Chicano History Week in Michigan was inaugurated by Lansing Chicanos who requested then Governor William G. Milliken to sign an executive declaration recognizing that week. The declaration stated that the dates of February 2-8 were to be observed as Chicano History Week in Michigan in observance of February 2, 1848, the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which formally ended the war between the U.S. and Mexico. The first seven days in the month of February provide Michigan teachers therefore a prime opportunity to do as the original declaration stated: "to develop an awareness of, and place educational emphasis on, the ancestry and heritage of the Chicano." Since Chicanos comprise over 50 percent out of a total of 16.9 million Hispanics in the U.S. and almost 70 percent out of a total of about 170,000 Hispanics in Michigan, the history of Chicanos is particularly important.

Teachers can help their students develop a greater awareness of Chicanos by informing their students why most U.S. citizens of Mexican descent prefer to be called "Chicano" instead of something else. According to some writers, the term "Chicano" was derived from the Náhuatl or Aztec word "Mexicano," in which the "x" was given the "ch" sound. Subsequently, the word "Mechicano" was contracted to "Chicano." Another significance of the term "Chicano" is that regardless of its derivation, it was and is a term that is frequently used by persons in Chicano barrios to refer to themselves. It is a term that is of the people, for the people, and, therefore, used by the people in the U.S. who are of Mexican descent. The term "Chicano" carries therefore a spirit of self-identity, self-definition and, consequently, self-determination. Through the term, Chicanos assert their identity, their uniqueness, and consequently their right to liberation.

Like the Blacks in the 60's popularized the term "Black" in reference to themselves, Chicanos in the 60's popularized the term "Chicano" in reference to themselves. By calling themselves by a term which they originated and preferred among themselves, Chicanos also asserted their right to be called what they wanted to be called, not what others wanted to call them. To respect a people is to respect what they want to be called. Many Chicanos thought that by allowing themselves to be called by what others preferred to call them, they were giving up their right to self-determination. Subjugation begins when you give up your name for what your oppressor wants to call you.

The term "Chicano" also allowed U.S. citizens of Mexican ancestry in the U.S. to get away from being hyphenated Americans, i.e., being called "Mexican American," a term often used by others to refer to Chicanos. "Mexican American" was seen by many Chico in the 60's as a term that relegated U.S. citizens of Mexican descent to second-class status, because the term implied that they were somehow only "part" American and not "all-American." Chicanos asserted their right to be "American" without having to have a prefix before the word American to qualify what kind of U.S. citizen they were. The term "Chicano" therefore gave clarity to the identity of U.S. citizens of Mexican descent while at the same time asserted their right to be full-fledged "Americans" and still be ethnically different.

Chicano History Week celebrates the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and this historical event also impacts on the definition of "Chicano" because if there is one thing that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo did, it was to give an ideological rebirth to persons of Mexican descent living in the U.S. What the treaty in essence did, was to promise to give persons of Mexican descent remaining in the conquered territories (from the southern border of Oregon to almost New Orleans), protection under the Constitution of the United States of America. The term "Chicano" therefore gives more historical significance to this event because the term "Chicano," like the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, also helps to distinguish between persons who are U.S. citizens of Mexican descent and persons who are Mexican, i.e., Mexican citizens, Mexican nationals, by the way, prefer to be called "Mexican" and not "Chicano."

Chicano History Week is therefore very important because it gives teachers the opportunity to place educational emphasis on why, how, and when Chicanos have been given or not been given protection under the U.S. Constitution. An examination of the history of Chicanos will reveal the history of a people living under classical colonization conditions, of efforts at their physical and cultural genocide, or their loss of land grants and their prosecution in trying to regain them, of their suffering as migrant workers, of their struggles under rapid social change and urbanization, and of their little improved status in our society since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. On the contrary, an examination of the history of Chicanos will also reveal that Chicanos have contributed to the economy, development and growth of the State of Michigan and the nation; that they have defended and died for this country and are the most decorated in war time in proportion to other ethnic groups; and that they have contributed to the arts, business, industry, education, agriculture, and to the richness of American culture and language.

No first seven days in February in Michigan should go by, therefore, in which teachers don't commemorate in their classrooms the history of Chicanos. It is particularly important in teaching about Chicanos to distinguish between the history and culture of Chicanos preceding the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the history and culture of Chicanos subsequent to the signing of the treaty. Teachers will want to take note, however, that Chicanos are as proud of their history before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as they are of being U.S. citizens. Historically, culturally, and linguistically Chicanos straddle both Mexico and the U.S., with the foot of their past in Mexico and the foot of the present in the U.S. Chicanos have as much regard for the 16th of September in Mexico as they have for the Fourth of July in the U.S. Chicanos are living proof that one can be bicultural and bilingual and still be 100% U.S. citizen!