a week as the group talked to people in the towns affected by attacks by counter-revolutionary groups.

### **A Community Coming Together**

The creation of El Centro de La Raza was the result of a community coming together to forge space for furthering the cause social justice for Latinos and Chicanos in Seattle. El Centro represented one of the first major attempts in the Seattle area to create community institutions to better conditions for the people. As the decade progressed, former student activists worked to create other community institutions -- such as SEAMAR Community Health Centers, Consejo Counseling Service, and the "Concilio for the Spanish-Speaking -- that focused on providing medical, educational, and other services needed in the community. When recalling the creation of the center, Ricardo Martinez remembers "how fun it was being together with a bunch of people doing something that [we] thought was the right thing to do for all the right reasons. [We] were hoping the end results would justify what [we] were doing."

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