



# The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal (Wisconsin Studies in Autobiography)

*Jose Angel Gutierrez*

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Texas, for years, was a one-party state controlled by white democrats. In 1962, a young eighteen-year-old heard the first rumblings of Chicano community organization in the barrios of Cristal. The rumor in the town was that five Mexican Americans were going to run for all five seats on the city council. But first, poor citizens had to find a way to pay the \$1.75 poll tax. Money had to be raised—through bake sales of tamales, cake walks, and dances. So began the political activism of José Angel Gutiérrez.

Gutiérrez's autobiography, *The Making of a Chicano Militant*, is the first insider's view of the important political and social events within the Mexican American communities in South Texas during the 1960s and 1970s. A controversial and dynamic political figure during the height of the Chicano movement, Gutiérrez offers an absorbing personal account of his life at the forefront of the Mexican-American civil rights movement—first as a Chicano and then as a militant.

Gutiérrez traces the racial, ethnic, economic, and social prejudices facing Chicanos with powerful scenes from his own life: his first summer job as a tortilla maker at the age of eleven, his racially motivated kidnapping as a teenager, and his coming of age in the face of discrimination as a radical organizer in college and graduate school. When Gutiérrez finally returned to Cristal, he helped form the Mexican American Youth Organization and, subsequently the Raza Unida Party to confront issues of ethnic intolerance in his community. His story is soon to be a classic in the developing literature of Mexican American leaders.

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