We have lost a great figure in the Chicano Movement. Sal Castro, an educator, school and civil rights leader, died April 15. He was 93. In contrast, his life was consummately, exemplifying the transition of the World War II generation and Mexican Americans into the Chicano Movement of the later 1960s. During his lifetime, Castro faced many of the challenges confronting Mexican Americans, working as a day laborer, a waiter, a janitor and, in 1943, serving in the military during the Korean War and stationed in the southern U.S., he came to understand the sting of racial discrimination and from elementary school to the university he suffered the inequities faced by Mexican students in the United States educational system.

He swore to combat educational inequity throughout his adult life by becoming a teacher and counselor amidst the presumption that Mexican children came to school ready to learn but it was poor run schools with disinterested teachers that repeatedly failed them.

It was in 1968 when I first met Sal. I was a student at UCLA and participating in a meeting of United Mexican-American Students (UMAS) at which Castro was invited to speak. All of us in UMAS had heard about Sal Castro he was already well known for his dedication to students and challenging the system to meet the needs of Mexican-American youth. However, we thought that as university students, we were at the forefront of a new movement to change. Very quickly, we realized that Sal was well ahead of us in trying to bring about meaningful changes specifically, changes in education for Mexican-Americans.

Sal brought along with him several high school students and he talked about how these young people were no longer afraid to speak up and demand educational conditions, which were resulting in more than 50 percent of Mexican-American desert students dropping out of school before graduation. He told us these high school students were going to act, they were planning demonstrations against poor quality education, and these events were going to happen soon. He called UMAS college students to join with these high school students and lend them support.

The attacks on March 15, 1968 occurred. Thousands of students walked out of East L.A. middle schools and high schools, including my alma mater Roosevelt High School. The Los Angeles Unified School District faced a series of protests unlike anything that had occurred in its history. The Mexican-American movement for civil rights had moved from the agricultural field—the farm worker movement led by César Chávez—to the city with the largest population of Mexican Americans living in the U.S., and Sal Castro was at the center of this new social and political challenge to the status quo.

Sal did not go unnoticed by the authorities. He was arrested and faced fifteen counts of conspiracy to disrupt public schools, and fifteen counts of conspiracy to disrupt the peace. If convicted he would have been in prison the remainder of his life. The school district acted by removing ten from the classroom. Ultimately, all charges were dropped and, with strong support from the community, Sal was allowed to teach once again.

Fundamental to the 1968 walkouts were the students that Sal was able to mobilize. Many of them had attended the Mexican American Youth Leadership Conference, a three-day event held at Camp Hess Kramer in Walnut, California. Sal first volunteered at the conference in 1965, before long became a volunteer himself. Sal was a leader more meaningful to Mexican American youth than anyone he was from various high schools, he had them question the educational and social conditions of their schools and how they perceived themselves. He used to say that students who straddled this three-day "camp," as he called it, were always changed by it. They became more secure in their identity and motivated to further educate themselves and be agents for change.

In fact, it was Castro's camp leaders who took on leadership roles in planning the 1968 walkouts, including Lucero Espiranza and Susan Ratner both of whom were UCLA students at the time. Juan Gómez-Quiñones, a UCLA graduate student, and now UCLA professor of History and American studies, supports the walkouts and later coalition challenge the LAUSD Board when it attempted to terminate Castro's activities, which he later makes a documentary on the walkouts (released in 1997), Espiranza, became the executive producer with Edward James Olmos directing the 2006 HBO film Walkout.

The list of graduates of the Youth Leadership Conference and the college students who volunteered as counselors includes former California State Supreme Court Justice Carlos Moreno, Los Angeles Mayors Antonio Villaraigosa, Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina, as well as Richard Alatorre, Richard Polanco, and many, many other young people whom Castro oversaw to become civic leaders, teachers, school administrators, lawyers, and doctors.

Some will argue that the demonstrations of 1968 did not cause significant change in the educational system. They will point to the fact that Chicano students are still having trouble with their schools, that incomes are high but the walkouts were a few years ago because Castro promoted a dramatic change in the youth, particularly Chicano in the Los Angeles region. We were no longer "students" and about the idea that students, for reasons that affected our communities. This perception period while periodical meet at social events, and it was not until 2003 that I realized I had no work on educational projects. He recruited students to the camp and discussed the "Mexican-American" case and the ongoing struggle with school segregation for Mexican students in California. Sylvia Hermosillo, Natividad綦rzquez, and Nadine Bermudez, UCLA doctoral students, joined me. No, he was paid, we volunteered our time because Sal asked us to join him, for the legacy and future of the conference, in addition to its impact, was important to us.

In 2000, I interviewed Sal for an oral history project at the CIRCA. In 2006, we also collaborated on Sal Castro's and the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference: Developing Chicano Leaders Since 1963, a significant research conference at UCLA that focused on the camp, the young leaders, and the leadership, which I'm proud to say was the first of its kind in this area. The conference was held on March 15, 1968. We wanted to honor the 1968 events and Sal Castro's central role in them. In this film, Castro speaks to students about his youth leadership camp and told them to "write your own history." This was, in fact, how he conducted all of his students. He would say that the history of our people was excluded from the history books, or even misrepresented by educators. He challenged students to educate themselves and project themselves to make a difference for themselves and their communities. Ultimately, Sal Castro succeeded in changing the lives of a generation, and he did indeed write his own history.