



The Nebraska Commission on Mexican-Americans at the Crossroads: The Dilemma of False Expectations—Neither Service nor Power, 1973-1980

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

This article is copyrighted by History Nebraska (formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society).
You may download it for your personal use.

For permission to re-use materials, or for photo ordering information, see:
<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/re-use-nshs-materials>

Learn more about *Nebraska History* (and search articles) here:
<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/nebraska-history-magazine>

History Nebraska members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* annually:
<https://history.nebraska.gov/get-involved/membership>

Full Citation: Roger P. Davis, “The Nebraska Commission on Mexican-Americans at the Crossroads: The Dilemma of False Expectation—Neither Service nor Power, 1973-1980,” *Nebraska History* 96 (2015): 26-41

Article Summary: Nebraska was the first state to establish a statutory agency to advocate on behalf of its Latino population. During the commission’s turbulent early years, conflicting expectations and interpersonal issues undermined the agency’s reputation despite a clear record of success in providing direct services to the people.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Ramon Perez, Peter Urdiales, Jesse Cervantes, Stanley Porras, Joe Perez Jr., J. James Exon, Charles Thone, Isabel Ramirez, Cecil Stanley, Vidal Rivera, Isabel Ramirez, Clement Aguilar

Nebraska Place Names: Scottsbluff, Alliance, Lyman

Keywords: Nebraska Commission on Mexican-Americans (MAC), Scottsbluff New Congress for Community Development, American G.I. Forum, Migrant Action Program, Office of Economic Opportunity, New Congress for Community Development, Comprehensive Employment and Training Administration (CETA), Nebraska Panhandle Community Action Agency, Nebraska Department of Labor, Scottsbluff Concerned Parents Group, Mexican-American Student Association (MASA)

Photographs / Images: newsletter cover art, Nebraska Commission on Mexican-Americans, November 1976; Stanley Porras; J. James Exon; original Western Office staff: Mary Ellena Pedroza, Pat Guerra, Isabel Ramirez; Peter Urdiales; original design of the *Nebraska Mexican-American Commission Newsletter*, April 1974; redesigned *Nebraska Mexican-American Commission Newsletter*, 1975; Urdiales presenting Exon with a memento, July 22, 1978; Charles Thone; Jesse Cervantes





THE NEBRASKA COMMISSION ON MEXICAN-AMERICANS AT THE CROSSROADS:

The Dilemma of False Expectations— Neither Service nor Power, 1973-1980

BY ROGER P. DAVIS

In March 1972 Nebraska became the first state to establish a statutory agency specifically charged with advocacy on behalf of its Hispanic population. Because the overwhelming majority of the state's Hispanics were of Mexican origin, the body was named the Nebraska Commission on Mexican-Americans, popularly known as the Mexican-American Commission or the MAC. Through its founding and early years, the MAC struggled to find its proper role and purpose.¹

Following its establishment in November 1971 as an advisory body to the office of the governor, critical voices emerged around the politics and meaning of the commission. From the western part of the state, where Chicano activism was prevalent, the leadership of the Scottsbluff New Congress for

Community Development was skeptical of a commission appointed by government officials. Ramon Perez, director of the New Congress, condemned the governor's council as "an expensive puppet show" whose true purpose would be to serve the wishes of the executive office.² In blunt language directed to the governor, Perez dismissed any legitimacy for a commission where "the figurines have been carved out by you, the rhetoric and limited action is supplied by someone at the top, and the audience is compiled of the poor and Chicano community."³

The questions and criticism continued despite the March 1972 passage and governor's signature of LB1081, establishing the commission as a formal statutory agency. In April 1973 the Scottsbluff chapter of the American G.I. Forum complained that the

Left: Newsletter cover art, Nebraska Commission on Mexican-Americans, November 1976. The motto translates, "It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees."

Stanley Porras, who served as the Mexican-American Commission's first executive director, 1972-1977. *Nebraska Mexican-American Commission Newsletter*, January 1976.



"Mexican people" were "gravely dissatisfied" with the commission, and in a formal statement to the governor, the Forum declared, "We want the Mexican American Commission to be accountable to the people they represent. The Commission should actively seek out the problems of our people, find workable solutions for them, and report on the progress they have done."⁴ The Scottsbluff Forum wanted an agency dedicated to grassroots activism to empower the Hispanic community.

That month, the commission's first director, Stan Porras, acknowledged the concerns and criticisms regarding its proper role and purpose. In the first issue of the commission newsletter he defined a judicious balance for the agency. For Porras, the militant refrain of "power to the people" was a sterile exercise in rhetoric. He explained, "Organization is the key-stone of political effectiveness," and "Our interest should be to cultivate getting things done by as many people as are interested in doing, than without any one person telling the other what to do." From this foundation, Porras defined the commission's role and purpose: "We are a liaison between the people and the state government. This is a service agency, not a force of power, and our concern is service not power."⁵

From 1973 to 1980 the commission worked diligently, under directors Stan Porras and his successor, Peter Urdiales, to enhance its reputation and provide needed services to the Hispanic community.⁶ These efforts crystallized in two particular initiatives: the Migrant Action Program, and the establishment of a Western Office in Scottsbluff

that would provide "direct services" to the community. Porras and Urdiales believed that success as a state service agency in these and other areas of concern would provide the legitimacy and accountability necessary to silence the critics. By 1980 the commission had a clear record of success as an effective agency of service to the Hispanic community of Nebraska.

Rather than insuring the commission's integrity, however, this record became the catalyst for further criticism, threatening the commission's demise. The story of this challenge and its outcome provides insight into the interaction of state politics and the diversity of Nebraska's broad Hispanic community.

In one of its first concerted efforts to fulfill its mandate of service, the commission targeted the migrant labor community and its bureaucratic support structure. As part of the 1960s War on Poverty, a proliferation of federal programs emerged to address manpower issues, and in particular the issue of migrant farm labor, which was overwhelmingly Mexican in origin. Following the ending of the Bracero Program in 1964, Congress created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and directed it to provide resources to state-level agencies to deal with migrant labor. In 1973 the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) was signed into law, and this agency took over the task of addressing migrant labor issues. CETA programs were overseen and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor from 1974 through early 1981.⁷ At the time of the creation of the Mexican-American Commission, Nebraska hosted approximately 3,000 migrant workers. By 1974 that number increased to more than 4,000. While some of these represented itinerant railroad and meatpacking labor, the overwhelming majority worked the seasonal sugar beet fields of western Nebraska.⁸

The basic organizational structure for migrant support involved the OEO providing funds for community organizations. In the Great Plains region the Texas Migrant Council and the Colorado Migrant Council were the principal organizations providing services for a mobile labor force. Organized from 1966 through 1969, the councils received funding from the OEO Migrant Branch to support programs in both child and adult education, including Summer Head Start and VISTA programs. Qualifying migrants included both intrastate and interstate seasonal workers.

In 1972 Nebraska did not have a formal farm worker program. Migrant support was limited to

supplementary social services administered by the Nebraska Panhandle Community Action Agency, funded through the Colorado Migrant Program, and some educational programs administered by public school districts.⁹ An emerging controversy in Alliance, Nebraska, in the spring of 1972 provided the Mexican-American Commission the opportunity to lay claim to a key service role within the politics of migrant labor.

On May 30, 1972, the Nebraska State Board of Education held its regional meeting in Alliance, Nebraska. At that meeting a group of local Mexican Americans, led by a representative of the New Congress for Community Development (NCCD), charged that children in the migrant education program were being beaten and humiliated. They presented to the board a list of six ultimatums and then walked out. The list of demands included the firing of the program director and two teachers, replacing at least half of the current staff with Mexican Americans, allowing parents to participate in administrative decisions, and formal participation for parents on the executive board. The migrant education program was overseen by the Alliance public school system. In addition to Alliance, the program offered services in Scottsbluff, Bayard, and Imperial. It served 750 students annually and was in its fifth year of operation. Education Commissioner Cecil Stanley denied the charges, but invited a review of the program by federal education officials. In the meantime the NCCD set up an alternative school for Alliance; within a month participation in the Alliance program dropped from 125 students to 77.¹⁰

In late June 1972, the head of the national migrant program of the U.S. Department of Education, Vidal Rivera, visited Alliance and met with state education officials and the public. Rivera concluded that the state education program complied with the intent of Congress and the law and was a “worthy” program. Despite the vindication, Commissioner Stanley remained wary, telling the press, “I personally feel that the current migrant program is but a pawn in a much larger game.”¹¹ Stanley’s instincts were acute. The national migrant program was on the cusp of a major overhaul signaling the end of the Office of Economic Opportunity and the start of administration by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Administration. Funding and administrative structures would change and various bureaucratic agencies could now contend for the resources and opportunity to serve the public. This would be a valuable service opportunity for the Nebraska MAC.¹²



J. James Exon served as governor of Nebraska from 1971 to 1979. NSHS RG3128-30

Just prior to the events in Alliance, and before the MAC had even hired an executive director, members of the commission hosted a presentation at their Scottsbluff meeting by Pete Mirelez, director of the migrant division of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Mirelez acknowledged a role for the commission in administering migrant farm worker programs and advised the members to be sure to be sensitive to “the needs of those you represent.” As events unfolded the commission was invited to be one of four state agencies to participate in the public meeting with Vidal Rivera regarding the affairs in Alliance. The commission hired Stan Porras just a few days later and, not surprisingly, the issue of an appropriate migrant farm worker program became a priority for the new chief officer.¹³

From the spring of 1972 through the spring of 1973 Porras and the MAC took initiatives to become the central directing agency for federal migrant funds for Nebraska. Porras attended the National Conference on Migrant Councils in early January and began work on a comprehensive plan to establish a Nebraska council overseen by the commission. The MAC filed papers to incorporate a “Migrant Action Council of Nebraska” in March 1973 and simultaneously submitted a funding proposal to the Office of Economic Opportunity. Unfortunately this was just at the point of the transition of the migrant programs from the OEO to the Comprehensive Employment and Training

“I personally feel that the current migrant program is but a pawn in a much larger game.”
—Cecil Stanley

Administration (CETA). With the consequent change in bureaucratic structure, the proposed Action Council was denied funding and the Mexican-American Commission was forced to bide its time and redesign and resubmit the proposal.

While this was a disappointment, one bright note gave Porras hope that all would go well. In the interim, the OEO released \$10,000 of emergency funds channeled through the Colorado Council. In June 1973 it was announced that the MAC would administer these funds in Nebraska. While Porras was delighted with the news, the head of the Nebraska Panhandle Community Action Agency was not. As a contending organization which had received funding in the past, the NPCAA challenged the right of the MAC to operate in this area. The agency's director bitterly declared that the MAC had no OEO experience, no direct migrant service experience, and was only engaged in a bid to expand itself at the expense of migrant families. The matter was put to rest when the Nebraska governor forwarded to the agency a ruling by the Nebraska attorney general that the MAC could legally function in this area.¹⁴

Over the following year the MAC channeled its administrative oversight of migrant funds through the existing Scottsbluff Migrant Health Project. Directed by Joe Perez Jr., this organization received migrant requests for assistance and coordinated the issuance of vouchers for services based upon funding from the MAC. Perez estimated that his office served more than 500 migrant families.

While administering the emergency funds, Porras labored on a revised funding proposal for the dormant “Migrant Action Council of Nebraska.”¹⁵ Reviewing his efforts in a note to Governor Exon in February 1974, Porras reported that he had contacted U.S. Senators Montoya of New Mexico and Kennedy of Massachusetts as well as seeking support of the Nebraska congressional delegation to move the proposal forward. At a meeting on the migrant issue in Scottsbluff in early March, Porras reported that “the proposal is now about as high up as it is possibly going to go; it's with the Department of Labor and they are reviewing it.”¹⁶ In early March, the Nebraska State Office of Planning and Programs informed Porras that the governor would not support any further proposals until guidelines were clarified, and then agencies could resubmit.¹⁷ While Porras was re-designing the commission initiative, another dramatic turn of events threatened to derail this service objective.

On August 12-13, 1974, the CETA invited all regional groups to Denver to outline the new rules and

open applications for migrant funding. Nebraska organizations represented at the meeting included the Nebraska Department of Labor, the Nebraska Community Action Organization and the Nebraska Migrant Health Project. Noteworthy for its absence was the MAC.

It is not clear why the MAC was absent. It may be that Porras—secure with an endorsement from the office of the attorney general, with clear support from the governor, and with incorporation of the Nebraska Migrant Action Council and a new appropriations request in the works—felt that the MAC had already staked its claim and was in the process of meeting the new rules to administer a Nebraska migrant program. If such was the case, the news from Colorado came as an unexpected shock. Joe Perez Jr., of the Scottsbluff Migrant Health Project, reported that the decision had been made to give the migrant program to the Nebraska Department of Labor. In his report to the MAC office, Perez was clearly critical of the MAC and its executive director:

All three organizations were eligible and interested in submitting a Q statement for funds. After much discussion we all agreed to support one application and it was the consensus to support the Department of Labor request. Certainly a valid question is where was the Mexican-American Commission representative, or for that matter, any other Chicano organization or migrant representative from Nebraska? As our Western Nebraska CETA representative it is difficult to accept that you may not have had knowledge of this important meeting.¹⁸

Possibly influencing Perez's criticism were unfortunate events which had transpired over the previous year as the Health Project experienced some administrative missteps of the MAC. The approval of the MAC to administer funding meant that the Scottsbluff program had a new agency with which to work and paperwork to file. Early on Perez found himself complaining to Porras that necessary interview forms were not forthcoming and that he was forced to proceed with assisting migrant families without the submission of proper documentation. Not surprisingly, in short order Porras was chastising Perez for not following necessary protocol. By October 1973 a tangle of miscommunication and misunderstanding led Perez to send an extremely critical note to Porras, copied to all commission members. It concluded with the following:

As we discussed, and you suggested, I have told people who want to get a hold of you to leave a message with your mother. Well, Stan, I am again embarrassed by having these same people call and tell me that your mother's telephone number is unlisted. I cannot help but feel that either you want to stay incommunicado with some of the people's problems or just give me the runaround. Our people, La Raza, have been given the run around long enough. Why should the Mexican-American Commission subject our people to these same run around? Call it what you like, humble jumbo, double talk, run around, it is all the same and ineffective.¹⁹

Whether through miscommunication, a flawed sense of security on the part of Porras, or a strategy on the part of MAC competitors, the outcome of the Denver meeting was a resounding victory for the Nebraska Department of Labor, which was chosen to administer more than \$106,000 of migrant funds during 1975.²⁰

Over the next seven months Porras labored to overcome the adversity and build a cooperative base for another attempt at securing a role in administering migrant funds. For the next funding period, 1976, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) was budgeting over half a million dollars for Nebraska, and the commission felt confident that they could successfully contend for the money. The Migrant Action Council was revived, and Porras reached out to Joe Perez Jr. to appoint him as the council chair. Perez accepted the appointment and stated that under his direction the Migrant Action Council would work with the commission, "despite past experiences and personal feelings."²¹ The Mexican-American Commission then contracted with the former director of the OEO migrant program for technical assistance in drawing up a new proposal, and by September 1975 that document was submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor. Once again, however, the MAC came up short. In November Porras was informed that the Nebraska Department of Labor would continue as the recipient and prime sponsor for all CETA funds for Nebraska.²²

Porras and the commission now took the offensive against the Nebraska DOL. Reporting on the commission strategy to Governor Exon, Glen Soukup, the ex-officio representative of that office, stated:

The Mexican-American Commission plans to submit a bill that all programs dealing with migrants be funded through them. As you are aware, presently this money goes through several

state departments and there was recently a conflict between the Department of Labor and the Commission staff regarding the funding of one proposal. In his campaign to get this bill through the Legislature, Mr. Porras intends to use a letter that was evidently written by you stating that all migrant programs should be handled through the Commission. Further he intends to make the point that the Department of Labor has received the grant and now they don't know what to do with it.²³

During April and May 1976, Porras challenged the Nebraska DOL in a sharp exchange of letters to the deputy commissioner, Thomas Erixon. Noting that the MAC was accurately perceived by the public as the representative body for Mexican Americans, and as 95 percent of migrants were Mexican or Mexican American, Porras requested that the DOL set aside at least \$20,000 to be administered by the MAC or at least by some truly Hispanic state organization such as the American G.I. Forum of Nebraska. Reminding Erixon of the action initiated by the commission in the legislature, Porras noted, "I had anticipated much more cooperation and a working relationship with your office, somewhat more than has been demonstrated by your office to say the least."²⁴ Porras followed up this note with a demand that the DOL demonstrate some accountability to the MAC. He requested specific details on how the Department of Labor was administering their CETA funds and noted that he expected an "immediate" response. The request included total amounts of monies received, formulas for distribution, receiving agencies, reports on usage of funds, and details of any plans for the coming year.²⁵

A week later Erixon responded. He noted that while Porras had indicated the commission initiative was in response to several groups seeking services it seemed the director could not identify any of these groups:

As I recall, in that earlier phone conversation, you indicated several groups had approached you regarding funding for the delivery of Services to Migrants. You could not, at that time, identify the organizations requesting to be delivery agents under the CETA program, nor could you be specific in the types of services addressed by these groups. You indicated that they were very vague in their verbal conversations with you regarding the specifics so that a proposal for delivery of services, not yet being

"Our people,
La Raza, have
been given the
run around
long enough."
-Joe Perez, Jr.

By September
1976 the
MAC offensive
appeared
successful,
but once again
the political
ground shifted
beneath them.

provided, could be considered. To date, I have not received the specifics which you considered urgent in that March conversation.²⁶

Erixon specifically noted that the American G.I. Forum of Nebraska had not contacted the department. Further chastising the commission and its leadership, he noted:

In a meeting in Commissioner Chizek's office in early March, you indicated to the Commissioner and myself, that you did not intend to cooperate with or communicate with the Project Director for Migrant Services in the Comprehensive Employment and Training Unit. You specifically requested that I advise the Project Director that he is not welcome in the Mexican-American Commission offices. . . . It is apparent that lack of communication and coordination has restricted the Commission's advisory input into the Title III program activities. In an effort to establish closer coordination, may I suggest you or your designee from the Commission office open and maintain contact with the Project Director.²⁷

Porras responded that he had discussed with Chizek "several incidents" regarding the project director that he felt "was behavior unbecoming and uncalled for from someone in that position." He further declared that, "If someone were to evaluate the Migrant CETA Program, it would be found that the program is not functioning as it should. It is my feeling that as a result of an inefficient administration, the migrants in Nebraska will once again lose out on programs." He added, "Your attitude and your attempts to blame this office for the lack of progress made in your program, administered by your department, are very poor excuses."²⁸

By September 1976 the MAC offensive appeared successful, but once again the political ground shifted beneath them and the maxim of strange bedfellows proved itself. Alongside the legislative initiative and its own challenge, Porras was gaining the support of the office of the governor. Wary of the political climate, the Department of Labor apparently changed its position and agreed that the possibility might exist that the MAC might be the more appropriate agency to administer migrant funds. To clarify the legal nature of this potential change the DOL requested a ruling by the attorney general on the commission's administrative authority.²⁹ Given the earlier opinion from that office, Porras undoubtedly felt confident in submitting the

request. However, on September 29 that office returned a very shocking reply:

You have asked whether the Mexican-American Commission has authority to enter into a contract with the Nebraska Department of Labor to provide emergency services for migrant workers or with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to administer the federally funded program for migrant workers in Nebraska. We have concluded it has authority to do neither. . . . There is no express language in the statute which gives the Commission authority to render services directly to Mexican-Americans or to administer programs which provide services for Mexican-Americans.³⁰

The commission was not only undermined with regard to its challenge to the Department of Labor to administer funds from one program, but the ruling was also a sweeping denial of the commission's authority to provide direct services of any kind! Porras moved quickly to introduce legislation to amend the commission's mandate to allow for direct services and administration of programs, but the bill was rejected in committee.³¹

Then a new dynamic emerged with the news that the Iowa Migrant Council had applied for the Nebraska migrant funds. In a note to the commission, the director of the Iowa program explained, "We do not want to take over Nebraska, but rather utilize our many years of experience and expertise to benefit farmworkers . . . (and) . . . we ask for your agreement to support our efforts in Nebraska by joining with us in the spirit of mutual collaboration."³²

By giving Nebraska interests a common foe, the Iowa initiative proved a catalyst for a new spirit of collaboration. Over the following months the MAC formally withdrew its migrant proposals, threw its support to the Nebraska Department of Labor and successfully requested the American G.I. Forum of Nebraska to work with the Nebraska DOL to administer monies. This united front was effective in delaying the final determination until December 1977. However, Iowa still received the contract.³³

The Nebraska DOL and the MAC then collaborated on a legal appeal, and Governor Exon sent a personal letter to the U.S. Secretary of Labor protesting the action and asking for its reversal. It was to no avail. However, in an ironic turn of events, over the following two years Nebraska got its own migrant agency. The Iowa program established a Nebraska advisory board to provide input and to review operations. By late 1978 administrative problems and

continued efforts to return Nebraska funds to the state resulted in a change. Led by Nebraskan Ella Ochoa, the advisory board incorporated as the nonprofit Nebraska Association of Farmworkers.³⁴

The outcome of the migrant services issue was bittersweet for the MAC. The Nebraska migrant population now had an effective instate institution which would serve them well for the next thirty-one years, and as an agency securely anchored in the Mexican American community it represented a community-based service goal of the commission. However, not only did the MAC fail to establish itself as that institutional agency, but it also found itself roundly chastised for its extensive attention to the migrant issue. Those discordant voices came mostly from the western part of the state, where, ironically, the commission had focused its second concerted effort to deliver direct services to the Mexican American population—through the establishment of a Western Office.

In March and April 1973 the commission initiated contacts with local officials in Scottsbluff regarding a Nutrition Program for the Elderly and the status of welfare certification and delivery services. These topics and others were featured at the commission's April 27 meeting in Scottsbluff, which included county commissioners and various state and county officials from the Department of Welfare and the Food Stamp Program.³⁵ Also present were representatives of the Scottsbluff American G.I. Forum, who presented a list of grievances and charged the MAC with failure to represent and reach out to the Mexican American community: "Many Mexican-Americans in Scotts Bluff County were not aware of the existence of the Commission, nor its members, nor were they aware that they could take their problems to them." The list of grievances concluded: "We want the Mexican-American Commission to be accountable to the people they represent. The commission should actively seek out the problems of our people, find workable solutions to them, and report on the progress of what they have done."³⁶ Chairman B. N. Garcia offered a measured response at the commission's August meeting, stating that while the charges were not valid, "suggestions about things the commission might have overlooked are welcome." Stan Porras was quoted as saying, "You can't just overnight or in a year inform every Chicano in the state about the commission. It is going to take some time."³⁷

By early September it became clear that these disturbances from western communities would

not be easily placated. Governor Exon contacted Porras for an explanation. The governor had met with a group of concerned citizens and he echoed their list of grievances, adding, "also, they were very much concerned that the commission's activities were over-directed at the problems of migrant workers to the detriment of our own Mexican-American citizens." He said there was interest in having a person directed to cover problems in the Scottsbluff area.³⁸ In response, Porras noted that the commission members had already responded to the list of the concerns at their August meeting, and as for having a person for the western area, he said, "We are asking for an outreach office in coordination with the Indian Commission, in our new budget, and hope that it will be granted."³⁹

In April 1974 the *Lincoln Journal* reported details of the new office under the headline, "Scottsbluff Field Office: Commission Aiming for July 1 Opening." In the article Porras explained that plans for a Western Office were proceeding smoothly, and that he envisioned the staff functioning "somewhat as an ombudsman for the Mexican-American community in the Panhandle."⁴⁰ By June the commission was accepting applications for a Western Office field officer. Fiscal issues delayed the opening until September 24, 1974, when Porras announced that the new office was open under the direction of Mr. Isabel Ramirez, and that Pete Urdiales had been hired as the Lincoln-based field officer to work closely with the Western Office. Porras noted that Urdiales "comes to us from western Nebraska and has been involved in the struggle for La Raza."⁴¹

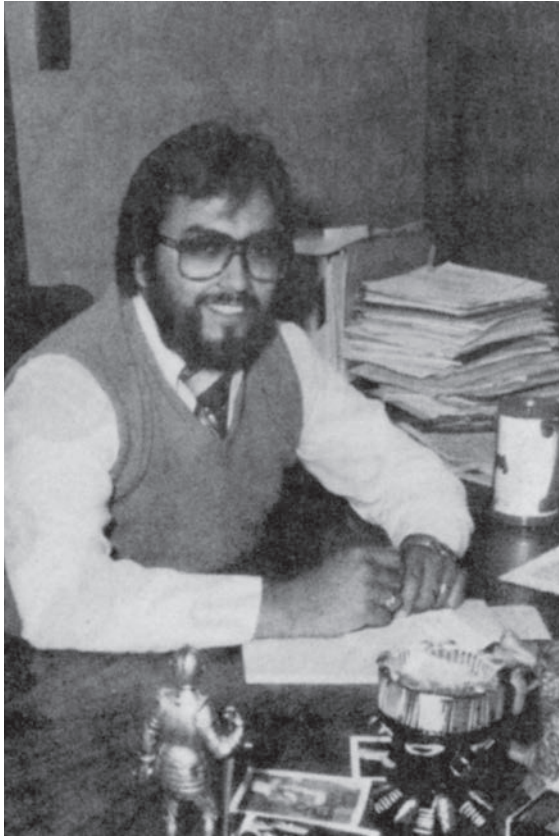
Over the next six years Ramirez and Urdiales labored to enhance the MAC's reputation by working with community groups on issues of public education and the impact of a Scottsbluff city block grant, by building relationships with local authorities, and by responding to a variety of individual requests for assistance. Similar to its initiative in the migrant program area, the commission believed it was laying a foundation for community service that would ensure its acceptance and legitimacy in the eyes of the western public.

Once again, an incident involving the public school system served as a catalyst for commission action. In the wake of the Alliance migrant schools issue, another school controversy emerged in Lyman, west of Scottsbluff. Following reports of an unusually high dropout rate for Mexican Americans and allegations from parents about harassment and ridicule of Hispanic students, the MAC undertook a formal investigation of the district. Public meetings were held in November 1973 and in May 1974; the



The original Western Office staff: Mary Ellena Pedroza, clerk typist; Pat Guerra, social service worker; and Mr. Isabel Ramirez, administrative assistant.

Nebraska Mexican-American Commission Newsletter, November 1976 (Ramirez photo, June 1979)



commission published a report in October 1974. The commission offered recommendations for screening of administrators and teachers, hiring of bilingual teachers, infusion of bicultural materials into the curriculum, and establishment of a parent-teacher advisory committee.⁴²

Just as the Western Office opened yet another issue with public schools emerged, echoing the concerns voiced in Lyman. Ramirez reported that one of the first activities of his office was to assist in a student walkout demonstration on September 16 in support of the Scottsbluff Concerned Parents Group.

On the morning prior to the demonstration, Ramirez and Urdiales presented a list of the parents' grievances to the school superintendent, Dr. Walter Parks. The parents demanded that the school board look into student abuse and the need for bilingual and bicultural training. Parks rejected the idea of meeting with the parents as a group, insisting upon meetings only on an individual basis. Asked if the group could attend a school board meeting to present their concerns, the superintendent rejected the idea, prompting the student boycott. However, following the student demonstration the parent group was placed on the school board agenda so they could present their grievances. The Western Office then orchestrated further assistance by facilitating

a meeting between a Nebraska State Professional Practices representative and the Concerned Parents. Ramirez also included the Cooperative Ministry group to build broader support in the non-Hispanic community, and ultimately he helped the parent group file three complaints with the Professional Practices Commission.⁴³

While these concerns were under review, the Concerned Parents soon faced another issue. The city of Scottsbluff had secured a community block grant to build a swimming pool. While initial proposals indicated that the pool would be constructed in the southwest "barrio" area, the city council resolved instead to build a new pool for the city high school. At a time when the parents' group was pushing for bicultural and bilingual training and a Mexican American counselor, only to be turned away because the school had no funds, this seemed an egregious move that underscored the prejudice of both the city council and the school board. Ramirez met with the city manager and arranged a community meeting to discuss the issue.

By October 1975 Ramirez and the local American G.I. Forum leadership helped organize the Southwest Scottsbluff Improvement Association, representing more than twenty Hispanic families. They filed suit against the city, charging it with failure to provide the "barrio" with municipal services and amenities equal to other areas of the city. To further make their point, the suit was filed in the U.S. District Court in Lincoln. In a newspaper interview, Ramirez said the parents "knew that they would never have gotten a fair shake with attitudes the way they are in Scottsbluff."⁴⁴

While the lawsuit's outcome is not clear, it is apparent that during Ramirez's tenure with the Western Office from 1974 through August 1980, the office committed a substantial amount of time and effort providing direct services to Hispanic organizations and to individuals. A later assessment of the office indicated that individual requests accounted for nearly 85 percent of the workload. Categories of individual attention include immigration and migrant issues, welfare, discrimination, health and housing issues, as well as translation and legal assistance, law enforcement issues and employment. The office assisted migrant farmers in securing migrant funds to support their families. One case involved assisting a wife in retrieving a husband from a hospital. A Brule farmer needed help to get the irrigation district to restore his water. A railroad worker received employment assistance for an unjust firing. The Western Office organized a committee on alcohol abuse and worked to

establish a local program. Ramirez assisted in creating programs for students to visit the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus and the University of Nebraska Medical Center, and the Western Office was essential in establishing the Mexican Athletic Club and organizing softball and baseball tournaments.⁴⁵ Reflecting on his busy schedule Ramirez recalled, "There were so many things going on. My work day wasn't 8 to 5. I worked seven days a week. I would get calls in the evenings, all hours of the day."⁴⁶ However, despite all of its efforts, the commission was challenged by divisions within the very community it was trying to serve. In late March 1974 the Scottsbluff American G.I. Forum approved a resolution denouncing the Nebraska MAC and its director for "unscrupulous and unethical considerations of Mexican-American activities," and calling for Stan Porras's resignation. This was in response to the director's decision to move the commission's quarterly meeting from April 13 in Alliance to April 27 in Lincoln. Hispanic community leaders in Scottsbluff and across the state were upset not only with the change of venue, but more significantly because the meeting date conflicted with a number of prescheduled Hispanic activities, including the quarterly meeting of the American G.I. Forum in Grand Island and the Chicano Awareness Days in Lincoln. Critics in the Forum speculated that Porras had moved the date and location to head off an initiative to ask for his resignation.⁴⁷

That is exactly what occurred in early April in Lincoln when the University of Nebraska Mexican-American Student Association (MASA) called for Porras's resignation, charging that he was not effectively advocating for the students and "in the interests of the Chicano people throughout the state."⁴⁸

In western Nebraska, the commission faced another controversy in early 1975. Already critical of the MAC's role in the migrant funding issue, Joe Perez Jr., serving as director of the Scottsbluff Migrant Health Project, blasted the actions of the new field officer, Peter Urdiales, whose responsibilities included editing the commission newsletter. From April 1973 through December 1974, the newsletter cover featured an outline map of Nebraska with an eagle perched on a cactus and holding a snake in its beak. The eagle symbol was a familiar design associated with the Aztec founding of the city of Tenochtitlan, modern-day Mexico City. In this depiction, the eagle's facing wing prominently displayed the design of the American flag. The cover announced simply that this was the "Newsletter of the Mexican American Commission."

Starting with the January 1975 issue, Urdiales changed the newsletter's appearance and "attitude." Gone were Nebraska and the American flag on the cover; a newly designed Aztec-style eagle was labeled "Aguila del Chicano" (the Eagle of the Chicano), above which a heading proclaimed "Luchando Por Justicia" (the Fight for Justice).⁴⁹ The new editor identified himself as "Juan Pistolas," a pseudonym indicating a gunslinger for justice who would call out those in authority. Among other items, the newsletter included education statistics from Scottsbluff County, advised readers to contact the commission for a Nebraska Professional Practices complaint form "if you have a complaint against a 'professional' teacher," and printed an article critical of the Panhandle Legal Board and the local United Way. Another article was critical of "They"—described as those who prohibit employment and undermine fair treatment and equal education. In reference to local communities, the article declared, "Ask our 'vendidos' [those who sell out] in the community who negotiate with the administration 'Escondidos' [two faced]. They ridicule us for talking in Spanish in school to a point where we forget our language . . ." and "Equal enterprise, we have it, look at who owns all the Taco Johns, Taco Bells and Taco Houses? As Emiliano Zapata would say, 'Es major Morir de Pie, Que Seguir Viviendo de Rodillas'" [It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees]. Finally, in a plea for Chicano unity the newsletter declared in an article entitled "¿Unidad?":

Too many times we all get caught up in the whirlwind of "Chicanismo" and neglect the "Causa Por La Raza." We are always talking of uniting our people and when it seems we are finally getting somewhere, some "Baboso" [fool] comes along and splinters everyone for the sake of unity. Remember the "Guero" [Anglo] is very at ease when "them Mexicans" are at each other. We will never be united unless we rid ourselves of the "Titeres" [puppets] the system has created.⁵⁰

In a scathing letter to Urdiales, copied to commission members, Perez condemned the editor's "irresponsible journalism," declaring, "In reading many articles I find that half-truths, misstatements and outright falsehoods were employed to make attacks on various groups in western Nebraska." Aiming at the heart of the matter, Perez continued:

The function of the Mexican-American Commission is to help protect the rights of individuals

**"My work day
wasn't 8 to 5.
I worked seven
days a week. I
would get calls in
the evenings, all
hours of the day."
—Isabel Ramirez**



Original design of the *Nebraska Mexican-American Commission Newsletter*, April 1974.

and to further the Mexican-American community economically, and socially. The Mexican-American Commission Newsletter which only serves to divide the Mexican-American community does not serve a function of the Mexican-American Commission. This Newsletter is not only a bad example of journalism, it is also an example of a gross misunderstanding of the purpose of the Mexican-American Commission.⁵¹

The commission's function and identity also became the key topic at its meeting in January 1976. The Lincoln-Lancaster County Mexican American Commission Advisory Committee presented a list of six proposals. One requested the MAC to conduct a county-wide survey of the needs of the elderly. The commission concluded that the advisory committee should undertake the task. The advisory committee

wanted the newsletter to become bilingual and include more information about commission activities. It also requested that the commission name be changed to "Spanish Speaking." One commissioner stated that the MAC did not deny services to other Spanish speakers but "if they wanted to be included, then let them request the legislature." Another noted, "If you look at Nebraska all you see is Mexican-American . . . this identifies us." If others wanted the name changed, the commissioners insisted, "they can go to the legislature to have it changed."⁵² One commissioner added fuel to the fire when he complained that the equal employment agency was lagging in its duties toward minorities because women were becoming predominant on the committee and failing to be assertive enough. "We give the women zippers and they don't know what to do with them," he said.⁵³ Not surprisingly, some constituents took this as an affront. At the next meeting community member Dolores Cardona took the floor to declare "As a Chicana woman, she was personally insulted and indicated that this biased statement was an insult not only to women, but to Chicanas by a Commissioner who represents minorities."⁵⁴ It seemed that the more the commission did and the more the Hispanic community became aware of it, the more reasons emerged for criticism.

One commissioner expressed the dilemma well in her farewell remarks following the end of her term in office. Following an expression of gratitude for the opportunity to serve, she remarked, "I am happy also to have gotten to know each member and have also seen Stan develop his confidence and maturity—in a way I feel sorry for our Director because even if he receives wages for his service to us and our government he still is everybody's whipping boy."⁵⁵ And so the commission itself seemed to be in the spring of 1977 when Clement Aguilar, the state chairman of the American G.I. Forum of Nebraska, wrote to Governor Exon, "We the Mexican Americans of the State of Nebraska do not feel we are being properly represented on the Mexican-American Commission."⁵⁶

In the meantime the commission changed executive directors. Stan Porras resigned in January 1977 and was succeeded in March by field operative Peter Urdiales.⁵⁷ In his departing remarks, Porras insisted upon seeing the glass half-full, and so despite criticism he stated that he took great pride in seeing a record of "positive advancements" which he identified, among other things, as:

The recognition of the Mexican-American Commission by City, County, State, and Federal

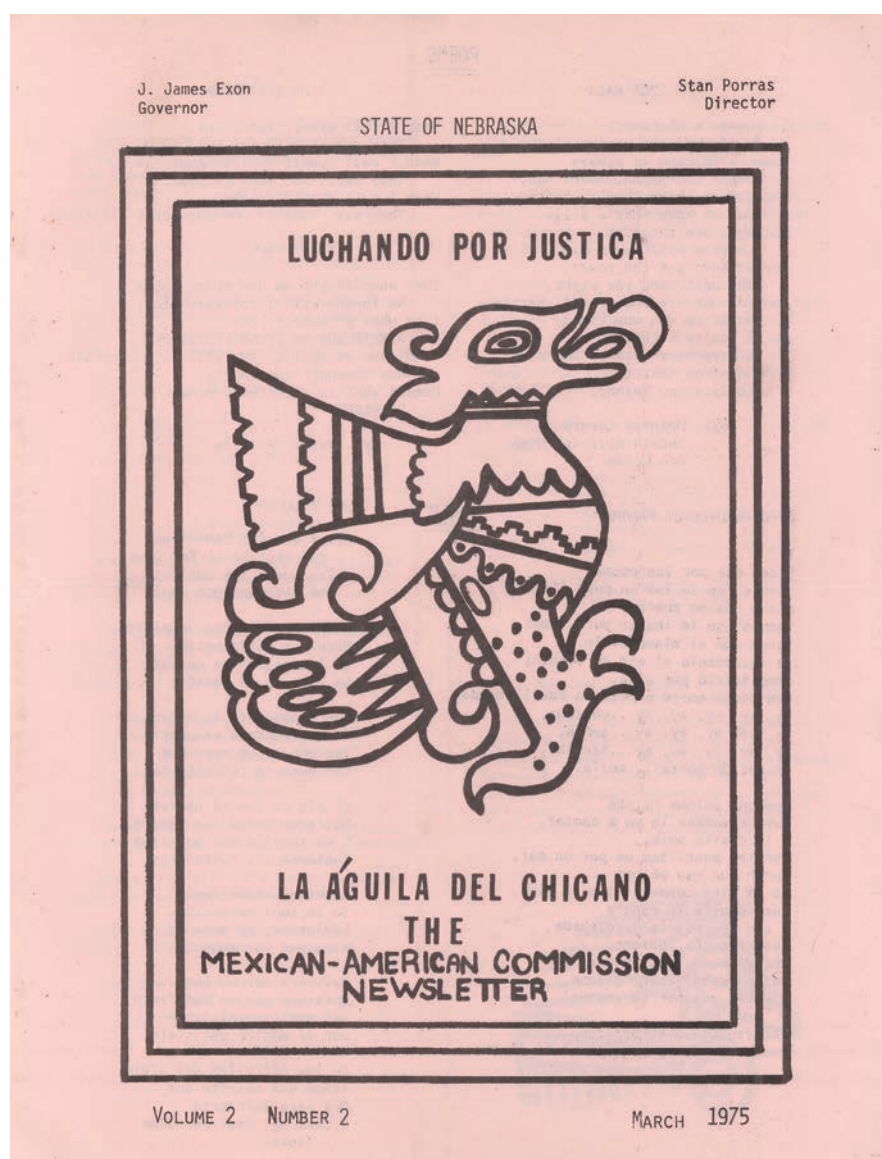
governmental agencies and elected officials; the increased awareness on the part of both the public and private sector of the problems of the Mexican-American; the renewed spirit, self-determination, open awareness and prideful dedication of the Mexican-American today; the recognition by other states of the positive efforts being made in Nebraska by the Mexican-American working hand-in-hand with the Mexican American Commission and community organizations.⁵⁸

Urdiales was formally installed in March 1977 and by the October quarterly meeting was also expressing his confidence in the commission and its understanding of its role and mission. In his director's report Urdiales asserted:

Since the beginning of the new fiscal year 77/78, I have been involved in numerous items of interest that relate directly to the Commission. One of the first tasks was to define the Commission's role politically with the constant thought that it must be in concert with community needs. The primary role of the commission is 'advocacy' with the meshing of programmatic and supportive assistance. Advocacy, as it relates to the Raza, is for this office to effectuate socio-economic change not only for that one individual seeking assistance but also for those not knowing where or who to contact but having the same problem(s).⁵⁹

This confidence was not shared by the broader Hispanic community. In the spring of 1978, members of the Scottsbluff Mexican American community approached U.S. congressman and gubernatorial candidate Charles Thone about the possibility of eliminating the commission under a new administration.⁶⁰ In July 1978 Clement Aguilar accepted appointment as a member of the MAC; following up on his earlier concerns, at the October meeting he asked that the commission be evaluated by an independent contractor, "to provide the Commission with direction as to the Commission's activities."⁶¹ Aguilar's recommendation was adopted and the commission set itself up for a formal review. This would become a turning point in the history of the Nebraska MAC.

In May 1979 the commission contracted with the Bureau of Business Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to conduct an external independent evaluation of its operations.⁶²

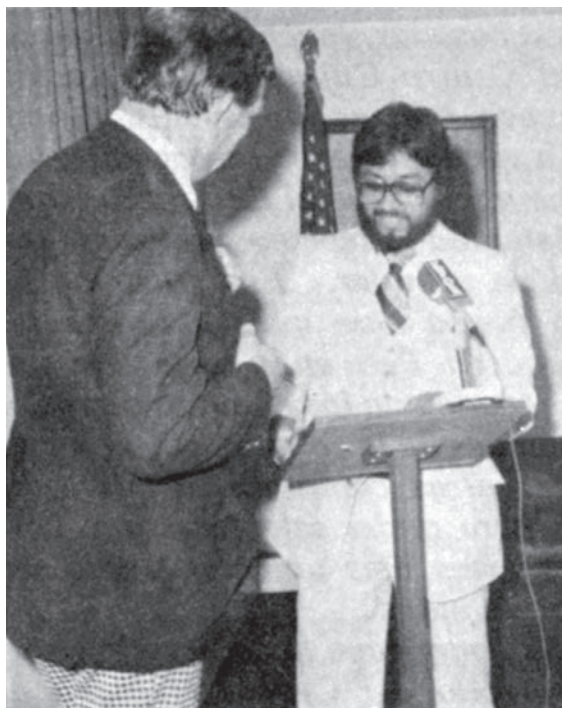


The evaluation began that month, and the final report was presented to the commission in April 1980. The report stated that the commission had been doing exactly what the directors envisioned, and that since its founding it had successfully provided programmatic and individual direct assistance to the Mexican American community. This, the report concluded, was the problem.⁶³

The report noted that the Nebraska MAC "was the first commission of its kind established in the United States and did not have the opportunity to compare its operations with similar agencies across the country."⁶⁴ Consequently, since its inception any formal definition of its mission and goals remained unclear, leading the investigators to conclude: "The Commission is operating without clearly defined objectives, which is inhibiting its ability to deal

In 1975 Peter Urdiales redesigned the Nebraska Mexican-American Commission Newsletter, making it more overtly political in tone and content.

Urdiales, as the MAC's executive director, presents Governor Exon with a memento on behalf of the commission at a July 22, 1978, meeting at the Governor's Mansion.
Nebraska Mexican-American Commission Newsletter, August 1978



with the major issues confronting the Mexican-American people in the state of Nebraska.”⁶⁵ Without such clarity of design, the commission had become an ad-hoc agency, “operating on a day-to-day basis.”⁶⁶

The commission’s initial flaw was attributed to the leadership of its first director, Stan Porras, who erred by “attempting to establish the Commission as a service agency which would administer programs.”⁶⁷ As evidence the report cited the efforts to administer the Migrant Program, and the establishment and activities of the Western Office. Performance in this period was “measured in terms of the number and types of individual cases handled.”⁶⁸ With a lack of planning and insufficient developmental meetings of commissioners and staff, operations reverted to simply handling day-to-day affairs. Citing the 1976 state attorney general ruling, the report concluded that the commission should not be involved in the provision of direct services and administration of programs. The report found that most recently “there has been a move away from this type of activity by the Lincoln office” but “not by the Western office.”⁶⁹

The purpose of the office was to “provide services and information regarding other programs to those who we are to serve.” No formal description of what the office was to do was provided at the time and the Director advised the Regional Field Officer that because the job description was

not fully established he should “play it by ear.” From that period to the present the office has operated largely on its own initiative, having little contact with, or reporting to, the Lincoln office.⁷⁰

The investigators found that the Western Office concentrated the majority of its time and efforts on individual cases and direct involvement in local matters. Furthermore:

An April 1978 directive that the Western office must refrain from providing direct services on immigration cases has not been adopted. A September 1978 directive from the Assistant Director to the Regional Field Officer, that ‘under no circumstances was he or anyone in his office to undertake any project that has not been first reviewed and approved by the Lincoln office,’ does not appear to have been acted upon as the Western office is continuing to operate autonomously with little communication to the Lincoln office.⁷¹

Because of these flaws of design and execution, the MAC had lost its way. “There appears to be considerable misunderstanding in the community as to what the role of the Commission actually is,” the report said.⁷² Until the agency more clearly defined its role and objectives it would continue on a “piecemeal basis,” failing to live up to its potential to serve the Mexican American community and the state.⁷³

The evaluation was a bombshell in the commission meeting of June 14, 1980. At that meeting the commission announced the resignation of Director Peter Urdiales. The committee voted to accept the report and to begin implementing all of its recommendations, particularly those calling for an end to direct services and for a “realignment” of the Western Office. More than a dozen voices from the audience objected to the report and specifically to the “politics” behind Urdiales’s resignation and the conclusions about “closing” the Western Office.⁷⁴ The commission was engulfed in turmoil for the next five months. Ex-director Urdiales challenged the commission’s actions, formally charging that its action was invalid because it had violated the state open meetings provisions. He also claimed that the actions against him were part of a vendetta by the new Nebraska governor, Charles Thone.⁷⁵

Urdiales was partially vindicated by a review of committee proceedings by the state attorney general’s office. The office listed numerous commission violations which included failure to: give proper notice of all meetings; formally provide reasons for going into executive session; keep written minutes

available for inspection; have appropriate rules for public participation. Pleased with this outcome, Urdiales planned to sue for compensation and a return to his old position.⁷⁶ Regarding the allegedly political nature of his removal, he said he held the governor accountable and that the key issue was the operations of the western office. He told the *Lincoln Star*:

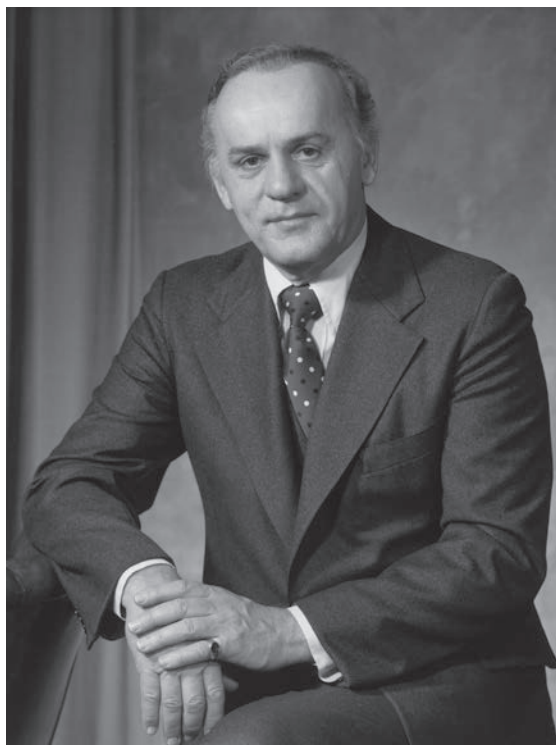
I want to keep the western office open with full staffing. They're putting the people in western Nebraska through a bunch of garbage. If anything the administrative office should be in Scottsbluff. . . . It's also the principle of the thing. I gave six years of my life to the state and this is the thanks I get from Charlie Thone, a kick in the ass. They put me through hell and now they're going to get a taste of it.⁷⁷

The newspaper reported that Thone had appointed six of the ten current commissioners; Urdiales charged that Thone had appointed "hatchetmen" to get him fired. "Urdiales said he was told during the closed session that he was being asked to resign because of his anti-Thone reputation and because of the recent evaluation of the commission prepared by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Bureau of Business Research."⁷⁸

In careful compliance with open meeting rules, the commission now formally released Peter Urdiales and named Jesse Cervantes as the new executive director on July 19, 1980. The commission also resolved to reduce the Western Office staff from three to one and to end direct services.⁷⁹ In his first editorial comment in the commission newsletter, Cervantes reviewed the recent events, concluding:

The evaluation conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, together with recent events over the last few months, have demonstrated the Commission's weaknesses and in some cases its failures. Because of this the Commission and its staff is determined to correct these inadequacies to insure the Commission's role in assisting the Mexican-American community throughout the State in years to come. The Commission is now at a crossroads in its existence.⁸⁰

By legislating the nation's first advocacy agency for Hispanics, the state of Nebraska and its Mexican American community appeared to accomplish something unique and positive. Emerging in an atmosphere of civil rights and community action, the commission thought itself to be



Charles Thone served as governor of Nebraska, 1979-83. NSHS RG1704-3-1

on responsible ground by declaring its purpose to be direct service to the community rather than developing political agendas. From 1973 through 1980 the commission appeared to be compiling a record of success. In the end, however, this very success threatened to be its undoing.

Perhaps the best analysis and sense of meaning of these years comes from a report from the Nebraska Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Commissioned in 1975 to assess all of the state civil rights agencies, the Advisory Committee concluded that, in general, most agencies were created as a minimum response to avoid federal intervention rather than to truly advocate for rights in their defined areas:

Each agency had a very specific function to perform; usually this was of a fact-finding nature or the handling of individual complaints. Constituents, however see these agencies as "The Government," and are disappointed when their requests are referred to another department. Elected officials tend to view the agencies as lightning rods which should absorb the initial shock of constituent discontent . . . Having an inadequate budget, the agencies are acutely vulnerable to charges of ineffectiveness from friend and foe alike. The Advisory Committee found that the most serious problem the eight agencies faced was "the dilemma of false expectations."⁸¹



Jesse Cervantes was named the MAC's executive director on July 19, 1980. *Nebraska Mexican-American Commission Newsletter*, December 1980

The MAC, with an aggressive service program, active leadership, an expanding foundation of resources and personnel, and a record of successfully meeting many if not all of the expectations of the Hispanic community, should have been an exception to a list of agencies facing the dilemma. Instead, as its new director declared, it found itself squarely at the crossroads of service and false expectations. Over the coming years the commission would struggle in an environment of new leadership and new politics to redefine its role and mission, redirect its activities, and rededicate itself as the official voice of the Hispanic community of Nebraska. 🌱

NOTES

¹ For a brief history of the commission's founding and its first years, see Roger P. Davis, "Service Not Power: The Early Years of the Nebraska Commission on Mexican-Americans, 1971-1975," *Nebraska History* 89 (Summer 2008): 67-83.

² Perez to Exon, Western Union Telex, Nov. 3, 1971, Box 54, RG1, J. James Exon Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society (hereafter Exon Papers).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Gene Sanchez to Exon, grievance report, Apr. 24, 1973, Box 1, Nebraska Commission on Mexican-Americans Records, NSHS (hereafter NCMA Records). The American G.I. Forum is a national organization of Hispanic veterans who work to combat prejudice against the Hispanic community. See Henry Ramos, *The American G.I. Forum: In Pursuit of the Dream* (n.p.: Arte Publico Press, 1998); *ibid.*, 79.

⁵ MAC Newsletter, 1, no. 1 (April 1973).

⁶ Stan Porras headed the MAC from June 1972 through January 1977. Field Representative Peter Urdiales served as acting director and then was hired as director in May 1977. Urdiales served until June 1980. See: "Porras resigns Mexican-American directorship," *Lincoln Star*, Jan. 29, 1977, 3; "Urdiales named director of Mex-Am Commission," *Lincoln Journal*, May 9, 1977, 5; "Commission 'fires' Urdiales," *Lincoln Star*, Aug. 9, 1980, 1.

⁷ Grace Franklin and Randall Ripley, *CETA: Politics and Policy 1973-1982* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 4, 6, 16. For a review of the Mexican and Mexican American demography of Nebraska in this period, see Roger P. Davis, "Hispanics in Central Nebraska, 1890-1996," in *A Prairie Mosaic: An Atlas of Central Nebraska's Land, Culture, Nature* (Kearney: University of Nebraska at Kearney, 2000), 218-25.

⁸ "Migrant Proposal Request-1976," July 1975, 4-1 through 4-3, RG1, SG40, B&C 1976, MAC, NSHS.

⁹ Interview with Ella Ochoa, Director, Nebraska Association of Farmworkers, May 1, 2012; *Colorado Migrant Council* (Denver: n.p., 1970), 10-12.

¹⁰ For the entire scenario of events and more details see: "Stanley Denies Beating Claims," *Lincoln Star*, June 10, 1972, 5; *ibid.*, "Stanley Would Welcome Migrant Program Probe," June 13, 1972, 32; *ibid.*, "Federal Investigator to Visit Alliance Migrant School," June 16, 1972, 5; "Migrant Head to Visit Alliance," *Lincoln Evening Journal*, June 19, 1972, 11; "150 Persons Attend Alliance School Meet," *Lincoln Star*, June 24, 1972, 13.

¹¹ "Stanley Terms Migrant School Program Pawn," *Lincoln Evening Journal*, June 27, 1972, 19.

¹² Franklin and Ripley, *CETA: Politics and Policy 1973 -1982*, 19; interview with Ella Ochoa.

¹³ "Commission meeting considers problems of migrant workers," *The Scottsbluff Star-Herald*, Apr. 29, 1972, 1; "Commission Employs Porras as Director," *Lincoln Evening Journal*, June 28, 1972, 35.

¹⁴ Porras to Betty Fikar, Feb. 15, 1973; Porras to Soukup, Mar. 19, 1973; Porras to Joe Garcia, OEO Migrant Division, Apr. 4, 1973; Rep. Charles Thone to Porras, Apr. 17, 1973; and Arringdale to Porras, June 28, 1973, all in Box 1 (320084), NSHS; Exon to Arringdale, July 16, 1973, Box 54, RG1, SG40, Boards and Commissions, NSHS. The Exon note stated: "You will find enclosed the letter from the Attorney General's office clarifying the question as to the legality of the Mexican-American Commission receiving funds from the Colorado Migrant Council. You will note that according to the opinion the Commission can legally function in this area."

¹⁵ Perez Jr. to Porras, July 31, Aug. 3, Aug. 28, 1973; Porras to Perez Jr., Sept. 17, 1973; Perez Jr. to Elizabeth Morales, Oct. 10, 1973, all in Box 1 (320084), NCMA, NSHS.

¹⁶ Migrant Meeting for Nebraska, Mar. 18, 1974, 14, transcript in Scottsbluff City Library.

¹⁷ Porras to Exon, Feb. 27, 1974.

¹⁸ Perez Jr. to Urdiales, Oct. 31, 1974, Box 1 (320084), NCMA, NSHS.

¹⁹ Perez to Porras, Scottsbluff, Aug. 27, 1973; Porras to Perez, Sept. 17, 1973; Perez to Porras, Oct. 1, 1973, Box 1 (320084), NCMA, NSHS.

²⁰ MAC minutes, Sept. 20, 1975.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Matzke to Porras, RE: Federal Fund Request, memo, Nov. 10, 1975, Box 187, RG1, SG40, Boards and Commissions, 1976, NSHS.

²³ Soukup to Exon, Jan. 17, 1976, Box 187, RG1, SG40, Boards and Commissions, 1976, NSHS. The bill, LB 949, was sponsored by Senator Loren Schmidt in the Agriculture Committee.

²⁴ Ibid., Porras to Erixon, Apr. 7, 1976.

²⁵ Ibid., May 11, 1976.

²⁶ Ibid., Erixon to Porras, May 17, 1976.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., Porras to Erixon, May 20, 1976.

²⁹ Porras to Douglas, Sept. 27, 1976, Box 8 (320095), NCMA, NSHS.

³⁰ Ibid., Hutchison to Porras, Sept. 29, 1976.

³¹ Ibid., N. Steven King, Staff Realignment document, Dec. 31, 1980.

³² Lucido to Chair of MAC, Nov. 5, 1976, Box 187, RG1, SG40, NSHS.

³³ MAC to Chezick, Jan. 3, 1977, Box 226, RG1, SG40, Boards and Commissions, NSHS; Urdiales to Yetter, Iowa Migrant Action Program, August, n.d., 1977.

³⁴ Cervantes to Giron, Dec. 27, 1977, Box 257, RG1, SG40, Boards and Commissions, NSHS; "Migrant Workers Fade from Farms," *Omaha World-Herald*, Midlands ed., Sept. 10, 2008, 1-2; interview with Ella Ochoa.

³⁵ Jensen to Porras, Mar. 1, 1973; Porras to Graham, Apr. 6, 1973; Porras to Koehler, Apr. 19, 1973, Box 1 (320084), NCMA, NSHS.

³⁶ MAC minutes, Apr. 27, 1973. Included with the minutes is a copy of the list of grievances, which had been sent to the governor. The eleven grievances included: (1) The commission had not published report on progress it had made since its inception. (2) No fiscal or budget reports were public. (3) Inadequate work had been done to inform and seek out local Mexican Americans. (4) No minutes of meetings were readily available for the public. (5) The commission director erred in a newspaper story when he indicated that he could speak for the entire Mexican American community. (6) The commission should not influence state officials to favor any of the various Hispanic organizations in the state. (7) The duties of the commissioners were not clear. (8) Many Mexican Americans of the Scotts Bluff area unaware of the commission. (9) That commissioners and director do not fulfill their obligations. (10) That the commission does little to look into problems in Scotts Bluff County and (11) That local commissioners and the director have not been accountable to the people they represent.

³⁷ "Commission Denies Chicanos' Charges," *Lincoln Sunday Journal Star*, Aug. 12, 1973, 6B.

³⁸ Exon to Porras, memo, Sept. 10, 1973, Box 1 (320084), NCMA, NSHS.

³⁹ Ibid., Porras to Exon, Sept. 17, 1973.

⁴⁰ *Lincoln Journal*, Apr. 1, 1974, 10.

⁴¹ Porras to Commissioners, June 27, 1974, and, Sept. 24, 1974, Box 1 (320084), NCMA, NSHS.

⁴² "Mexican-American Commission Educational Report of the Lyman Public School System," October 1974, Nebraska Document, microfiche, M1500B001-77.

⁴³ Interview with Isabel Ramirez, Nov. 2, 2012; Western Office Quarterly Report, Nov. 2, 1974, 1; *ibid.*, November–December–January 1974-75, 1-2, History Box 3, MAC Office; MAC minutes, Feb. 21, 1975, 4.

⁴⁴ Interview with Isabel Ramirez; Western Office Quarterly Report, April–May–June, 1975; *ibid.*, October–November–December 1975, 1; History Box 3, MAC Office; "SE Group Feels 'No Fair Shake' Here," *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*, Oct. n.d., 1975, n.p.

⁴⁵ Interview with Isabel Ramirez; Western Office Quarterly Reports (various), History Box 3, MAC Office; "Staff Realignment, Mexican-American Commission" Report, Dec. 31, 1980, Box 10 (320096) (King 1980-1981), NCMA, NSHS; "Alcoholism Project: Status Report," November 1979, Box 9 (320088), NCMA, NSHS.

⁴⁶ Interview with Isabel Ramirez.

⁴⁷ "Resignation of Porras Demanded," *Lincoln Star*, Mar. 30, 1974, 9; "Porras Denies Charges that Meet Date Changed," *Lincoln Evening Journal*, Apr. 1, 1974, 6.

⁴⁸ "NU Student Group Asks for Resignation of Porras," *Lincoln Evening Journal*, Apr. 5, 1974, 10.

⁴⁹ Nebraska Documents: Microfiche, M1500N00-1975/76; MAC Newsletter, n.p.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Feb. 12, 1975, Box 1 (320084), NCMA, NSHS.

⁵² MAC minutes, Jan. 17, 1976.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., June 19, 1976.

⁵⁵ Mary Cardona resignation letter, Jan. n.d. 1976, Box 187, RG1, SG40, Boards and Commissions, January–June, 1976, NSHS.

⁵⁶ Aguilar to Exon, Apr. 26, 1977, Box 226, RG1, SG 40, NSHS.

⁵⁷ "Porras resigns Mexican-American directorship," *Lincoln Star*, Jan. 29, 1977, 3; "Urdiales named director of Mexican-American Commission," *Lincoln Journal*, May 9, 1977, 5.

⁵⁸ Porras to Valdez, Jan. 28, 1977, Box 226, RG1, SG40, NSHS.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Director's Report, Oct. 1, 1977.

⁶⁰ MAC minutes, May 10, 1978, 3; Director's Report, Apr. 22, 1978.

⁶¹ MAC minutes, Oct. 21, 1978, 4.

⁶² Ibid., May 12, 1979, 2.

⁶³ Evaluation of the Nebraska Mexican-American Commission, by David Chinchin, Bureau of Business Research, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (April 1980), 78 pp., Box 8 (320095), NCMA, NSHS.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid., iii.

⁶⁶ Ibid., i.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁷¹ Ibid., 38.

⁷² Ibid., 70.

⁷³ Ibid., 28.

⁷⁴ MAC minutes, June 14, 1980.

⁷⁵ "Open meeting rules said violated," *Lincoln Star*, Aug. 7, 1980, 27; *ibid.*, "Urdiales plans to reclaim MAC position," Aug. 8, 1980, 9; *ibid.*, "Commission 'fires' Urdiales," Aug. 9, 1980, 1; "Urdiales plans to go to court, seek about \$3,200 in wages," *Lincoln Journal*, Aug. 9, 1980, 6.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ "Open meeting rules said violated."

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ MAC minutes, July 19, 1980.

⁸⁰ MAC Newsletter, vol. 7, no. 2 (December 1980), 2-3.

⁸¹ Gale to Porras, Apr. 15, 1975, Nebraska Civil Rights Agencies Study, United States Commission on Civil Rights, Central States Regional Office.

Roger P. Davis is professor of history at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

