

# **The Revolt of the Cockroach People Study Guide**

**The Revolt of the Cockroach People by Oscar Zeta  
Acosta**

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# Plot Summary

The Revolt of the Cockroach People is the fascinating story of Chicano lawyer Buffalo Zeta Brown, written by his son, Oscar Zeta Acosta. Brown became involved with the Chicano Militants when he moved to Los Angeles in 1968. He originally went to Los Angeles looking for a story to write. Brown wanted to write a book. He didn't want to work as a lawyer but that isn't the way it worked out.

Brown spent three years with the Chicano Militants. This book goes behind the scenes of the radical Chicano movement in the barrio of Tooner Flats in East Los Angeles. The reader goes inside the group with Brown and becomes familiar with the various characters. Not only did Brown function as the groups' lawyer, he became one of them, helping to organize the protests and marches.

His first march with the group was the protest at the Garfield School the day after he was introduced to them. He looked at what was happening and wondered what his role should be. The leaders were eventually indicted on charges of conspiracy to disrupt the schools. Brown defended them and eventually won.

The Militants also tackled the Catholic Church and disrupted Masses on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in 1969. This resulted in the St. Basil Twenty-One case. There were also other cases such as the Robert Fernandez case. The boy was found hanged in jail. His family felt the boy was murdered and went to Brown. Brown got a second autopsy and a hearing, but not the charge of murder he was looking for.

When Brown was in Acapulco for several months, the East Los Angeles riots occurred. Reporter Roland Zanzibar was killed during the riots. A group of militants were arrested in conjunction with the riots. They were known as the Tooner Flats Seven and Brown won a verdict of innocent for them in the year-long trial. Along the way, he challenged the way in which Grand Juries were selected and won the right to question judges.

Brown's involvement with the Chicano Militants wasn't strictly as legal adviser. He drove the car for the bombing of the Safeway Store and he was involved in planning the bombing of the Los Angeles Court House. This was his way of achieving revenge. He was never charged for any of these crimes and he was present at most of their demonstrations. During the Laguna Park riots, he was in Acapulco.

The Revolt of the Cockroach People is very interesting reading. The book is easy and fast to read and the reader will find it well worth the time.



# Chapter 1, pgs. 1-21

## Chapter 1, pgs. 1-21 Summary and Analysis

The book opens on Christmas Eve 1969, with three hundred Chicanos gathered in front of St. Basil's Church carrying candles. The wealthy from the Beverly Hills mansions are inside the church. The marchers are from the east side of the Los Angeles River from a barrio known as Tooner Flats. Most of them are young and there are three priests handing out tortillas.

The marchers are told they can enter the church for the televised march but when they reach the top of the stairs, the doors are closed and they are told that the church is full. Gilbert, Pelon and the other leaders decide they want to go inside. When they walk around the side of the church, they find the police waiting in riot gear in the parking lot.

Several of the leaders enter through the basement. An usher tells them they have to leave. The crowd outside is chanting to let the poor people into the church. A few punches are thrown between Gilbert and the usher when it dawns on the lawyer that the usher is a policeman.

The police surround the group as the other Chicanos enter the church. During the ensuing confrontation, the Chicanos are sprayed with Mace. The lawyer watches. Since he is dressed in a suit and tie, he is not touched by the police.

The street nun, Duana Doherty, enters the church and runs to the front where she asks the congregation to help the poor people. She is carried out by two ushers. Chicano militant Gloria Chavez attacks the altar with a golf club. As she runs to the vestibule, she is grabbed by three police. The lawyer, Brown, watches all of this. Sgt. Armas tells his men to leave Brown alone because he is the Chicano's lawyer.

Brown tells the rest of the Chicanos to go home. They will meet again tomorrow for the Christmas Mass. Brown goes to his office. He calls a journalist friend of his in Colorado and tells him about the riot in the church. Brown wants the journalist to write the story.



## Chapter 2, pgs. 22-31

### Chapter 2, pgs. 22-31 Summary and Analysis

Brown came to Los Angeles in January 1968. He arrived by bus and checked into the Belmont, at Third and Hill. The hotel was infested with cockroaches, and when he walked around the surrounding area, he didn't like it. It was populated with hobos and prostitutes.

The next morning his sister picks him up and drives him to her home in Canogo Park. He meets her husband Dave, an engineer who works on projects for the military. This is not acceptable to Brown, but he says nothing. They talk about his plans, and Teresa tells him about a group of Chicano Militants in East Los Angeles. Brown decides that the suburban life style of Teresa and Dave isn't what he is looking for.

That afternoon, he visits his cousin Manny's bar called Manny's Fish Bowl. Manny had been a high jumper at the University of Southern California and was considered a contender for the 1952 Olympics. When the time came, the coach ignored him. Manny claims it is because he was Chicano.

Manny tells Brown that the Chicano Militants are a group of Communist punks. They talk for the afternoon and Manny gives Brown some money. He pays one month's rent in advance.

While lying in bed, he remembers his protest at his grad school graduation when the Chicanos were not allowed to march with white partners. He decides that he will learn Spanish, write a book and practice criminal law.



## Chapters 3-4, pgs. 32-47

### Chapters 3-4, pgs. 32-47 Summary and Analysis

Brown met Gilbert after he had been in Los Angeles for three months. Brown says he is researching an article for the New York Times. He is introduced to Gilbert by a friend of Manny's. One of the offices of the Militants is in the basement of an Episcopalian church in Tooner Flats. They don't show much interest in him until they learn that he is a lawyer.

Gilbert says they need a Chicano lawyer who is on their side. They ask Brown about his legal background and the kinds of cases he has handled. Gilbert asks to see his Bar card and he shows it to them.

The Chicano Militants are planning to stage a strike that Brown says he wants to write about. Gilbert wants him to write for their paper *La Voz* and tells him to come to the demonstration the next day. They agree to meet in front of the Garfield School at nine the next morning.

Brown has been in protest marches before. He is also drinking again, which he figures is part of his personal heritage. He had taken the name Buffalo Zeta Brown.

Brown attends the demonstration the next day. All of the people are wearing Chicano Liberation Front buttons. The students are being urged not to attend school. As soon as students enter the school, a fire alarm sounds and they pour out. Police and fire engines arrive. There is a confrontation and arrests. The students begin to march to the school board. Brown wonders what his role should be.

In Chapter Four, Brown travels to Delano to meet with Cesar Chavez. The Farm Workers Union has a forty acre ranch there that is their headquarters. Chavez has been on a hunger strike for twenty-five days but asks Brown how he is doing in Los Angeles. He tells Brown to help the group in Los Angeles. As Brown leaves, he decides he will help the group for several months and then go to Acapulco to write.



## Chapter 5, pgs. 48-64

### Chapter 5, pgs. 48-64 Summary and Analysis

Brown is now working out of his room at the Belmont Hotel. After his visit with Chavez, he is working for Gilbert, Risco and Ruth and other cases on May 21, 1968. He receives a call from the church office saying that the police are there. By the time Brown arrives, Ruth is there alone. Gilbert, Risco and Mangas have been arrested. The police have also raided the offices of the Chicano Militants. He tells Ruth to call a meeting for that evening.

On the way to the jail, he listens to the news and learns that thirteen of the Chicano Militants have been indicted by a Grand Jury on charges of conspiracy to disrupt schools. At the jail he asks to see all thirteen prisoners. Risco introduces him to the prisoners he doesn't already know. They learn from Brown that they can face up to forty five years in prison, three years for each of the fifteen counts. He tells them that they better view the situation seriously. Brown doesn't feel that he has the experience to represent them, but Gilbert wants him.

Brown views the situation as being politically motivated since the arrests are right before the California Primary. The group had received telegrams of support from Kennedy and McCarthy, but not from Nixon. They decide to approach the problem from that point of view and to have pickets outside the jail. Risco and some of the men will stage a hunger strike until they are free.

Back at the church, Brown explains the situation to the assembled group and tells them what the prisoners want. The group begins to work on the literature and posters that they need.

The next morning there is a police line outside the Glass House. A group of Black Panthers and another black group are there to support the protesters, along with some people from the Communist Party. Brown gives orders to the protesters so they avoid arrest. Five thousand people march for five hours. They then go to Placita Square for a rally. Brown speaks at the rally and refers to the prison as the East Los Angeles Thirteen and presents the charges against them as political persecution for their speaking out against racism.

The East Los Angeles Thirteen are released on bail. Gilbert, Brown and others, while at the campaign headquarters of a candidate for District Attorney, receive offers of support from both the McCarthy and Kennedy campaigns. While they are talking, Kennedy is shot. They listen to the reports on television. They feel that their cause is lost and that Nixon will now win the election.



## Chapter 6-7, pgs. 65-88

### Chapter 6-7, pgs. 65-88 Summary and Analysis

McCarthy donated ten thousand dollars to the Chicano group.

Brown and members of the group are out around a lake near Edwards AFB, smoking dope and trying to relax. Everyone is tense about the upcoming trial. The owner of the property wants them to leave and starts shooting at them. They run off.

When the trial had initiated, Brown had argued that the indictment was defective and that the group had the constitutional right to march and protest. As a result, the court issued a temporary restraining order. It would probably be a year before there was a ruling.

Brown receives a call from Doctor Francisco Bravo, owner of the Pan American Bank, requesting a meeting with Mayor Yorty to discuss the situation in East Los Angeles. All thirteen defendants appear for the meetings. The mayor wants them to stop holding so many demonstrations.

That fall Brown became involved with the six Chicano law students and their battle against the Catholic Church. They try to see Cardinal McIntyre, who is busy. When they try to make an appointment, they are told they will be notified by mail. On the way out, they walk into the Cardinal's office. They are escorted out by the police. Three weeks later they stage the Christmas Eve protest at St. Basil's.

Chapter Seven opens on Christmas Day, 1969. After the arrest of the St. Basil Twenty-One, the [protesters are back at the church. They are marching in front of the church for the release of the prisoners with full media coverage. Stonewall, Brown's journalist friend from Colorado, helped make the arrangements for a showing of reporters from around the world. The attack on the Church is not received well by various Chicano communities who are Catholic and loyal to the church.

Their various organizations were financed by funding with grant money from various sources. Some of the foundations began asking questions about their activities. Brown, whose Chicano Legal Defense, was funded by the Ford Foundation. Brown quit and moved his office from the Belmont to the Episcopal Church's basement. They decide to have a three day fast and are allowed to use the grounds of the Jewish Temple near St. Basil's. The police position held by Sgt. Armas is two blocks away in the Fedco Building.

During the fast, Brown meets three girls, Veronica, Madeline, and Rosalie, who come home to his apartment after the fast. Then it is announced that Cardinal McIntyre has been fired by the Pope.





## Chapter 8, pgs. 89-104

### Chapter 8, pgs. 89-104 Summary and Analysis

A week after the firing of the cardinal, the family of Robert Fernandez arrives at the church basement asking for Brown's help. Seventeen-year-old Robert had been killed by the police, according to his family. He had been high on drugs. He met his sister who went to buy him a six-pack. When she returned, the police were talking to her brother and his friends because Robert had shouted out the words Chicano Power. The police threatened the sister, Lupe, with arrest when she asked what happened. The family tells Brown that Robert has had problems with that particular police officer before.

When Robert called his mother an hour later, he said he had been booked for Plain Drunk with bail set at five hundred dollars. A little while later, they receive a call from the police saying that Robert hung himself and was dead and the family had to identify the body.

At the funeral, the family notices purple spots on Robert's face. A man called Andy de Silva calls the family and tells them that his nephew, Mickey de Silva, was Robert's cell mate and that Robert had hanged himself. The family doesn't believe it.

Brown calls the coroner's office and says he will be there that afternoon. They would have a demonstration outside the office. While the demonstrators wait outside, Brown has a meeting with Coroner Naguchi, who says he will conduct a second autopsy with a panel of seven pathologists. They make the announcement at a joint press conference.

The following week, Brown attends the autopsy.



## Chapter 9, pgs. 105-118

### Chapter 9, pgs. 105-118 Summary and Analysis

The results of the autopsy on Robert Fernandez is inconclusive, but one of the pathologists says he thinks the boy was murdered. Brown looks for Mickey de Silva and can't find him so he talks to his uncle, Andy.

The coroner's hearing room is packed. The Chicano Militants are also there. Rosalie, Madeline and Veronica are there with Brown. Both Andy and Mickey are missing. The proceedings are televised. Brown feels that the situation at the hearing is politically motivated. Several people testify in addition to the pathologists, including the arresting officer, the jailer and the prisoner who collected the blankets. The prisoner testifies that the blanket Fernandez had was not cut up. In addition, the measurement of the cloth cut from the blanket presented as evidence do not match the measurement of the piece of cloth Fernandez is said to have tied around his neck. In addition, the strip of cloth has jagged edges while the hold in the blanket is straight cut.

The next day a psychological profile of Robert describes the situation in his life and says it is possible that he may have committed suicide. Mickey de Silva is then brought in to testify. He says he was asleep, and when he awoke, the police were removing Robert's body from the cell.

The jury rules that Robert's death was suicide.



## Chapter 120, pgs. 119-133

### Chapter 120, pgs. 119-133 Summary and Analysis

Brown is now living in a house on Sixth Street with Gilbert and the three girls. They drive there after the hearing and make Molotov cocktails. Brown vows to get even for Robert's death.

Brown has Gilbert and Pelon dress in jackets and ties. They have no specified plans when they start to drive around. Brown says they need to find a target that is symbolic. They discuss what names they will give if they are caught. Brown says he will give his own name.

They talk about finding the deputy who arrested Robert. They talk about killing de Silva or another cop. Since the Farmworkers Union were picketing Safeway, they talk about bombing a Safeway store. They work out the details of the attack. Gilbert and Pelon bomb the store while Brown waits in the car.

The three drive back to the house to celebrate with the girls. The next day Brown files as a candidate for Sheriff of Los Angeles County.



## Chapter 11, pgs. 145-155

### Chapter 11, pgs. 145-155 Summary and Analysis

Brown has an interview with Roland Zanzibar of KMEX about the Fernandez case. The station had broadcast the Coroner's hearing and Brown feels the reporter has a genuine interest in the situation. In the interview, Brown refers to the Chicanos as the Cockroach people. He also announces that he filed to run for sheriff and shows his receipt for the filing fee. He is not using the name of Zeta and says that since he has no organization or finances, his candidacy is a purely educational undertaking. After the interview, they talk over a beer at a neighboring bar.

Brown represents all of the St. Basil Twenty One. They have to have a special room for the trial because of the number of defendants. They find, during the trial, that the police had alerted church officials of the possibility of trouble at the Mass, although they wouldn't say where the information came from. During the first day of the trial, Brown is ruled in contempt of court for his behavior. Because of comments by spectators, they are cleared from the courtroom so they don't prejudice the jury.

When Brown objects to this, he is reprimanded and makes a motion for mistrial, saying he objects to the judge and the court. The judge orders him arrested. When some of the defendant say they want to be heard, they are also arrested since their bail is revoked. They are released after lunch.

The next day, the rector of St. Basil's testifies. Brown questions him about the advance information about the disturbance. Monsignor Hawkes testifies that the two street nuns, Josie and Duana, are not in good standing with the church. He asks about Cardinal McIntyre's dismissal and says that constitutes the defense of his clients. The judge orders Brown into custody for his way of speaking.

Brown is taken to the New County Jail. They tell him that they are treating him differently because he is a candidate for sheriff. He is processed and checked in. He gives his occupation as professional revolutionary. Jim Lovelace, the sheriff who walks him through the procedures, tells Brown that he would make a good Undersheriff and not to forget him if Brown wins the election for sheriff.



## Chapter 12, pgs. 156-167

### Chapter 12, pgs. 156-167 Summary and Analysis

During the month long trial of the St. Basil Twenty One, Brown was found in contempt ten times. During the closing arguments, Brown tells a story from the year 1500 AD and how Cortez landed in Mexico. In 1850, there were more invaders. The religion of Christianity is imposed on them. A hundred years after that, the St. Basil Twenty One try to obtain an audience with the Cardinal to secure his help in obtaining a better life for Chicanos. They are threatened and arrested. When he finishes, he receives a standing oration from the crowd.

After three hours, Brown is informed that the jury has delivered a verdict. On the way back to the courtroom, he is introduced to Liberace, who says he will vote for Brown. Back in the courtroom, they find there is no verdict, the jury wants portions of testimony read. It takes seven days for the verdict. Six defendants are found guilty and the other fifteen are innocent. Sentences are from ninety days to six months. Brown will appeal, but they celebrate the partial victory at his house.

One of the jurors from the trial calls him and he leaves to meet her in Watts, where she lives. She tells him about the deliberations and how a deal was made that if the six were found guilty, the others would be cleared. The outline she shows him could only have been made by someone in the legal field. This gives Brown his basis for appeal. They spend the night together.



## Chapter 13, pgs. 168-183

### Chapter 13, pgs. 168-183 Summary and Analysis

Brown continues his campaign for sheriff. He draws a lot of support from different function, including Hollywood stars. He attends a rally for Chicano candidates with Rosalie. Anthony Quinn introduces some Chicano politicians. He also introduces Brown. Vicki Carr speaks and sings.

A month later, Brown attends a protest rally at UCLA. They are protesting in support of the student protesters killed in Ohio and Kent State. Brown has been invited to speak along with Angela Davis and Corky Gonzales. Gilbert, Pelon and Black Eagle are also with him since they function as his bodyguards. Brown more or less antagonizes the crowd when he speaks. After the rally, Brown learns of a big demonstration to be held in August, but he is tiring of the scene.

The week before the election, the East Los Angeles Thirteen win their case in the appellate court. They are free. Brown files for a new trial for the St. Basil group based on the information he obtained from juror Jean Fisher. He is denied and told to appeal.

Brown lost the race for sheriff but came in second. He returns the girls to their grandmother's house and leaves for Acapulco.



## Chapter 14, pgs. 184-197

### Chapter 14, pgs. 184-197 Summary and Analysis

Brown is in Acapulco with friends. After three days, he finds the police have been asking questions about him. His friend, Jesus, has lived in Mexico for five years, and tells him not to worry about the police. They drive around sight-seeing and talking. Brown says he is not planning to become involved in any more battles for a long time.

They go to a night club. They have Anna and Betti with them and dance and drink. Betti gives Brown a Quaalude-400 which he takes with alcohol. Brown and the two girls go to the motel rooms. A man says he wants to watch and Brown says he doesn't care.

Brown learns the reporter Roland Zanzibar was killed while covering the riots in East Los Angeles. A Chicano leader named Rudolfo Gonzales was arrested for the crime. This is the same Corky Gonzales that he had met at the protest rally. He tries to find out what information he can from the newspaper. He finds that the men were arrested for crossing state lines to incite a riot. He decides he has to return to Los Angeles to help out. He calls and talks to Black Eagle and finds that Gilbert was shot by the FBI, but it was only a flesh wound. He leaves Acapulco that night.



## Chapter 15-16, pgs. 198-214

### Chapter 15-16, pgs. 198-214 Summary and Analysis

They are watching a color film of the Chicano Moratorium of August 29, 1970. In it are scenes from the riots at Laguna Park. The film is shown in the trial of the Tooner Flats Seven who are on trial for among other things, arson, conspiracy and rioting.

Sheriff Peaches is relating the events of the riots. The judge is Alfred Alacran and he has ruled Brown in contempt more than a dozen times since the beginning of the trial. Brown leaves with Gilbert and Sailor Boy.

Brown had arrived back in Los Angeles on August 30, 1970 and was met at the airport by Gilbert and Pelon. While they drive, they tell him what has happened the past several months. When they question him about Mexico, he tells them they have no right to complain about him spending time with his brother. He'd been working as a lawyer for three years when he didn't want to be a lawyer.

They drive to Laguna Park looking at the aftermath of the riots. They meet with some of the other militants. He agrees to defend the Seven and then goes on to his house on Sixth Street. Brown doesn't look forward to another long trial. He promises himself that he will write his book after the trial and that he will destroy the courthouse where all of the trials were.

In Chapter Sixteen, Brown holds a press conference the day after his return and calls the Grand Jury a racist institution. After the first week, a lot of people were staying at his house and they all had guns. There was a meeting of the leaders and defendants. Brown asks them questions since he is the defense attorney. They all say that they don't tell the protesters to pick up guns. They talk about the book Brown plans to write.

Brown won another victory. He had challenged the method of selection of Grand Jurors. They now had the right to question any of the Superior Court judges.





## Chapter 17, pgs. 215-233

### Chapter 17, pgs. 215-233 Summary and Analysis

Brown talks to some people protesting the political persecution of Charles Manson. They tell Brown that the situation is political, just as in his cases.

Brown's briefcase is never searched when he enters the courthouse. They all know him. He carries Sailor Boy's .357 Magnum in his briefcase. In court, Brown explains to the judge that his position is that the court doesn't have jurisdiction because of Grand Jury discrimination. Chicanos constitute a class of people and his witness, Doctor Joan Moore, will testify to this. The trial proceeds and before the end of the session, Brown's taken into custody for two days and nights. He is back with Sergeant Lovelace again. On Monday, the session resumes and he questions judges for the next few months.

The last judge Brown questions is Judge Charles Older, who is the judge in the Charles Manson case. Manson supporters, known as Charlie's Girls, are in the courtroom. The questioning concerns the kind of people that are selected for Grand Juries. They don't select hippies, cockroaches or Beatniks. Finally, the session is adjourned.

Brown knows that his deal to write a book has made him enemies. He tries to explain to the group that they need writers, just like they need lawyers, especially now that Zanzibar is dead. They need someone to present their views.

After the questions of the judges ends, the trial is set to open on Monday.



## Chapters 18-19, pgs. 234-258

### Chapters 18-19, pgs. 234-258 Summary and Analysis

One of the witnesses at the trial is undercover police officer Fernando Sumaya. He testifies about attending a meeting at Brown's Sixth Street home. Brown wasn't there, but the group made plans for a march the next day. Brown also questions him about the events surrounding the Zanzibar killing since he was in the Silver Dollar Bar where and when the reporter was killed.

The next witness, police officer Tom Wilson, is questioned about his reasons for firing into the Silver Dollar Bar. Brown also questions Officer Valencia, who had arrested Corky. The trial continues for more than two months. Brown insinuates that the authorities knew that Zanzibar and his crew had tapes showing what really happened at Laguna Park and they were afraid that Zanzibar would expose them. He claims the murder of Zanzibar and the arrests were ordered by police chief Todd Davis. Davis claims that Brown is the leader of the Militants. Davis, who had taught at UCLA with Brown, denies Brown's allegations. Cesar Chavez appears as a character witness.

Brown does not offer any closing arguments. He feels that since the jury is bored and has learned of his own involvement, that it is best not to do so. The jury is instructed and sent to deliberate.

In Chapter Nineteen, after fifteen days of deliberations, the Tooner Flats Seven are found innocent. Only Corky was found guilty of misdemeanor possession of a weapon.

The Militants had purchased the materials they needed and made seven time bombs to blow up the courthouse. They are set to explode one half hour after the group leaves the courthouse.

The group goes to a party at Brown's Sixth Street house. During the party, they hear a news report about the explosions at the courthouse. They drive to a phone booth where they call the police department recorder and read a prepared statement claiming responsibility for the blast. Another newscast tells them that a body has been found.

Brown leaves the case and heads for Frisco Bay. He wasn't caught for his involvement. It is the spring of 1972.

# Characters

## Buffalo Zeta Brown

Brown is a Chicano lawyer who represents the Chicano marchers from the Tooner Flats barrio in East Los Angeles. At Christmas 1969, he has been working with them for more than a year. He issues the press statements and deals with the press for them. Brown is actually one of the leaders of the protesting Chicanos.

Brown had come to Los Angeles in January 1968 to write a book. He had no intention of practicing law at the time. He had graduated from law school in 1966 at the University of California and had worked at Legal Aid Office in the East Oakland slums. He had served in the 573's Air Force band and had been involved in numerous protests and marches before becoming involved with the Chicano Militants. After being fired from the Public Defender's Office, a friend of his cousin Manny introduces him to Gilbert. He had taken the name of Buffalo Zeta Brown or Brown Buffalo.

Arriving in California at the age of five, he had always wanted to work for Cesar Chavez. He sees Chavez in 1968 and Chavez asks him to help the group in Los Angeles. Brown acts as their organizer and lawyer and wins some important legal victories for them. Brown won the major cases for the group. After the Tooner Flats Seven trial, he knew of the bombs planted at the courthouse. He left Los Angeles area and went to Frisco Bay. He was not arrested for his activities or involvement.

## Gilbert Rodriquez

Gilbert is one of the Chicano Militants. He first met Brown in April 1968. Gilbert was one of the leaders involved in the Christmas Eve riot at St. Basil's. His headquarters is in the basement of an Episcopalian church in Tooner Flats. He has been involved in numerous protests marches. He is introduced to Brown by a friend of Manny's and says they could use a Chicano lawyer and that Brown could write for the Militant's paper, La Voz. Gilbert was indicted by a Grand Jury on charges of conspiracy to disrupt the schools for his role in the Garfield School strike. Gilbert wants Brown to handle their defense, even though he feels that he doesn't have enough experience in the area. Gilbert and Pelon bomb a Safeway store with Brown in anger over the situation surrounding the death of Robert Fernandez. They eventually move into Brown's house and function as his bodyguards. Gilbert and the other twelve of the East Los Angeles Thirteen defendants win their case in the Court of Appeals and are freed. When Brown is away in Acapulco, Gilbert is involved in the East Los Angeles riots and is shot by the FBI, but it was only a flesh wound. Gilbert is found innocent in every major case against him because of the defense efforts of Brown. Gilbert was one of the people who was instrumental in the bombing of the Los Angeles courthouse after the end of the Tooner Flats Seven trial.



## **Sergeant Armas**

Sergeant Armas is the police officer in charge of the Los Angeles SOC Squad, which handled the Christmas Eve riot at St. Basil's. He told his men not to touch Brown because he was the lawyer of the rioters. Armas has managed to infiltrate the Chicano Militants through the person of undercover police officer Fernando Sumaya.

## **Mangas Coloradas**

Mangas Coloradas is an Indian and part of the Chicano Militants group. He was a part of the demonstration at the school and was indicted by a grand jury on charges of conspiracy to disrupt the schools. He was an ex-boxer who had received a scholarship to the University of California at Los Angeles. He was interested in acting.

## **Cesar Chavez**

Cesar Chavez is head of the Farmworkers Union, headquartered near Delano, California. He believes in passive resistance rather than violent confrontation. Chavez is in his twenty-fifth day of a hunger strike when he meets Brown.

## **Eli Risco**

Risco is a member of the Chicano Militants. He was involved in the protest at the Garfield School and was indicted by a Grand Jury on charges of conspiracy to disrupt the schools.

## **Jean Fisher**

Jean Fisher was a juror at the St. Basil's Twenty-One. After the end of the trial, she contacted Brown and informed him of irregularities in the deliberations which gave him his basis for appeal.

## **Roland Zanzibar**

Roland Zanzibar was a reporter for KMEX. He had interviewed Brown and was sympathetic to the Chicano cause. He was killed by a stray bullet in the Tooner Flats riots.

## **Fernando Sumaya**

Fernando Sumaya is an undercover police officer who infiltrated the Chicago Militants. He testified at the Tooner Flats Seven trial. He was known as Frisco.

## Ruth

Ruth is a member of the Chicano Militants.



## Objects/Places

### **Tooner Flats**

Tooner Flats is a barrio where Mexican-Americans live in the East side of Los Angeles.

### **St. Basil's Church**

St. Basil's is a Roman Catholic Church located on Wilshire Boulevard in a wealthy part of Los Angeles.

### **Canogo Park**

Canogo Park is a suburb of Los Angeles located in the San Fernando Valley.

### **Delano**

Delano is a town in California located north of Los Angeles.

### **Belmont Hotel**

The Belmont Hotel is at Third and Hill Streets in Los Angeles and is where Brown lives when he first arrives in Los Angeles.

### **Garfield School**

The Garfield School was the site of a strike by the Chicano Militants.

### **Glass House**

Glass House is the name used to refer to the jail where the thirteen Chicanos are being held.

### **Acapulco**

Acapulco is a Mexican resort where Brown goes after the East Los Angeles Thirteen appellate verdict clears the Militants.



## **Laguna Park**

Laguna Park, at Indiana and Whittier is where the East Los Angeles riots occurred.

## **Sixth Street**

Brown and many of the others live in a house on Sixth Street.

## **Episcopalian Church**

The church referred to as Father Light's Episcopalian Church is in Tooner Flats. The basement serves as an office and meeting place for the Chicano Militants.



# Themes

## Working for a Cause

One of the dominant themes of the book can be called working for a cause. When Brown first arrived in Los Angeles, he didn't know what he wanted to do. He was looking for a story to write and planned on writing a book. Even though he was a lawyer, he didn't want to practice law. When he met the Chicano militants, he became their lawyer and represented them in various cases. He also represented members in the Chicano community in various cases, like the Robert Fernandez case. Brown wanted to see an end to the repression experienced by the Chicano community and wanted to see an improvement in living conditions for them. This was the cause he was dedicated to even though he chose to align himself with a group of militants and their violent tactics. Brown didn't just represent the Militants; he became one of them. He helped them plan their demonstrations just as he planned their legal defenses. Brown did whatever he thought he had to do for the advancement of the Chicano cause, even if it meant violence. He drove the car the night they bombed the Safeway store and was active in the planning of the bombing of the Los Angeles courthouse. Brown was basically motivated by the political injustice of the situation regarding the Chicanos and charges against them.

## Pent Up Frustration

A second theme of the book can be called pent up frustration. Brown and many of the Chicanos felt frustrated at the system and felt discriminated against. They lived in the slums of East Los Angeles where many of the buildings were infested with cockroaches, and where educational and job opportunities were bleak. The people didn't feel much hope that their situation could improve. For many of them, poor living conditions and the street life of gangs and drugs was the norm. Groups like the Chicano Militants formed out of this anger and frustration. They tried to improve conditions in the barrio through marches and demonstrations. They called attention to the plight of the Chicano in East Los Angeles, even though many of their activities resulted in violence. The violence of the riots and clashes with the police were the result of their anger and frustration. They felt that they were being victimized by political persecution and this is what Brown was able to show in many of the court cases. He even won a challenge to the selection of Grand Juries and was allowed to question judges. The pent up frustration and anger of the Chicanos was a result of their living conditions and their treatment by the system. This is what led to their civil arrest when they began to fight back.

## Revenge

A third theme of the book is that of revenge. The people suffering from the oppression of the system wanted to strike out at those causing the oppression. The frustration and anger that resulted from the oppression led to their riots and acts of violence. The





Chicanos felt that they were persecuted and discriminated against and the marches and demonstrations organized by the Chicano Militants provided a common rallying point and way to express their anger and frustration. The anger and frustration leads to acts of revenge and violence. This was even true of Brown. They wanted revenge for what happened to Robert Fernandez. They made Molotov cocktails and drove around looking for a way to express their anger through violence. They finally bombed a Safeway store. Another example of revenge was the bombing of the courthouse in Los Angeles. Brown had spent three years defending the Militants on various charges. He didn't want to be a lawyer and resented the system that made him have to defend the Militants. He was involved in the planning of the courthouse bombing and made reference to going out with a bang several times. His two big goals were to write a book and to bomb the courthouse where he spent so much of his time defending the Militants on charges that he felt stemmed from political persecution. Their phone call tied the bombing to revenge for the death of Zanzibar.



# Style

## Perspective

The *Revenge of the Cockroach People* is written in the first person point of view with the narrator being the author, Oscar Zeta Acosta. Acosta is the famous Buffalo Zeta Brown, the Chicano lawyer, who the book is about. The author basically tells the story of this tumultuous three year period in his life. The use of the first person makes the book more real for the reader since it seems to be Brown that is talking to them. He tells of the events as they happened and what the reactions of the various people were. Even though Brown didn't want to work as a lawyer, he did for his three years with the Chicano Militants, defending them against whatever charges they faced, and he made it clear throughout the book that he wanted to be writing and not spending his time in a courtroom. This first person perspective allows the reader to learn of the events that occurred in the narrator's presence. The author was there - he knows what happened. He is not telling the story as he heard it from others or read about it, and this makes the story all the more real for the reader. The author is obviously qualified to write the book because it is about his own experiences. The book is very readable and would be of interest to anyone who wants to learn of the Chicano lawyer's experiences or the circumstances surrounding the conditions that led to the riots.

## Tone

The tone of the book is quite subjective. The author is telling his own story of his involvement with the radical Chicano Militants. He not only was their lawyer and defender, he actually was one of them. He took part in the planning of their activities as well as in several acts of violence. He drove the car for the Safeway bombing and was part of the planning for the bombing of the Los Angeles courthouse. Brown grew up as a poor Chicano and experienced many of the same problems and frustrations that the residents of the Tooner Flats barrio in East Los Angeles. He identified with the people and how they were treated by the system. He used the argument of discrimination and political persecution in many of his defenses. Brown felt much of the same anger and frustrations and hatred with the establishment as the Militants did, and this is obviously in his writing. His choice of language used in referring to the police and judges and others illustrates his anger and hatred, and the voice takes a little getting used to on the part of the reader. Even though Brown was a lawyer, he was just as radical as the Chicano Militants, and at several points in the book refers to himself as a revolutionary. The subjective tone of the book adds to the realism of the book and the conditions in East Los Angeles.

## Structure

The structure of the book is simple. Acosta tells his story in nineteen chapters. There are no chapter titles in the book. The chapters average about ten pages with some shorter and a few longer.

The book is chronological for the most part, but not entirely. There is a lot of jumping around between chapters and within chapters which makes it a little difficult for the reader at times. There is also no Table of Contents and no Index, which means the reader who wants to check a name or event must flip through the page to find the information.

Since the name of the book is *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, there are drawings of cockroaches throughout the book. While this may emphasize the title of the book and Acosta's point of view, it takes some getting used to on the part of the reader. There are no other pictures in the book, so the reader cannot place a name with a face. There are many Spanish words and phrases in the book but the reader does not have to understand Spanish to follow the book.

The book is interesting and fast reading and worth the reader's time.

## Quotes

"Three hundred brown-eyed children of the sun have come to drive the money-changers out of the richest temple in Los Angeles. It is a dark moonless night and ice-cold wind meets us at the doorstep. We carry little white candles as weapons. In pairs on the sidewalk, we trickle and bump and sing with the candles in our hands, like a bunch of cockroaches gone crazy." Chap. 1, p. 11

"I ask him if he's heard of the Chicano Militants. He laughs and tells me they are just a bunch of young punk communists who don't know their ass from a hold in the ground. 'They blame all their troubles on everybody but themselves.'" Chap. 2, p. 27

"I know LA is a graveyard for organizers. You, personally, Brown Buffalo, a Chicano lawyer, have got to help those kids. Nobody else is going to do it. The Militants are doing a terrific job. Aren't you satisfied?" Chap. 4, p. 46

"We were nothing but a bunch of outside agitators, radicals, communists and racists. But now that the racist-agitators are in jail, charged with Conspiracy, now it is news." Chap. 5, p. 57

"So three weeks later, on December 24, 1969, some three hundred Cockroaches gathered at the newest monstrosity in the archdiocese to protest corruption within the Church and to seek reparation for the conquest of our lands. And in two years now, I still had not written one single word for myself." Chap. 6, p. 77

"The vato loco has been fighting with the pig since the Angeles stole his land in the last century. He will continue to fight until he is exterminated." Chap. 8, p. 91

"There is total silence in the court. I have no further questions for him. He looks me straight in the fact as he passes by. I know I have just sent him to hell. The jailers will walk all over him. I nod my head and whisper my thanks. He has just exposed a murder." Chap. 9, p. 114

"Once again, as at the St. Basil's riot, I am left on the front lines without a position. My heart begins to beat furiously. We are not far from the target." Chap. 10, p. 127

"I doubt you'll win...but just let me tell you...Not all of us are happy with Peaches...If by some miracle you do get the job...just don't forget me. I'd make a hell of an Undersheriff. The name's Lovelace. Jim Lovelace. Got that?" Chap. 11, p. 154

"A hundred years later, the Chicanos turn to the government and to the priest and ask for justice, for education, for food, for jobs, for freedom and the pursuit of happiness. The St. Basil Twenty-One sought an audience with the leaders of the Church and of the State." Chap. 12, p. 161



"I don't know....All I know is...I've heard a lot of talk about you, man. You must know the police are right on your tail. They're just waiting for you to make a mistake." Chap. 13, p. 182

"Obviously Corky will be in need of a lawyer. I have spent a summer of girls, booze and dope. I have forgotten the battle, not even written about it. But now it is time to return to the war zone." Chap. 114, p. 196

"Shit, it is obvious to me that if I never went to Acapulco, everything would still be the same. Someone would be dead. Someone else among us would be framed for it and I would defend him." Chap. 15, p. 205

"I'm billed as the only revolutionary lawyer this side of the Florida Gulf. And it's true: I'm the only one who actually hates the law. The rest are just jiving. I'd rather spit in a judge's eye than stick a pig in the heart." Chap. 16, p. 214

"Attention...The bomb that just exploded today in the Hall of Justice was done in memory of Roland Zanzibar and The Day of the Chicanos....This is the Chicano Liberation Front...." Chap. 19, p. 256



## Topics for Discussion

How did Buffalo Brown become involved with the Chicano Militants? What were his original plans?

What is the significance of the strikes at schools and encouraging the students to strike? What charges did it lead to?

Why did the Chicano Militants group demonstrate against the Catholic Church? What were they protesting? How were the protests received?

What is the story of Robert Fernandez? What kind of action do Brown and the Militants take? Why?

Explain the details of the Tooner Flats Seven case? How did Brown handle the case?

Why did Brown challenge the Grand Jury selection process? What was his basis? What was the outcome?

How did Brown exact his revenge against the court?