

Visiones de Aztlan

Vol. 2

Denver's Chicano Perspective of Today's Issues

No. 1

THE HISTORY OF DENVER'S GANG-LIST AND POLICE 'GANG SQUAD' METHODS

A March 1992 draft of the Denver Police Department Protocol for Gang Response defines gangs and lists seven criteria used by police to identify gang members. Among the criteria are "when an individual admits membership," use of information given by informants, presence of "tattoos" and style of "articles of clothing," "graffiti on a subjects' clothing or articles," etc. If a suspected gang member meets none of the criteria, police appear to use a catch-all category when none of the previous criteria apply. This criteria is when there are "strong indications an individual has a strong social rather than professional relationship with a gang, but does not exactly fit the above criteria." (Before the adoption of the Protocol, a police officer could add a person's name to the list just by stopping the person three times and writing 'contact cards' on the person stopped; no arrests or convictions needed to be made.)

The Protocol categorizes gang members as Gang Member-Active, Gang Member-Inactive, and Gang Member-Imprisoned but it is apparent the current gang list has many more names than active, inactive and imprisoned gang members. Also on the list are names of "wannabees" and members of gang 'sets'. Many critics charge the gang list also has names of non-gang members who are stopped and labeled by police solely because of their race or style of clothing.

The Denver police maintain a computerized list of known or suspected gang members in Denver. Until many names were deleted due to publicity and criticism, the list totaled 6,567 names of which 93 percent were of black or brown youngsters though police administrators admit there are only about 250-300 "hard-core" gang members in Denver. The Denver police Impact Units—an updated version of the gang squad—has been active since July and, according to the December 5, 1993, *Denver Post*, "members of the Impact Units keep cards on all of the people they come in contact with . . . The Unit in southwest Denver has made nearly 1,000 'contacts' since the program began in July . . . most of them were 'Hispanic'." If only 250-300 "hard-core" gang members are in Denver, who were the 95 percent on the gang list who are not hard-core? Why were their names listed? To answer this question it is useful to understand the history and methods of the Denver police department's anti-gang efforts.

The Denver gang list and use of gang squad methods began in 1979 with federal Justice Department Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) money. Further, Denver police based their approach on methods copied from the L.A. Police Department Gang Division according to 1980 Denver city government documents. Denver's first police gang squad was called the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Unit which "was created under \$300,000 federal LEAA funding about June 1979 . . . and consists of 14 police officers." (\$237,920 of the \$300,000 was spent on salaries for 12 of these policemen.) By 1980, the Denver police—copying Los Angeles police methods—established a functioning, computerized gang list with information on "several hundred young people" in "10-15 youth groups in various parts of the Denver who generally hang around together without causing any particular problems at this time . . . [these youth are] 99 percent Hispanic . . . from generally the lower socio-economic families . . . particularly in west, southwest

and northwest Denver."

By 1980 Denver police named 14 youth gangs including the "Southwesters," "Low Riders," "44th Avenue," "VGV," and the "Home Girls." At least 8 of 14 gangs named by Denver police in 1980 were comprised of young people of Mexican origin. Though Denver youth groups in 1980 didn't "cause any particular problems," city authorities felt they had to be watched so Denver wouldn't become like L.A. (Does this sound familiar?)

Why Denver received federal gang money in 1979 is a big question. Denver had no gangs in 1979 and no gang names are found in city documents until 1980. A June 11, 1980, city document admitted "In Denver we do not, at this time, have anywhere near the problems being experienced in the L.A. area. For example, our youth activity in terms of gang formation was done away with in the late 1960s." A thorough search of 1979 newspapers reveals no articles naming gangs, gang deaths, gang warfare or so-called "drive-bys," "gang

The June 11 document serves as the Denver groups report upon returning to Denver. It gives no information on what, if anything, was learned from the community groups. The Denver report states, "Much of the information contained in this report is taken directly from a document titled, Guidelines and Procedures Used by the Los Angeles Police Department Relating to Gang Activity."

The 1980 Denver report, based on an LAPD orientation, gives a so-called history of L.A. gangs that blames the beginning of L.A. gangs on Mexican immigrants who came to L.A. during and after the 1910 Mexican Revolution. The Denver report starts with a scary (and familiar-sounding) introduction: "In the past decade [the 1970s], gang violence has escalated at an alarming rate. Whereas in the past, gang fights involved fists, feet, chains, some knives, and very few guns, today's gangs are well armed... Today [1980] brutal, senseless, wanton acts of violence are becoming a daily occurrence rather than the exception." Since

on wall graffiti to identify gang membership; (5) police used tattoos and nicknames—now called "monikers"—to identify gang members; (6) 'wannabees' arrested on minor offenses were used by police to get information on the activity of "hard-core" gang members, etc.

Based on what Denver police learned from L.A., they began in 1980 to classify gang members as "hard-core" (or "veteranos"), "affiliates," "peripherals," and "cliques." Today, a hard-core veterano is called an "O.G."; peripherals and affiliates are called "wannabees" and cliques are called "sets." In 1979 the gang squad was called the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Unit; in 1992 it was the Urban Street Crime Bureau; in 1993 it is now the Impact Units. Though the wording changed over the years, the basic methods used today remain the same as those used in 1979-80. Further, these police practices have been criticized since their beginning.

No youth were involved in the 1980 meetings with Denver officials until

community activists invited themselves to the "public meetings." The concern about the importance of youth involvement is reflected in a March 31, 1980 city document where Ms. Judy (Montero) Cisneros "expressed early in the meeting that there were no youth present at the meeting." This was not the only criticism voiced.

One community activist, Tony 'Big T' Marquez, "suggested that the neighborhood parks should be equipped with lighting . . . that if lighting were provided, the youth in the area would be able to use the basketball courts, the swimming pool, etc. He further stated that when these requests have been made of [the] Director, Parks and Recreation, [the Director] stated that with budget cuts the City & County of Denver has been experiencing in recent years, those requests cannot be met." Budget cutting, however, never seems to

be a problem for the police gang squad. One other criticism was voiced but was not reflected in minutes of the meeting.

When told Denver police were going to Los Angeles for gang training, one critic pointed out Los Angeles long had one of the nations' worst gang problems and the LAPD obviously failed to solve it. Denver city officials were told that sending Denver police to L.A. for training amounted to learning a model of failure. The response of city officials was much as it has continued to be since then: they listened to the criticism, did what they originally intended to do, and went on with the next item on their agenda. Critics in 1980—and 1994—believe providing opportunity for neglected youth will better end gang activity than will increasing budgets for arrest and imprisonment. Maybe the 1979 LEAA \$300,000 was not enough money to solve the gang problem. Maybe it should have been spent differently. Whatever the case, by 1982 Denver had its first gang homicide with the killing of teenage Kenny Alva in North Denver. What went wrong? Or did things ever go right to begin with?

•Ernesto Vigil



Manual High School students boycott classes to demand Chicano and African studies in the core curriculum. See story, Page 2 Photo by LeRoy Lemos

hand-signs," or "gang graffiti." Much of what little gang activity existed in Denver in 1980 was not the result of hard-core gang activity but was the result of Hollywood movies that glamorized gangs.

A March 31, 1980 city document noted "since last year's flurry of movies on 'youth gangs' there seems to be more activities to form youth groups." The VGV gang named by police in 1980 was probably a 'wannabee' group started by Denver youngsters after seeing the Hollywood gang movie, *Boulevard Nights*. The gang in this movie was called the VGV, for Varrio Grande Vista, and the movie was shown in Denver around 1979 and 1980.

To learn what to do with their gang money, Denver police decided to go to California from May 7 to May 11, 1980, by using part of the federal LEAA gang money to send five government employees to L.A. and San Diego; one was with the U.S. Department of Justice; 2 were Denver Commission on Community Relations employees; and 2 were Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Unit officers, i.e., the gang squad. A June 11, 1980, document shows the five went to study "youth gang activity and methods used by police departments and community based organizations to deal with the problems."

1980 the Denver gang squad has based its methods on the wisdom of the LAPD Gang Division. Denver police began to stop youth suspected of gang activity, to build its' gang list and to practice what it learned from Los Angeles.

Though Denver's gang squad was formed in June 1979, the public knew little about this. Some 'public meetings' were being held at City Council offices with Denver police but few people knew what was going on. In March 1980, eight uninvited community activists went to one 'public meeting'. The documents obtained by them at the meeting are those cited in this article. The officers present, including Sgt. Lou Lopez, spoke openly about Denver's gang squad methods and apparently thought the eight activists were invited by the City Council.

Lopez revealed: (1) Denver police were computerizing names for inclusion on the gang list; (2) California parole authorities informed Denver police about California parolees arriving in Denver because police believed California gang members would spread gangs to Denver; (3) Denver police gathered names of suspected gang members from school authorities and by cooperating with other police departments outside Denver; (4) Denver police took names found

Youth of Color Targeted More Often as "Gang Members"

1993: A North High School official (when justifying categorizing a young man as a "gang member" because of the young man's style of dress): "If he looks like a duck, walks like a duck, talks like a duck—he must be a duck."

1993: A critic of the use of clothing to decide who is a gang member: "The problem with these so-called gang experts who make decisions based on what someone wears is that anything that has feathers gets called a duck."

1948: Beatrice Griffith, writer, social worker and voice from the past: "In the opinion of many Americans, well-to-do Mexicans, and most of the Los Angeles police force, all Pachucos are delinquent Mexican zootsuits. Few realize that among the many thousands of youths of Mexican ancestry in Los Angeles County, only a small percentage, less than five percent, are classified as delinquents. On the other hand, fully two-thirds if the underprivileged Mexican American youth between 1940 and 1945 wore one form or another of the so-called zootsuit, a style of garment which classified them in the minds of many as trouble-makers."

On December 12, 1993, a Denver Post article revealed details of the police departments' "gang list" of which most of those listed were African American (3,691) or of Mexican/Latino origin (2,434); people of color were 93% of the list though these groups account for only 36% of the Denver population. Though police have routinely denied harassing innocent youth—and though police almost never give precise information about the gang list—a close look at the list will show youth's names who have not been arrested nor convicted for any offense, much less for gang-related crimes.

In the Post article, John Williams—a member of the city task force on youth violence—said "I think a lot of times they're taking these kids that have no affiliation, none whatsoever with a gang, and sticking their names on that list. I think sometimes they just stop anybody who's dressed like a gang member and label them as gang members. Kids tend to dress alike these days

with their big pants and big shirts but that doesn't necessarily mean they're gang members."

This is not the first time this complaint has been made. In late 1991 and early 1992, community activists from North Denver and the Westside complained to high-ranking police officials that police were harassing non-gang members based on their racial background and their style of dress. In response to these complaints the police department, which never admitted to the practice of harassment, drew up a police 'protocol' that formalized police practices with suspected gang youth. The gang list and the practices that built it continued after the protocol about the same as they went on before it.

Police Sgt. Kirk Hon defends the police practices that leads to minorities comprising 93 percent of the gang list by saying, "There aren't many white guys in gangs so the reason we're arresting so many of the minorities is because that's who we're dealing with." Not all police seem to agree with this statement. Police Sgt. Dave Dawkins has worked with delinquent youth through the Gang Rescue and Support Project and is regarded highly by many young people. Dawkins says, "It's unfortunate the statistics come out the way they do and it looks like they're leaning the way they do but I think it's because the [police Gang] Impact Units are concentrating their efforts in those (minority) areas and not because white kids don't commit crimes."

The criticisms of police practices in building the gang list are many but chiefly concern the inclusion of many innocent youth who are harassed by police who put them on the list and who are then harassed by other police after their names are listed. There are approximately 5,584 African American males between 12 and 24 years of age in Denver. For the gang list to have had 3,691 African American names means the police believed 2 of every 3 black

youths are known or suspected gang members or affiliates. There are 12,314 Mexican/Latino youth in Denver between 12-24 years of age and 2,434 Latinos were on the gang list so police believed 1 of every 5 Latino young males was a known or suspected gang member.

Some critics say the police maintain such an inflated list in order to be able to justify the growing police budget while schools, recreation and social programs for youth constantly have their budgets cut. These critics argue that money should be spent on educating, employing and providing opportunities for youth to have a positive and productive role in society so the basis for

and trusted they will not return respect or trust.

If the institutions of the adult world presume young people are guilty until proven innocent, it is probable that a certain percentage of this youth population will treat the adult world with the same distrust and hostility that they themselves are treated. Today's youth, including those who have taken the lives of those around them, were children just a few years ago and the world they are growing up in is one they have inherited from the adults who created it. In a very real sense, the violence plaguing the streets of Denver and the nation are the fruit of seeds of neglect that adults have planted



Manual High School students rally on the West steps of the state capitol before meeting with legislators. Photo by LeRoy Lemos

gang formation would no longer exist. Further, it is increasingly heard that young people must take responsibility for their actions and earn their rights by being responsible. Though this sounds reasonable, as far as it goes, it also has to be recognized that young people of color have consistently been deprived of their rights and treated as though they were presumed guilty and had to prove their innocence. Young people often live up to the expectations adults have of them. If young people are not respected

and allowed to grow. What goes around has come around; WE ARE REAPING WHAT WE'VE SOWN.

[NOTE: A December 19 Rocky Mountain News article named 15 people killed in Denver by juveniles this year; at least two-thirds were killed by known or suspected gang members and at least 12 of the victims were minorities. At least 79 percent of the victims of youth violence this year are people of color as are 82 percent of the suspects involved; 47 percent of youth violence victims are of Mexican/Latino origin as are 47 percent of the suspects.]

•Enrique Vargas

MANUAL STUDENTS PROTEST BIASED EDUCATION

On Monday, January 24, 1994, close to one hundred dissatisfied students from Manual high school staged a boycott of their own school. The significance of the day stems from the fact that it was "student count day." It is the one day of the semester where an official count of the students is taken. Eighteen hundred (\$1,800) dollars is allocated from Federal money for each student.

Manual High School students have legitimate complaints and concerns about the way the school is being run. For example, last year, 1993, Manual graduated sixteen black males. They expect to graduate twelve this year. In a community that is predominantly black, that is a disgrace. Administrators at the school continue to say they are doing their job to the best of their ability. Assistant principal, Debbie Blair initiated a policy to curb tardiness. This policy is known as "Hall Sweep." The official wording says that any students left in the hall after the tardy bell are to be sent to detention. There is also a rule that states that if a student is within eye distance, they are to be allowed to attend class without a tardy. There has been widespread abuse of the policy by teachers and administrators. There are documented instances when students are physically pushed out the classroom, teachers locking doors, and teachers

holding doors. There are also cases where, when a hall sweep nets more white students than other students of color, all students are dismissed without detention.

Another case where a student was mistreated because of his color is the case of Andres Mendoza. Andres, a talented artist attends Manual under the School of the Arts program. He was invited to attend a class on the Metropolitan State College campus by the instructor of the program. Andres took the parental consent form home for his father's signature. Andy, Andres' father, took a day off work to personally get it signed by the Manual principal and then hand deliver it to the instructor on campus. After waiting approximately two hours; still no signature. Andy went to see Josie Sanchez, a friend whom is part of Manual's counselling staff. Ms. Sanchez went into an administrative meeting and asked Ms. Transou for the signature. She was told it was too late for Andres to enter the program and therefore, she would not sign the document. All the Mendoza family wanted was a simple signature. If the instructor of the program did not feel the document late, why did the administration hold up the aspiring artist from a program so beneficial to his learning experience?

There are other concerns about

Manual that the students raised on January 24 when they not only walked out of class, but marched to the State Capitol. They want an unbiased, multicultural education. They want to be taught their own histories as well as the history of others. They want an end to violence. They want an education that is fair to all people.

After speaking their minds and concerns on the west steps of the Capitol, the students went inside. They met with Celina Benavidez, state representative to voice their demands. She invited student representatives to the floor of the House. The student reps: Francene Moreno, Amin Suliamann, Zeke Moreno, Javier Ramirez, Johanna Barrientos, and Moja Hinkston were introduced to the House of Representatives. The rest of the students watched from the balcony above. Youth Empowerment Advocate, LeRoy Lemos, who had escorted the students onto the floor, was also introduced.

To the critics who might say that they should not have missed a day of education to prove their point, students who attended the boycott, reply, "What kind of an education is Manual providing?" The students long for learning but Manual is only giving lip service. Manual is only one high school in Denver Public Schools, but do not think it is the only one with problems.

•Michelle Sanchez

Visiones de Aztlan is published with a grant from the Chinook Fund.

For inquiries and letters, please write:

Visiones de Aztlan
c/o The Chinook Fund
2412 West 32nd Avenue
Denver, CO 80211

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION for CHICANO STUDIES UPDATE

The Coordinating Committee of the National Association for Chicano Studies (NACS) met on December 4-5, 1993 in Seattle, WA. The purpose was for the annual mid-year meeting of the NACS Coordinating Committee. NACS is made up of 8 regions, with each region having a Regional Representative and a Student Representative. All Regional Reps. have a vote on the Coordinating Committee, as well as 2 National Student Representatives, which split a vote. The regions (FOCOs) are Pacific Northwest, Northern California, Southern California, Rocky Mountain, Texas, Colorado, Midwest, and Mexico.

Colorado's FOCO Representative is Dr. Luis Torres, a professor of Chicano Studies and English, from the University of Southern Colorado in Pueblo. The Student Representative is LeRoy Lemos, a student at the Community College of Denver. Dr. Torres has the double-duty of being the General Coordinator for NACS.

The Coordinating Committee had the dubious task devising a plan that would enable the organization to continue functioning through 1994, without the benefit of a National Conference. Not only does the national conference serve as a networking/research sharing opportunity, most NACS business is voted on during the conference.

Colorado was the only FOCO that had bid on hosting the '94 conference during the '93 conference in San Jose, CA. But Colorado's bid was defeated by a successful resolution originating out of the Lesbian Caucus, which called for a NACS boycott of Colorado because of the Amendment 2 issue. No other region stepped up to the plate and thus NACS had no host for the '94 National Conference.

The Coordinating Committee met for 12 hours on Saturday and 4 hours on

Sunday. It was decided that each region would host their own conference in lieu of a national conference. Each FOCO would also be allocated funds to help defray costs from the NACS General Fund. It was encouraged that all regions also direct a portion of their conference to discussing the Gay Rights issue.

At the meeting the Pacific Northwest FOCO presented a bid to host the 1995 NACS National Conference. The proposal was discussed and by unanimous decision, they were awarded the conference. A Spokane, WA Visitors and Convention Bureau representative was on hand to urge the consideration of it being the host city. The presentation was well prepared and well received by the committee. Although the actual city is chosen by the FOCO, most committee members were looking forward to a Spokane conference.

Other business items acted on were the addition of an Eastern FOCO and a Gay Caucus. Also a National Office Evaluation Committee was formed and Dr. Ricardo Sanchez, University of Washington at Pullman, was appointed as Chair of the Editorial Committee. It was also decided that another meeting of the Coordinating Committee would take place in late May in order to address NACS business, again, in lieu of a national conference.

A Colorado FOCO meeting has been planned for February 12, 1994 at the La Alma Recreation Center, 12th & Osage, in Denver. The focus will be to plan the Colorado Regional NACS Conference. The meeting will be held from 10am-2pm, with a gathering for a late lunch/early dinner at the Panaderia Santa Fe, 750 Santa Fe Drive. Any person that has an interest in joining NACS, or learning more about the organization is encouraged to attend.

•LeRoy Lemos

Leadership Nominations

The La Raza Male Youth Leadership Conference is seeking nominations for two (2) awards to be given during its 1994 conference, April 30, 1994, on the Auraria Campus.

The Third Annual La Raza Male Youth Leadership Conference is a collaboration of many organizations such as Metropolitan State College, Community College of Denver, University of Colorado, IBM, Planned Parenthood, the Mayor's Office of Employment and Training, and the Governor's Job Training Office, to name just a few.

The mission of the conference is "To Empower young Chicano/Mexicano/Latino males to achieve full educational, economic, and social potential and to develop a strong commitment and responsibility toward the Chicano/Mexicano/Latino communities"

The La Raza Male Youth Leadership award will be given to an outstanding young male who exhibits leadership qualities and demonstrates a commitment to the Chicano/Mexicano/Latino communities. Qualified youth should be 14-21 years of age and be a resident of Colorado.

The Rudolfo "Corky" Gonzales Award will be given to an adult community leader who has exemplified an outstanding effort to positively impact our community.

Nominations should be sent to Mike Miera, Metropolitan State College of Denver, P.O. Box 173362, Campus Box 16, Denver, CO 80217-3362.

•LeRoy Lemos

FT. COLLINS/LOVELAND POLICE ARE TERRORISTS, SAYS COMMUNITY

The Ft. Collins Chicano community is poised to take their concerns to the Mayor and the Larimer County, Ft. Collins, and Loveland Police Chiefs. A march and demonstration have been planned for January 28, 1994, at the Colorado State University Plaza at 2 p.m. Area high school students have also planned to walk out of school at 1:30 to join the protest.

At the forefront of the community organizers are Louie Sr. and Rosie Perez of Timnath, a suburb of Ft. Collins. They claim they and their family have been the target of constant police harassment. Their son Louie Jr, 16 and nephew Vincent Martinez, 20, whom live with Mr. and Mrs. Perez, were the target in a rape case in Loveland.

Louie Jr, Vincent, and Lorenzo Archuleta, 17, of Ft. Collins, were charged with the July 25, 1993 rape of a 14 year-old girl in a Loveland Apartment. All three of the youths pleaded "not guilty" to the charges and the matter was set for trial.

The young girl who had claimed to be raped later alleged that she was the target of threats by the three boys. That

claim stemmed from an incident in front of the girl's house in which the Louie Jr., whom she

claimed had a gun at the time, had stated, "You are going to go to the police and tell them that we didn't rape you because we didn't."

During the first week in January a judge dismissed the case against Vincent. The family was elated with the decision, although the other two youth still face charges in juvenile court. But the exoneration of the youth apparently did not sit well with city officials. In the January 6, 1994, edition of the *Loveland Reporter-Herald*, Jolene Blair, Deputy District Attorney, stated,

"Just because we can't prove a case beyond a reasonable doubt doesn't mean he's innocent."

Unfortunately the police harassment did not end. On January 15, 1994, at about 9:30 p.m., a search warrant was served on the Perez family home. The warrant called for the locating of a sawed-off shotgun that had been stolen.

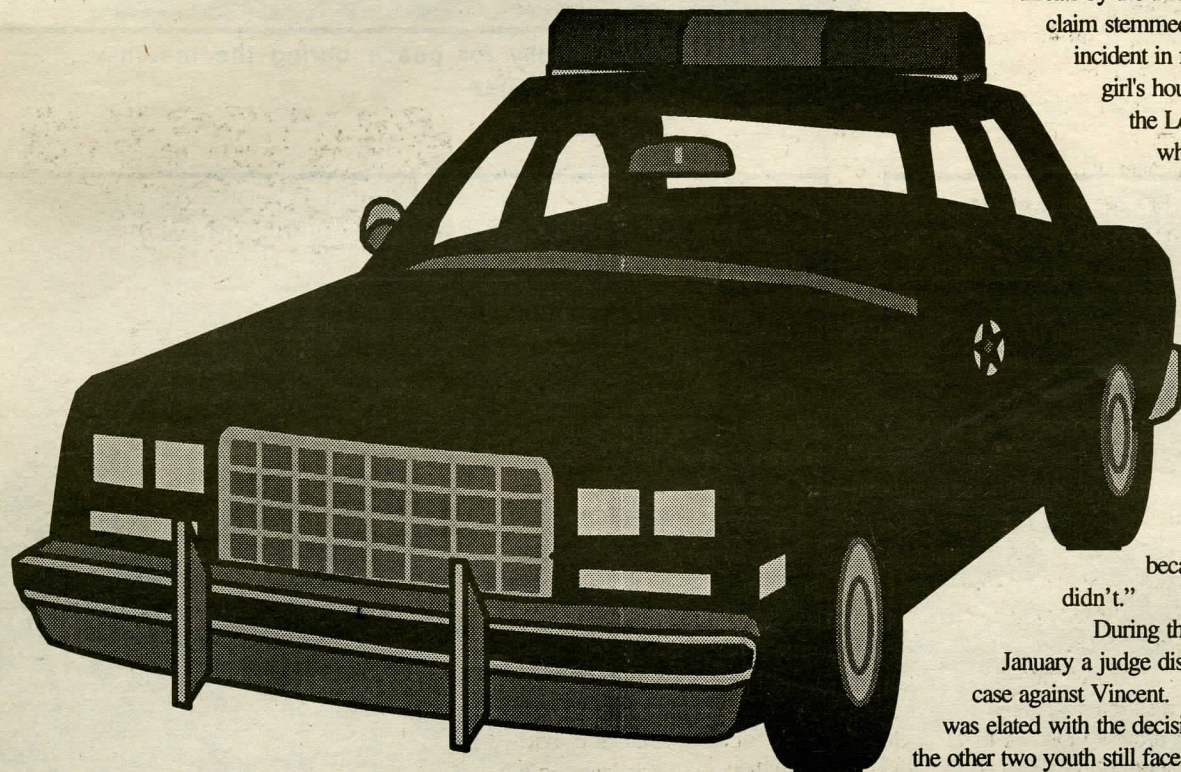
The police focused on Louie Jr. because an incarcerated juvenile police informant told police that Louis Jr. had told him once that he had a shotgun, although he had never seen the shotgun. The accusation was corroborated by another incarcerated informant, both of whom were offered reduced sentencing in exchange for testifying against Louis Jr. The Perez family stated that these youths also have a vendetta against their son.

Also during the raid, Vincent Martinez was handcuffed while the house was searched. While he was handcuffed, on his knees, on the floor, he was struck in the ribs with a nightstick by an unidentified officer, an act which was witnessed by Vincent's 5- and 12-year old cousins and another adult family member. Family members also said that Louie Jr. was also struck repeatedly during the raid. Although there was no weapon found, police still arrested Louie Jr. for suspicion of gun possession, and held on a \$25,000 bond. Police stated that he could still be charged, without finding the weapon, because a "reliable" witness said he had the gun.

Both Vincent and Louie Jr. have been targeted by Loveland Gang Officer, Scott Roberts, and listed as SHO/DI. SHO/DI stands for Serious Habitual Offender/ Directed Intervention, which is a "gang list," which is to identify youths as "gang" members. Please read another article in this issue that gives a history of "gang lists."

Visiones de Aztlan will cover this event as it unfolds in Ft. Collins. Together the people of Larimer County will continue to fight for justice for the youth and themselves. We, as the Chicano Community, must stand behind our Raza in Larimer County and support them in their struggle.

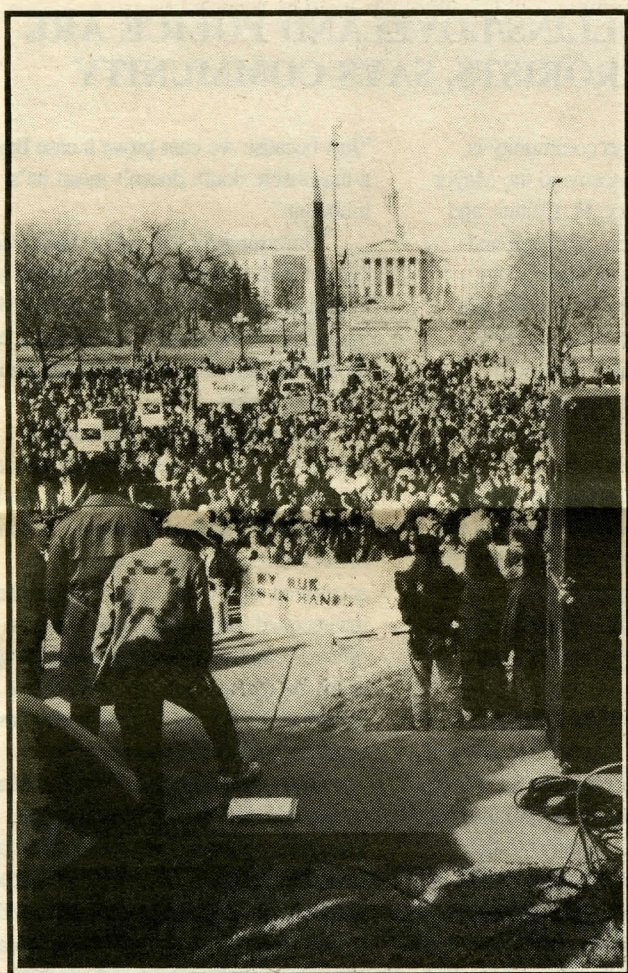
•LeRoy Lemos



Martin Luther King Day March January 17, 1994 Denver, CO



Portrait of slain civil rights leader, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. Photo by Michael D. Lopez



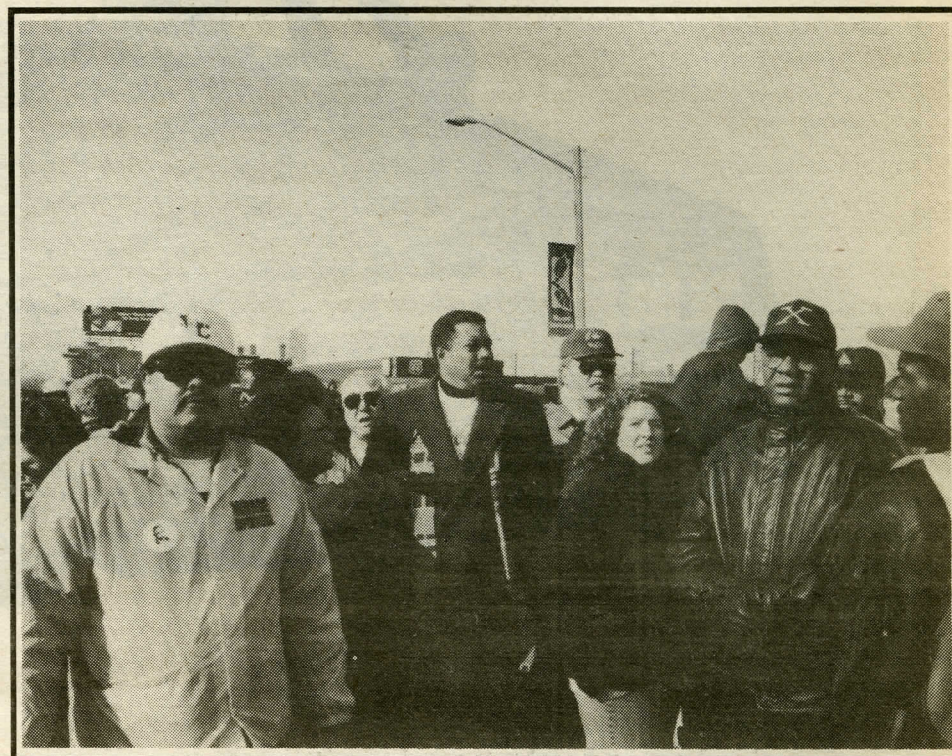
12,000 rally at the west steps of the State Capitol. Photo by Michael D. Lopez



East High students rally for peace during the march. Photo by Michael D. Lopez



March participants rally the King statue in the Civic Center Park. Photo by Michael D. Lopez



Shea Kelly, who was beaten during last year's parade, marches down Colfax with Denver Mayor Wellington E. Webb. Photo by Darrel Kassahn