

OVERCOMING TRIPLE OPPRESSION: IDENTITY, POWER,  
AND FEMINISM AMONG WOMEN OF MEXICAN  
ANCESTRY IN TEXAS,  
1960-1980

by

STEPHANIE SCHACHERER

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON  
DECEMBER 2007

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my committee members for their assistance, patience, and expertise with this endeavor. I would also like to thank Dr. José Angel Gutiérrez for spending a significant amount of his personal time interviewing these remarkable women, enabling me to create a thesis from their diverging experiences. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the Mexican American women of the 1960s and 1970s in Texas who remain an inspiration to all women.

November 15, 2007

## ABSTRACT

OVERCOMING TRIPLE OPPRESSION: IDENTITY, POWER,  
AND FEMINISM AMONG WOMEN OF MEXICAN  
ANCESTRY IN TEXAS,  
1960-1980

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

Stephanie Schacherer, M.A.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2007

Supervising Professor: Dr. Roberto Treviño

The Mexican American civil rights movement surfaced in the 1960s and 1970s as a direct response to blatant institutional discrimination and neglect. The participation of women within the movement, however, has been overwhelmingly marginalized in favor of a largely male-dominated interpretation. Indeed, Mexican American women in Texas displayed a variety of perspectives about religious and ethnic identity, feminism, and politics during this time. Drawing on their own rich heritage and mutual experiences with discrimination based on race, gender, and class, these women nevertheless developed conflicting ideas about the abovementioned topics. How each

woman fashioned her own environment according to her understanding of her own dynamic history and experiences remains the focus of this thesis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	v
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THE NATURE OF TRIPLE OPPRESSION .....	7
3. WHAT'S IN A NAME? .....	28
4. SHADES OF FEMINISM.....	50
4. IDENTITY AND ACTIVISM .....	72
4. LEGACY AND CONSEQUENCES.....	104
REFERENCES .....	110
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.....	120

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Mexican American civil rights movement, or Chicana and Chicano movement, surfaced in the 1960s as a direct response to poverty, blatant institutional discrimination, and neglect. Primarily located in Southwestern states, members of this movement successfully promoted their cause at a time when the United States remained preoccupied with an escalating war in Vietnam as well as a deteriorating sociopolitical domestic situation. While the history of the Mexican American civil rights movement has recently entered civil rights discourse, the role of activist Mexican American women during this time period has been woefully neglected.

While having experienced very similar forms of discrimination, both within and outside of their communities, Mexican American women in Texas displayed an intriguing variety of philosophies during the 1960s and 1970s, especially concerning ethnic identity, feminism, and politics. During this time, these women challenged both internal and external constraints on their substandard social status. The crucial nature of this period can be seen in the myriad forms of protest and leadership that accompanied their struggle for equal rights. They constructed and polished over time ideas concerning ethnic identity, feminism, and politics as they valiantly sought to terminate decades of chronic oppression. Their motivations, choices, and consequences varied dramatically, perhaps compromising their ability to affect change on a larger scale.

If Mexican American women made such valuable contributions to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, why are they relatively underrepresented in historical literature? How did they view ideas about identity, feminism, and politics during this time? The path of Mexican American studies follows four phases, the first which deals with theories of cultural conflict, discrimination, and internal colonialism, as described vividly in Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America*. The second phase expands on the problem of discrimination by stressing the individual and community strength of Mexican American culture. The third phase, the analysis of gender, as well as class, and generational roles, did not evolve until the late 1980s. The fourth and final phase, the utilization of postmodernism as an analytical tool, began a decade later.<sup>1</sup> That gender analysis within Mexican American studies did not appear until the 1980s proves the overshadowing legacy of marginalization women in this culture had to combat. Prior literature often depicted Mexican American women in stereotypical fashion. For example, Ruth Allen's writings reflect the long history of this pervasive stereotype. A 1930s sociologist, Allen often commented on the "traditions of feminine subservience" within Mexican and Mexican American communities with blatant ethnocentric flair, overlooking the positive aspects of female domesticity in what Vicki Ruiz terms "notions of happy extended families."<sup>2</sup> As a result of such historical disregard, Mexican

---

<sup>1</sup> Victoria-María MacDonald, "Hispanic, Latino, Chicano, or 'Other'? : Deconstructing the Relationship between Historians and Hispanic-American Educational History," *History of Education Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2001): 376-78.

<sup>2</sup> Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in the Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 15.

American women essentially had to fight that much harder to write their actions into history.

Expectedly, the field of Mexican American studies has encountered considerable condemnation for its treatment of women, as strongly pointed out by Chicana feminists such as Alma García and Ana Castillo. Studies of Mexican American women began sparsely appearing in the late 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Yet, disagreement exists regarding the cause of the problem. Sociologist Irene Blea asserts that information about women during this time “has been unavailable, inconsistent, and erroneous.” She further adds,

This should not be interpreted to mean that scholars are not attempting to standardize data or are not conscientiously writing about La Chicana. They are. Many are graduate and undergraduate students, some are professors, and a few are men who write about her. Mostly, however, these are women and researchers with very limited vehicles for publication and dissemination of their material.<sup>4</sup>

Conversely, Christine Marie Sierra, Professor of Political Science at the University of New Mexico, blames academia for this inequality. She claims,

Class, race, and gender inequalities permeate institutions of ‘higher learning.’ The power of academia rests upon the control or monitoring of ideas and its hierarchical, elitist structures which promote rich over poor and working-class, whites over people of color, and men over women.<sup>5</sup>

While these women seek to explain the exclusion of Mexican American women in this area of study, neither looks to the women themselves to explain their past omissions. The fact remains that while these women experienced similar forms of triple

---

<sup>3</sup> Irene I. Blea, *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> National Association for Chicano Studies, *Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 5.



oppression, discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, their passivity and lack of agreement regarding matters relating to ethnic identity, feminism, and politics directly affected how they interacted with one another and, subsequently, how they were able to advance various causes in their communities. This thesis examines the factors that both unite and divide these spirited women against the backdrop of a crucial time for Mexican Americans in Texas history.

The second chapter of this work provides a general overview of the origins of Mexicans and Mexican Americans as an ethnic group, discussing in general their standing under Spanish occupation, Mexican independence, and U.S. subjugation. This chapter also discusses the complexities of Mexican American women within their own communities to deconstruct the subtle yet insidious labels that often misidentify them as one-dimensional beings. The discussion of triple oppression details the gloomy realities for many Mexican American women in Texas and well as the many motivations these conditions inspired for change. Although, for the most part, these women shared similar experiences of discrimination, their ideas regarding ethnic identity, feminism, and politics varied considerably. The third chapter outlines the multifaceted role of religious and ethnic identity among Mexican American women in Texas. Properly discerning their activism of the 1960s and 1970s requires an understanding of the complexities involved in their search for identity, as other forces often thrust interpretations upon them. The varying methods and justifications women employed in crafting their religious and ethnic identities reveal insight into what it meant to be a woman of

Mexican ancestry in Texas, directly affecting the way in which they perceived and acted upon their substandard positions.

Chapter four addresses the nature of feminism among women of Mexican ancestry in Texas. These women often drew inspiration from the rich history of Mexican feminism, cultivating a style better culturally suited to their needs. Nevertheless, their place in the predominantly Anglo feminist movement in the United States perpetuated a significant range of conflict. Mexican American women in Texas felt slighted, even alienated, by the Anglo-American women's movement. The seeming failure of that movement to address issues directly related to the plight of women of Mexican ancestry contributed greatly to this lack of solidarity. Conflict further erupted among women within their respective Mexican American communities. Traditional Mexican-origin men and women often berated those with feminist sympathies for what they perceived to be a transgression against the solidarity of their communities. Some Chicana and Chicano movement activists compared the language of the feminists to treason that jeopardized the effectiveness of their resistance movement. As a result, several incompatible strands of feminism surfaced among Mexican American women during the 1960s and 1970s.

The fifth chapter addresses the presence of women in Texas politics during this turbulent period, and also reveals how these women struggled among themselves. The political history of Mexican Americans in Texas has often been told from a male perspective, relegating women to the fringes of a movement that could not have occurred without their participation. Indeed, many historians credit women for their

participation in the civil rights movement while not directly recognizing their merits. Whether as a result of chauvinism or simply a lack of sources from which to draw, the contributions of Mexican American women remained vastly understudied in this era. Mexican American women were a ubiquitous, albeit fractured, part of political activity in Texas during the civil rights era. They struggled with various issues, from domestic concerns regarding their participation to the problem of sexism. How they structured their political environment to suit their philosophical, social, and professional needs is the focus of this chapter.

The sixth and final chapter examines the legacy and consequences of Mexican American women during the civil rights era. As if unwilling to let go of the divisiveness of the past, Mexican American women maintain divided views on their achievements during the Chicana and Chicano movement. Some duly credit the courage and strength women displayed in the 1960s and 1970s while others reflect on the damaging effects of political activity, often as a result of personal experience. Regardless, the discordant attitudes that often failed to unite these women in Texas during the movement may continue to influence how they view themselves as ethnic women into the next century.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE NATURE OF TRIPLE OPPRESSION

Discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and class significantly affected how Mexican American women viewed themselves as well as how they interacted socially and politically with the greater society. Experiences with ethnic discrimination often began at an early age in school, at a time when many young Mexican American girls remained cognizant of their differences. These women also felt marginalized as a result of their gender, often encountering sexism inside and outside of their communities. The final facet of this inequity, class-based oppression, explains the low economic status of Mexican American women in Texas. Nevertheless, understanding the nature of triple oppression and its influence on the activism of Mexican-origin women in Texas during the 1960s and 1970s requires at least a brief description of their long history in the state. It is impossible to understand their decision-making during the civil rights era without first reviewing the past events which contributed to their unquestionably low social, political, and economic status.

A product of a brutal colonization and subsequent exploitation, their existence as an ethnic group formed an unfortunate pattern of oppression that has accompanied their experiences for centuries. The presence of women of Mexican descent in Texas dates back to the sixteenth century as a result of Spanish invasion of the New World. Miscegenation between Spanish men and indigenous women produced a significant

population of *mestizos* in the newly established colony of New Spain. Regardless of their mixed Spanish heritage, *mestizos* suffered socially within the strict caste system. Ranked according to skin color and social position, *peninsulares* maintained the most prestigious position within the system by virtue of their European birth.<sup>6</sup> *Criollos*, Spaniards born in Mexico, came after *peninsulares* followed by *mestizos* and *mulattos*, those of Spanish and African descent.<sup>7</sup>

Under Spanish occupation, *mestizos* did not fare well. Occasionally, privileged *mestizos*, such as the son of Cortés, maintained privileged lifestyles. But for a majority of *mestizos*, the sting of illegitimacy restricted their ability to acquire an education and decent jobs due to the fact that they lacked birth certificates.<sup>8</sup> Even after New Spain became the nation of Mexico in 1821, society retained much of the same bias towards those mired in poverty, as were four-fifths of the population. *Indios*, *mestizos*, and *mulattos* continued to be viewed as “tainted, and were illiterate, moneyless, and ineffective.”<sup>9</sup> Bias towards women was further compounded by the perception that women were “mentally deficient and therefore ineligible to govern themselves.”<sup>10</sup>

The American occupation and eventual settlement of what is now the Southwest did not improve the economic or political status of Mexican-origin women. From the time Anglos began settling in what is today the state of Texas, their attitudes towards Mexicans have been based on their alleged ethnic superiority. Historian Arnaldo De

---

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Richmond, *The Mexican Nation: Historical Continuity and Modern Change* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002), 36.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>9</sup> T. R. Fehrenbach, *Fire & Blood: A History of Mexico* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 360.

<sup>10</sup> Richmond, *The Mexican Nation*, 136-137.

León chronicles these patronizing attitudes in his comprehensive work *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900*. Though Anglos might have initially formed alliances with their Mexican counterparts, he asserts that racial tolerance changed as the former began to outnumber the latter. De León further claims,

Collectively, the many attitudes whites held toward Mexicans went hand in hand with attempts toward oppression. They buttressed the idea that Americans were of superior stock and Tejanos were not, rationalized an elevated place for whites and a subservient one for Mexicans, and justified the notion that Mexican work should be for the good of white society.<sup>11</sup>

The segregation that ensued in Texas maintained a persistent presence. One study found that during the early twentieth century, 117 Texas towns segregated the Mexican and Mexican American population from Anglos, with a majority of laws requiring segregation.<sup>12</sup> Although traditional colonial structures ceased to exist, a system of “internalized colonialism” continued for Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Texas.<sup>13</sup> Generations of Mexican and Mexican American women remained constrained by these societal inequities, unable to challenge their inferior position in a rapidly changing society.

This same bigotry which De León chronicles did not disappear with the advent of the twentieth century, as discrimination based on ethnic origin continued to affect Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Some women encountered condescending forms of

---

<sup>11</sup> Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821 – 1900* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1983), 103.

<sup>12</sup> Michael A. Olivas, ed. ‘*Colored Men*’ and ‘*Hombres Aqui*’: *Hernandez v. Texas and the Emergence of Mexican-American Lawyering* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2006), 93.

forced assimilation that sought to usurp their cultural habits, and replaced them with a variety of Anglo behaviors. Advocates of assimilation recognized the woman as the main figure of the household and, consequently, focused their attention on her for two main reasons. First, they viewed females as the primary transmitter of morals and values in the home and, second, her Americanization directly correlated with society's benefit from her labor participation.<sup>14</sup> For example, missionaries were often directly involved in this process, as historian Vicki Ruiz noted for the Rose Gregory Houchen Settlement House in El Paso. Constructed in 1912 in South El Paso, this Methodist mission provided steady social services to the residents of the area, but also coordinated a flurry of Americanization activities such as "age- and gender-graded Bible studies, music lessons, Camp Fire Girls, scouting, working girls' clubs, hygiene, cooking, and citizenship classes."<sup>15</sup> Explaining what the process entailed, Methodist missionary Dorothy Little stated, "We assimilate the best of their culture, their art, their ideals and they in turn gladly accept the best America has to offer as they...become one with us."<sup>16</sup> Little's statement revealed the apparent lack of shame that accompanied this ethnocentric attitude.

While some women were coerced to reform their habits, others remained systematically neglected. Even as late as 1971, during the Mexican American civil

---

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Hunter, "'If You're Light You're Alright': Light Skin as Social Capital for Women of Color," *Gender and Society* 16, no. 2 (2002): 176.

<sup>14</sup> George Sánchez, "'Go After the Women': Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915-1929," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, ed. Vicki Ruiz (New York: Routledge, 1994), 289.

<sup>15</sup> Vicki Ruiz, "Dead Ends or Gold Mines? Using Missionary Records in Mexican American Women's History," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, ed. Vicki Ruiz (New York: Routledge, 1994), 300.

rights movement, women of Mexican ancestry in Texas encountered blatant exploitation and neglect. The Southwest Foundation for Research and Education used women in San Antonio as virtual guinea pigs for birth control research. Dr. Joseph Goldzieher conducted this experiment in the early 1970s in an attempt to determine the side effects of birth control pills, including nervousness, nausea, depression, and headaches.<sup>17</sup> This particular project involved 398 women, almost 80% of whom were Mexican American. Seventy-six of the women who participated in the project were given placebos along with other birth control precautions and, as a result, six of them became pregnant. The Concerned Chicana Women's Organization criticized the project, claiming it "included a number of low-income, poorly educated Mexican-Americans" and that the women may have not been given clear instructions on the specifics of the experiment.<sup>18</sup> Regardless, at this particular time in Texas, the law forbade abortions, and the women were consequently forced by the state to carry these unwanted pregnancies to term.

Clearly, women of Mexican ancestry in Texas comprise a diverse group of people, exhibiting a wide range of characteristics and behaviors that remain inconsistent with many popular stereotypes. However, decades of ethnic discrimination have often contributed to their classification as passive, submissive, or sexually promiscuous individuals and little consideration has been given to their diverse historical backgrounds. Such negative generalizations can be found in images of Mexican

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>17</sup> Caroline Lund, "I could never explain this to Mrs. Gomez," *Chicano*, Dallas, Texas, June 17-24, 1971, 14.

<sup>18</sup> "Seven Women Pregnant In Experiment on Pill," *The Dallas Morning News*, July 10, 1971.



American women in literature. Professor Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, for example, explains that even images of Mexican American women in literature are often viewed in an overly simplistic fashion, and can be divided into good and bad women. “[T]he *good* woman can think or do no evil, is pure, understanding, passive, and long suffering; the *bad* woman is a temptress and seductress and may represent evil through love or the perversion or excess of passion.”<sup>19</sup> The fact that such stereotypes have maintained their presence in American popular culture reveals much about the pervasive power of discrimination, leaving little appreciation of the wide variety of experiences that characterizes these distinct women.

Several vital factors influence the characteristics of women of Mexican ancestry in Texas, including geographical location. In his discussion of regional variations in Mexican American history, Richard Griswold del Castillo discusses the differences between Tejanos and California Chicanos. He claims, “For Chicanos, Texas has always been dominated by a small town and rural ethos, while for the Chicanos in Southern California, metropolitan development has been relatively more pervasive.”<sup>20</sup> The same disparities apply to those who are native-born as opposed to immigrants from Mexico. Stereotypes result, in part, from faulty representation of Mexican Americans in textbooks. In their collaborative article, “At Loose Ends: Twentieth-Century Latinos in Current United States History Textbooks,” historians Joseph Rodriguez and Vicki Ruiz exposed the inadequacies of undergraduate survey history textbooks. Their work

---

<sup>19</sup> Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, “The Chicana in the City as Seen in Her Literature,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 6, no. ½, MWSA: Selected Conference Proceedings, 1980 (1981): 13.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Griswold del Castillo, “Tejanos and California Chicanos: Regional Variations in Mexican American History,” *Mexican Studies* 1, no. 1 (1985): 135.

revealed that current texts often group individuals of Mexican descent with other Latino groups, such as Cubans or Puerto Ricans. Rodriguez and Ruiz concluded that “there is not a single hermetic Mexican or Mexican American culture, but rather preamble *cultures* rooted in generation, gender, region, class, and personal experience.”<sup>21</sup> Clearly women of Mexican origin are not homogeneous entities, but exemplify a variety of characteristics.

Nonetheless, they all experience this phenomenon widely known in academic circles as triple oppression. Theresa Aragón de Valdez, a professor of political science at the University of Washington, explains, “She is oppressed because of her race and because of her sex, and as a consequence oppressed because of her low socioeconomic status and her lack of facility with the English language.”<sup>22</sup> Denise A. Segura, professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, defines triple oppression as “the interplay among class, race, and gender, whose cumulative effects place women of color in a subordinate social and economic position relative to men of color and the majority white population.”<sup>23</sup> This discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and class, three facets of her oppression which can never be separated, has been a particularly pervasive one for these women since their evolution as *la raza*.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Joseph A. Rodríguez, and Vicki Ruiz, “At Loose Ends: Twentieth-Century Latinos in Current United States History Textbooks,” *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 4 (2000): 1696.

<sup>22</sup> Theresa Aragón de Valdez, “Organizing as a Political Tool for the Chicana,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 5, no. 2 (1980): 7.

<sup>23</sup> National Association for Chicano Studies, 48.

<sup>24</sup> In her article *Gender, Race, and Raza*, Amy Kaminsky expands on the definition of *raza*, explaining it “does not quite mean ‘race’” but carries “affective connotations of culture and affinity.” See Amy Kaminsky, “Gender, Race, and Raza,” *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 1 (1994): 7-31.

For many young Mexican American girls in Texas, their experience with ethnic discrimination, the first facet of triple oppression, began at an early age, manifesting itself in several ways, especially in education. More often than not, schools were segregated throughout the Southwest.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Mexican American children who attended Anglo schools often encountered little sympathy from staff and students. As a result, by March, 1974, the median number of years of education for Spanish-speaking women averaged 9.7 as opposed to their Anglo male and female counterparts, who averaged 12.3 years.<sup>26</sup> Distinguishing between schools established by Anglos and those established by Mexican Americans, known as *escuelitas*, is important when addressing the presence of racism in education. Beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, private *escuelitas* were established throughout South and South Central Texas “to offer Tejano children the opportunity to study academic subjects and to maintain their language and culture.”<sup>27</sup> These institutions were a direct response to the neglect, prejudice, and coerced assimilation many Mexican American children experienced in Anglo schools. While they credit certain positive aspects of assimilation, University of Minnesota sociologists Heidi Barajas and Jennifer Pierce impart that the negative consequences of assimilation “may be damaging to students’ sense of identity and self-esteem as a racial ethnic minority.”<sup>28</sup> Recalling her first day of school in Garland, Texas, in the late 1940s, María Elena Martínez recounted how teachers changed her

---

<sup>25</sup> Olivas, ‘*Colored Men*’, 93.

<sup>26</sup> Aragón de Valdez, “Organizing as a Political Tool for the Chicana,” 8.

<sup>27</sup> Teresa Palomo Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten “*Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003) 152.

<sup>28</sup> Heidi Lasley Barajas, and Jennifer L. Pierce, “The Significance of Race and Gender in School Success among Latinas and Latinos in College,” *Gender and Society* 15, no. 6 (2001): 860.

name to Mary Helen. As a young child at the time, María Elena did not recall exactly how it happened, only that she maintained that name until she finished college. Prior to beginning her master's degree, María Elena became conscious of the meaning and implications behind the disguising of her legal name.<sup>29</sup> In addition to Anglicizing Mexican names, other efforts to Americanize young Mexican American girls were made throughout the Southwest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Anglo schools, young women were often trained "to be neat and ladylike, the American way. They were taught to speak, read, and write English only. They learned to make and wear American clothing, eat American food, salute the flag, and celebrate the Fourth of July."<sup>30</sup>

Educators in Anglo-dominated schools often did little to mask their contempt for children of Mexican ancestry. Rosa Rosales remembered how one of her elementary school teachers so despised Mexican students that she and another Mexican student were removed to another classroom.<sup>31</sup> Marina García recalled that one of her teachers commented, "You are not college material. You . . . are not doing well, you know. You're not worth this."<sup>32</sup> Hilda Tagle recounted how the principal at Hattie Martin Elementary School in Robstown attempted to impede her admission to the predominantly Anglo school. The principal finally relented and admitted Hilda,

---

<sup>29</sup> María Elena Martínez, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, December 3, 1998, Del Rio, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as María Elena Martínez interview).

<sup>30</sup> Blea, *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender*, 52.

<sup>31</sup> Rosa Rosales, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, February 8, 1998, San Antonio, Texas February 8, 1998, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Rosales interview).

“grabbing my arm and, you know, kind of half dragging me down the hallway and saying ‘I’m going to keep my eye on you,’ you know.” For the first time, Hilda felt painfully self-conscious of her ethnicity.<sup>33</sup>

The effects of ethnic discrimination in school also surfaced in less obvious ways as well. As a result of such blunt prejudice, young Mexican Americans became aware that even the contents of their lunches separated them from other students. Linda Yáñez recalled the popular stigma attached to carrying tortillas with beans to school. She also witnessed other self-conscious Mexican American students attempt to conceal their meals from other students. She stated,

I know it was very difficult in 1997 where now it’s become a staple, you know, salsa and tortillas and chips and that kind of thing. But back then, there was a stigma attached to that. You know, lunch was white bread. That was the proper lunch. And so, they would hide it and that made an indelible impression on me.<sup>34</sup>

Elizabeth Zúñiga also went to certain lengths to conceal the contents of her lunch from other students. She vividly recounted,

We ate it under a tree somewhere . . . sitting in the back . . . of the school building because we didn’t go to the lunch room, of course. And sometimes we would compare our lunches. We would see what everybody was bringing. They were always having the sandwiches and probably potato chips or different stuff like that. We always had our little

---

<sup>32</sup> Marina García, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, February 28, 1998, Lubbock, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Marina García interview).

<sup>33</sup> Hilda Tagle, June 14, 1998, Corpus Christi, Texas, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Tagle interview).

<sup>34</sup> Linda Yáñez, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, January 14, 1998, Edinburg, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Yáñez interview).

tortillas with our little frijolitos in there . . . Most of the time it was smashed . . . we would try keep everybody from seeing them.<sup>35</sup>

Language barriers also presented significant problems for young students in school. As opposed to viewing the student's ability to speak Spanish as a potential asset, their inadequacies with the English language remained the primary focus. Elizabeth Zúñiga recalled when, as an elementary school student, instructions were given in English detailing when restrooms breaks were to be taken. Having been raised in a Spanish-speaking household, the young elementary student did not understand what had been explained. Upon realizing the need to use the restroom, Elizabeth simply got up and left the classroom. Her teacher's response was angry and embarrassing to Elizabeth, leaving her feeling frightened and humiliated.<sup>36</sup> Severita Lara recollected her punishment for speaking Spanish in school during the eighth grade. The principal of Severita's school noticed her speaking Spanish in the hallway, explained she had been warned before, and took her to his office for punishment, where he paddled Severita twice for her indiscretion. Severita left the school in tears, and ran to tell her father of this physical abuse. Her father went to the school with Severita and boldly confronted the principal, proclaiming, "This is my tongue. It is what I speak at home! You are not going to hit her." The principal backed off, eventually agreeing to send Severita to the library for any future punishment.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Zúñiga, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, October 25, 1997, Ballinger, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Zúñiga interview).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Severita Lara, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, July 22, 1998, Crystal City, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Lara interview).

Throughout their early education, many young female students were not mentored in the same fashion of their Anglo counterparts. Herlinda García stated, “The majority of us did not come from families where the parents were professional. The majority of us did not have mentors within the family. So how could we believe in ourselves?”<sup>38</sup> In her teenage years, Elvira Reyna did not consider attending college, feeling as though she did not have the choice. Having worked her way through high school, Reyna recalled thinking to herself, “I’ll finish high school and get married and have kids.”<sup>39</sup> Ofelia Santos, a first generation Mexican American from South Texas, remembered how, at eighteen years of age, “No one told me that I needed to go to college even though I was . . . in the top ten percent of my class. There were no counselors who encouraged me to go to college. My parents had no money. And, so, the only thing that was left for me to do was to find a man to marry.”<sup>40</sup>

Although discrimination and a lack of guidance, especially within education, remained prevalent for many young Mexican American women, others had positive reinforcement from parents, educators, or other vital actors. Irma Rangel, who eventually procured a law degree, remembered her parents emphasized a tough work ethic. She stated, “We took pride in the knowledge that we achieved by working that

---

<sup>38</sup> Herlinda García, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, June 26, 1996, Houston, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Herlinda García interview).

<sup>39</sup> Elvira Reyna, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, February 12, 1998, Mesquite, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Reyna interview).

<sup>40</sup> Ofelia Santos, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, June 17, 1998, Edinburg, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Santos interview).

much harder.”<sup>41</sup> Diana Orozco grew up in a similar environment. She asserted, “I feel very fortunate that I mean, I was from two parents that valued education tremendously. My dad was an educator with the school district for about fifteen years.”<sup>42</sup> Undoubtedly, parental support and encouragement provided a foundation for many young Mexican American women to challenge injustices in the future.

Young women also found reinforcement outside of their immediate communities. Lydia Camarillo recalled growing up hearing her father comment that “women in my family will never work.” As the oldest of eight children, Lydia felt as though she had been an “assistant mom” most of her young life, helping her mother with both household chores as well as her younger siblings. As a result, getting married and raising a family immediately following high school seemed less appealing to her. Fortunately for Lydia, her high school counselor became the catalyst in her educational career. Knowing that she made good grades, he prodded her to apply to college, and made a concerted effort to help her complete the paperwork and financial aid information needed to attend the University of California at Santa Cruz. Although she would be the first in her family to attend a university, her father’s first reaction unfortunately fell short of anything supportive. He told her, “If you go, you are going to be a loose woman.” Lydia departed for college against her father’s wishes, and her high counselor drove her to the university to begin her first semester. Years later, Lydia’s

---

<sup>41</sup> Irma Rangel, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, April 10, 1996, Kingsville, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Rangel interview).



father eventually forgave his daughter for her stubborn independence, and stated rather sheepishly, “You really do know what you are doing, don’t you?”<sup>43</sup> Other figures of authority influenced young Mexican American women. Born in 1955, Isabel Campos came from Guadalajara to New Braunfels, Texas, in 1971 to live with an Anglo foster family. Though she continued to visit Mexico every summer, Isabel quickly adapted to life in Texas, and her foster family encouraged her to speak English and make good grades in school. She eventually earned her nursing degree from the University of Texas.<sup>44</sup>

Often, the option to pursue higher education was not immediately available to many Mexican American women following high school. Quite simply, the effects of ethnic discrimination often shook their confidence. As a result, many Mexican American women in Texas delayed attending college, often until the realization that they too could persevere at the collegiate level. Other women simply experienced epiphanies that, in later years, led them to enroll in college. At the age of thirty, Ofelia Santos recalled feeling restless about her life. One day while driving around in South Texas, she heard the Peggy Lee tune “Is that all there is?” on the radio. She remembered saying to herself, “I have a house, I have a husband, I have three kids, I’m a secretary.

---

<sup>42</sup> Diana Orozco, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, February 23, 1998, Dallas, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Orozco interview).

<sup>43</sup> Lydia Camarillo, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, April 13, 1996, San Antonio, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Camarillo interview).

<sup>44</sup> Isabel Campos, Texas, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, January 16, 1998, New Braunfels, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Campos interview).

Is that all there is?”<sup>45</sup> This particular episode proved to be the defining moment in her professional life. In 1978, Ofelia enrolled in the University of Texas Pan American and graduated in 1982 with a degree in political science and a minor in communications. Born in 1944, Margaret Gómez did not enroll in college until 1981. Although she worked full-time as a constable in Travis County throughout her tenure at St. Edwards University, she graduated summa cum laude in 1991 with a degree in sociology.<sup>46</sup>

For those who chose to begin college immediately following high school, feelings of inferiority as a result of ethnic discrimination did not automatically dissipate. Ironically, some women were first introduced to ethnic discrimination during first years in college. Norma Chávez of El Paso recalled encountering the “first traumatic racism that I have ever felt in my life” at Angelo State University.<sup>47</sup> After completing two years at Laredo Junior College, Herlinda García of Houston distinctly recounted the culture shock she faced at the University of Houston. She further claimed, “I didn’t feel like there was a support system.”<sup>48</sup> Education clearly did not insulate Mexican American women from ethnic discrimination, as even the most professional of women encountered this type of prejudice. When Elvira Reyna ran for the Texas Legislature in

---

<sup>45</sup> Santos interview.

<sup>46</sup> Margaret Gómez, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, June 13, 1998, Austin, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Gómez interview).

<sup>47</sup> Norma Chávez, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, June 21, 1996, El Paso, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Chávez interview).

<sup>48</sup> Herlinda García interview.

1993, she recalled an opponent asking one of her supporters, “Why are you supporting Elvira Reyna? Why are you supporting that Mexican?”<sup>49</sup>

Discrimination based on gender, the second component of this triple oppression, also maintained an unfortunate presence in the lives of many Mexican American women. Many Mexican American women often first encountered machismo, which anthropologist Richard Basham describes as “a typical male response to fear of dominance by a (perceived) sexually superior and threatening female,” within their own domiciles or communities.<sup>50</sup> Though often viewed as a Latin American or Mexican phenomenon, as Basham explains, “the basis of machismo can be seen most clearly in the skeletal Latin family structure,” though the cult of machismo remains a ubiquitous feature in other Western cultures as well.<sup>51</sup> Instead of being viewed as equal human beings with limitless potential, Mexican American women were often relegated to the home to perform domestic duties at the behest of their spouses. María Jiménez recalled a male acquaintance of the family asking her father, “Why educate the girls? They are going to get married.”<sup>52</sup> As previously mentioned, Lydia Camarillo’s father seemed insistent on keeping the females in his household from working or, in Lydia’s case, attending college.

This type of gender bias occurred outside of Mexican American communities as well, as these women faced gender discrimination within the professional sphere. After

---

<sup>49</sup> Reyna interview.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Basham, “Machismo,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 1, no. 2 (1976): 126.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>52</sup> María Jiménez, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, June 14, 1998, Houston, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Jiménez interview).

receiving her law degree in 1978, Sylvia García found that she encountered more discrimination as a female than as a Mexican American. She claimed, “I think a lot of the commentary or even the resistance that I got was more in terms of being female than Hispanic. I do remember some comments some judges would make that was, that were just sexist.”<sup>53</sup> When Judith Zaffirini made the decision to pursue a PhD, her husband’s law partner responded, “I don’t know why you want to get a PhD. The only person who needs a Ph.D. is the President and the word President implies male by definition.”<sup>54</sup> After Norma Ramirez announced she intended to run for county Judge of Zapata County, a man said to her, “Who do you think you are? You are a woman . . . Don’t even try it!”<sup>55</sup> Margaret Gómez encountered the same misogynist attitude in 1980, when she announced her intent to run for Constable in Travis County Precinct Four. Upon hearing of her intent to run, an outraged Herbert Benner claimed “this was no job for a woman,” and decided to run against her.<sup>56</sup> Gómez won her race against Benner, but still gives him credit for her victory. She stated, “Mainly because he handed the race to me by saying to this community, this is no job for a woman, you know. And, so . . . I think he won the race for me.”<sup>57</sup> Gender discrimination occurred in a variety of ways, not merely manifesting itself among primarily poor or educated women. In some

---

<sup>53</sup> Sylvia García, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, July 22, 1999, Houston, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Sylvia García interview).

<sup>54</sup> Judith Zaffirini, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, June 10, 1996, Laredo, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Zaffirini interview).

<sup>55</sup> Norma Ramírez, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, July 25, 1996, Zapata County, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Ramírez interview).

<sup>56</sup> Gómez interview.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

circumstances, it gave Mexican American women the impetus to challenge the parochial sensibilities of the white establishment.

The final facet of triple oppression relates to the low socioeconomic status of Mexican American women. Julia Kirk Blackwelder's study of women in Depression-era San Antonio reflects this blatant inequity. Blackwelder exposes the occupational segregation of the industrial world and its effects on Mexican American women during this traumatic period in American history. A 1932 Women's Bureau survey of Texas workers revealed that Mexican women received significantly lower wages than white women who worked "side by side in the same occupational and establishment."<sup>58</sup> Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei also portray the harsh economic realities of Mexican American women in their work *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multi-Cultural Economic History of Women in the United States*. Amott and Matthaei explain how, in comparison to Anglo men and women, Mexican American women "remained overconcentrated in low-paid, seasonal jobs, and suffered high poverty rates."<sup>59</sup> In *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender*, Irene Blea notes, "Chicana jobs are physically demanding, deadend, and frequently dangerous. Chicanas tend to be migrant workers, dishwashers, and domestics. Women are highly concentrated in service areas as waitresses, laundry and garment workers, department store clerks, and maids in hotels."<sup>60</sup> Their ethnicity and gender only further depressed their low economic status. Denise Segura argues, "the interaction among lower-class status, ethnicity, and gender

---

<sup>58</sup> Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Women of the Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio, 1929-1939* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984), 90-91.

<sup>59</sup> Teresa Amott, and Julie Matthaei, *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multi-Cultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), 86.

limits human capital acquisition and channels minority women into lower-echelon jobs that offer few opportunities for advancement.”<sup>61</sup> Consequently, many Mexican American women in Texas found employment in agricultural, manufacturing, or domestic settings. A lack of formal education greatly contributed to their sparse choices regarding employment, and, in some cases, obstructed their ability to take care of themselves. For example, the median annual income for Spanish-speaking women in 1972 was \$2,647, while African American women earned \$5,147 and Anglo women earned \$5,998.<sup>62</sup> Yet, in the time between 1960 and 1970, Mexican American women entered the labor force with more frequency than her white and black counterparts.<sup>63</sup>

In this inequitable job market, Mexican American women had to accept whatever positions were available, often taking on several jobs at once to supplement the family income. Judge Hilda Tagle recalled her mother, both a migrant worker and a beautician, as “a real hustler...in the sense of always looking for work, a way to make money to, you know, support herself or whatever, and provide.”<sup>64</sup> While many Mexican American women may not have held two or more jobs, it might have seemed that way. Jacklyn Potter’s feature of migrant women farmworkers throughout the country, including the Eastern Shore of Virginia and Texas, describes the duality of the women’s role. She explained,

---

<sup>60</sup> Blea, *La Chicana*, 118.

<sup>61</sup> Denise A Segura, “Chicana and Mexican Immigrant Women at Work: The Impact of Class, Race, and Gender on Occupational Mobility,” *Gender and Society* 3, no. 1 (1989): 38.

<sup>62</sup> Aragón de Valdez, “Organizing as a Political Tool for the Chicana,” 8.

<sup>63</sup> Patricia Zavella, “Abnormal Intimacy: The Varying Work Networks of Chicana Cannery Workers,” *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 3 (1985): 542.

<sup>64</sup> Tagle interview.

These women work long hours. All the women begin their day at 3:30 a.m. when they get up to make breakfast and lunch for their husbands, children, and relatives. They work until 6 p.m. in the fields, with one hour for lunch. When they return to camp, they fix dinner. Their hands and their hearts provide for their families. Rarely can they plan beyond the next paycheck.<sup>65</sup>

In *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*, Vicki Ruiz describes what she terms the “double day existence of the mother.” Ruiz explains how women would often labor in the fields with their families during the day only to return home to more domestic chores, “spending half the night so she would be ready to go back to work the next morning.”<sup>66</sup> Though their roles within the household were often gendered, it is important not to overlook her contributions to the stability of the family unit.

This seeming unending nature of triple oppression understandably compelled many Mexican American women into action during the 1960s and 1970s. Though previous decades witnessed the remarkable activism of Mexican American women, the national civil rights movement, especially César Chávez’s farm workers movement in addition to other inspired political activity throughout the Southwest, encouraged women in greater numbers and from various walks of life to challenge the status quo. Clearly some women were blessed with more positive experiences that better enabled them to tolerate or perhaps challenge their often second-rate positions in society. Education and support from friends and family often made this endeavor less complicated. Regardless, each woman had to come to the conclusion on her own that

---

<sup>65</sup> Jacklyn Potter, “If I had all the money I wanted, I’d get the electricity turned on, buy some food...”: migrant women farmworkers,” *Off Our Backs: A Women’s Newsjournal* 10, no. 10 (1980): 10.

these societal divisions were no longer acceptable. Refusing to tolerate the pervasive stereotypes, generalizations, or categorizations the larger society placed upon them, many Mexican American women, in conjunction with their male counterparts, opted for change. Without a doubt, the multifaceted nature of their struggle ensured plenty of obstacles along the way, as they attempted to overcome generations of repression.

---

<sup>66</sup> Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 17.



### CHAPTER 3

#### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The political activity of the 1960s and 1970s instigated a sense of self-awareness among disaffected peoples across the United States. Religious and ethnic identities, interrelated components of this self-awareness, among Mexican American women during the 1960s and 1970s in Texas factored significantly in their struggles against the social, political, or economic oppression that permeated their existence. How and for what reasons they practiced their faith, in addition to the use of terms like Mexicana, Mexican American, Latina, Chicana, and Hispanic was given further consideration during this time as women sought to define themselves within the realm of the greater society. Self-identification, as Vicki Ruiz asserts, “speaks volumes about regional, generational, and even political orientations. Mexicana/o typically refers to immigrants, while Mexican American signifies U.S. birth. Chicana/o reflects a political consciousness born of the Chicana/o Student Movement, often a generational marker for those of us coming of age during the 1960s and 1970s.”<sup>67</sup> How women of Mexican descent in Texas fashioned their religious and ethnic identities often directly correlates to their social and political choices during the tumultuous period of the 1960s and 1970s.

---

<sup>67</sup> Vicki L. Ruiz, “Morena/o, blanca/o y café con leche: Racial Constructions in Chicana/o Historiography,” *Mexican Studies* 20, no. 2 (2004): 344.

A general understanding of the association between religion and ethnic identity among Mexican and Mexican Americans requires a review of the evolution of Mexican Catholicism, which occurred amidst their turbulent history of social subjugation. This history explains why the Catholic Church came to play a significant role in their lives of Mexicans and, subsequently, Mexican Americans. When the Spanish introduced the Catholic faith to the indigenous peoples of the Americas in the sixteenth century, the natives embraced aspects of this Christian ethos as features of the faith, especially the Gospels, often complemented their worldview.<sup>68</sup> This synthesis can be seen in the coupling of Aztec symbols with Catholicism which subsequently created a type of “folk Catholicism.”<sup>69</sup>

During the early sixteenth century, one of the most powerful symbols of Mexican culture emerged from the belief in the miraculous apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In her work *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women*, Jeanette Rodríguez examines the religious and ethnic identity associated with this particular icon. Appearing to Juan Diego, an Aztec, on December 9, 1531, Guadalupe, the Virgin Mary, spoke to Diego in the Nahuatl language.<sup>70</sup> Representing the indigenous people, Guadalupe embodied compassion and understanding, claiming to be one of their own.<sup>71</sup> Andrés Guerrero explains in *A Chicano Theology* how Guadalupe represented a deviation from the old Aztec religion,

---

<sup>68</sup> Jay Dolan and Gilberto Hinojosa, eds., *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 14.

<sup>69</sup> Andrés G. Guerrero, *A Chicano Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 151.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

<sup>71</sup> Jeanette Rodríguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 23.

replacing it with the new Catholic religion.<sup>72</sup> In 1660, the Catholic Church officially declared Our Lady of Guadalupe as the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>73</sup> By the nineteenth century, Guadalupe's popularity among the disenfranchised population increased and, by the twentieth century, she had become popularly known as the "Mother of the Mexicans."<sup>74</sup> Likening Guadalupe to a form of glue that holds a people together, Tomás Atencio, a Protestant sociologist, explains, "The Virgin de Guadalupe is a very important symbol because it ties us to our Indian past. Its manifestation ties us to our traditional past."<sup>75</sup>

The evangelism of the Spanish continued throughout the next several centuries, as Spanish utilized the Catholic Church to manipulate and eventually conquer the natives of the New World.<sup>76</sup> They built missions and parishes throughout the Southwest in a successful attempt to convert and control the masses.<sup>77</sup> The staunch Catholic identity of the Spanish established itself firmly among the natives and *mestizos* who eventually comprised the Mexican people. Following independence from Spain in 1821, the autonomous Mexican government proudly proclaimed its allegiance to defend "the Catholic faith, Mexican independence, and the public order of Mexico."<sup>78</sup> Seen as one commitment, loyalty to the state inevitably included loyalty to the tenets of Catholicism.

---

<sup>72</sup> Guerrero, *A Chicano Theology*.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>74</sup> Jeanette Favrot Peterson, "The Virgin of Guadalupe: Symbol of Conquest or Liberation?" *Art Journal* 51, no. 4 (1992): 39.

<sup>75</sup> Guerrero, *A Chicano Theology*, 108.

<sup>76</sup> Timothy Matovina and Gerald Poyo, eds., *¡Presente! US Latino Catholics From Colonial Origins to the Present* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 2.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 3-9.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 9.

Although the Spanish Crown no longer ruled over Mexico, important elements of its religious culture remained constant.

The primarily Protestant invasion of Anglos from the Southeast beginning in 1821 created a pluralistic ethnic and religious setting destined to create conflict. In Texas, as immigrants under the rule of the Mexican state, Anglos pledged their loyalty to Catholicism and official Protestant churches were prohibited until after Texas won independence in 1836.<sup>79</sup> Naturally, this fueled resentment among Anglos seeking to establish their Protestant communities in foreign territory. The supremacist and ethnocentric attitudes of Anglos towards Mexican citizens and their religious beliefs remained prevalent. At the time, American culture in general remained rife with hostility towards Catholics as well as suspicion of foreigners.<sup>80</sup> Many felt the Spanish-speaking Catholics were “superstitious and ignorant of their faith, culturally depraved, economically backward, and politically corrupt.”<sup>81</sup> During this period, a Protestant minister once stated, “Here was a semi-savage, Mexican government, administered by a tyrant, himself under the tyranny of Catholicism, demoralizing in its character, and but one step in advance of the most degrading heathenism.”<sup>82</sup> The eventual conquest of the Southwest by the Anglos in 1848 represented a trying time for Spanish-speaking Catholics in Texas.

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 10-12.

<sup>80</sup> Dolan and Hinojosa, *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965*, 148.

<sup>81</sup> Matovina and Poyo, *¡Presente! US Latino Catholics From Colonial Origins to the Present*, 46.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 15.

While Protestant leaders were often harshly critical of Spanish-speaking Catholics, so were other Catholic leaders.<sup>83</sup> The predominantly European-born clergy who arrived in the Southwest to manage the faith were often disrespectful toward and unable to relate to Spanish-speaking Catholics of the region.<sup>84</sup> This misunderstanding and miscommunication often led to open conflict. For example, in 1875, twenty-two exiled Mexican sisters appealed to Brownsville Bishop Dominic Manucy to reside in the area and minister to the community. Enraged by the Bisops refusal, Catholics attempted to block the Bishop's order by refusing to let the train carrying the women leave the city. Although ultimately unsuccessful, this further solidified antipathy towards the local diocese.<sup>85</sup> Still, the Spanish-speaking Catholic population continued to grow. In 1836, approximately 9,000 Mexican Catholics lived in what is today the state of Texas. Twenty-five years later, in 1861, the diocese of Brownsville reported a population of 30,000 Mexican and Mexican American Catholics.<sup>86</sup>

By the twentieth century, Spanish-speaking Catholics comprised one-third to one-half of all Catholics in the state.<sup>87</sup> Mexican and Mexican Americans may have not been overwhelmingly able to participate in the new economic system established by the Anglos, and they generally remained firmly excluded from the social strata of the Anglos. Yet, they retained finite ties to their faith in light of political and religious changes occurring around them. In light of the U.S. acquisition of the Southwest,

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>84</sup> Dolan and Hinojosa, *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965*, 19-20.

<sup>85</sup> Matovina and Poyo, *¡Presente! US Latino Catholics From Colonial Origins to the Present*, 51.

<sup>86</sup> Dolan and Hinojosa, *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965*, 27.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 27.

Spanish-speaking Catholics reinforced a religious and ethnic identity that “fortified their resistance to the effects of conquest and expressed their own ethnic legitimation.”<sup>88</sup>

Just as Mexican Catholics found a sense of identity in the practice of Catholicism that included a fusion of their indigenous roots and Catholic faith, Mexican Protestants often felt the disapproval of not adhering to the dominant belief system. Protestant missionaries set their sights on converting Spanish-speaking Catholics around the time the United States annexed Mexican territory.<sup>89</sup> Protestantism appealed to some Mexicans, yet, generally speaking, they did not leave the Catholic Church in large numbers.<sup>90</sup> Some Protestant rules, such as required behavior codes, appeared too strict for Catholics. Though Protestants launched significant campaigns to convert Mexican Catholics, they succeeded in getting only some five percent of Mexicans and Mexican Americans at most during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>91</sup> Those Mexicans and Mexican Americans who did convert often faced conflict from their Catholic counterparts. Although conversion experiences varied, Mexicans and Mexican Americans who converted to Protestantism often faced persecution from those within their own communities. Church historian Paul Barton explains in *Hispanic Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists in Texas* how the process of conversion “raised the possibility within the homogenous Spanish-speaking Catholic community that perhaps

---

<sup>88</sup> Matovina and Poyo, *¡Presente! US Latino Catholics From Colonial Origins to the Present*, 58.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>90</sup> Dolan and Hinojosa, *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965*, 42-43.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

their Catholic tradition was not a true representation of the sacred order.”<sup>92</sup> Clearly, the Catholic faith and the cultural traditions that accompanied its practice correlated directly with the idea of being Mexican. It is easy to see how those who converted from Catholicism to another faith would have been seen as traitors to their Mexican identity. However, by the 1960s, tensions between Mexican Catholics and Protestants waned, as both united under the banner of social justice as well as a desire to integrate religion and culture.<sup>93</sup>

The role of religion varied among politically active women of Mexican ancestry in Texas. Though primarily Catholic, some activist women aligned themselves with other affiliations, finding a comfortable space for religion in their lives based on their own personal and cultural experiences. For some, the commitment to Catholicism remained an unwavering feature of ethnic identity. Ofelia Santos of Edinburg, Texas, and a first generation Mexican American, claimed to be a “staunch Catholic” even in her later years.<sup>94</sup> Yet, as Rosa Rosales of San Antonio explained, her relationship with the Church was not as positive or as consistent:

I wasn't really a very active Catholic in my older years. I did get married by the Catholic Church. I . . . was a little turned off by the Catholic Church. I didn't like it. I have always said this . . . the sermons given by priests seem to be anti-women. Maybe that was my perception. So, I was . . . turned off because I remember that I had . . . not really left the Church, but I was not an active participant in the Church. I mean, I attended Sunday church, you know, and that was it. And then I remember when we . . . moved to Michigan, as the kids were small, we used to go Mass also, but then as the years went by, I think we stopped going to Mass and basically, for quite a few years, when I returned back

---

<sup>92</sup> Paul Barton, *Hispanic Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 51.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>94</sup> Santos interview.

and I remember one day I was back . . . in Mass and I remember the priest was saying a sermon and blaming the women for divorces. And all the problems with the . . . children . . . it was because women do not stay home and take care of their kids. And . . . I said to myself, 'Now I know why I left the Church for awhile there.' Because it, it seems to me that there is still and maybe it is my perception . . . I don't want to seem like I am badmouthing the Catholic Church, but it would seem that, that the sermons by certain particular priests, still in their own way, are blaming the women for a lot of the problems of society. And I thought that was wrong.<sup>95</sup>

Although Rosales very carefully criticized the role of the Catholic Church, especially regarding what she perceived to be its condemnation of women, her identification as a Catholic remained fairly steadfast. She may not have been an ideal participant in her faith, but she never renounced it completely, revealing it to be a pertinent part of her identity.

After completing her first two years of college at the University of Texas Pan American, Judge Linda Yáñez of South Texas recalled her decision to become a nun. Although her family remained regular observers of Catholicism, her mother and father gently encouraged her to reconsider, advocating the utility of her education. On her decision to remain in college, Yáñez elaborated,

So, I talked to my father and I told him . . . that I wanted to be a nun. And I wanted to leave my junior and senior year and go do this. And my father thought I was nuts and my mother thought I was crazy. And they said, 'Why don't you wait and finish at Pan Am? And after you graduate, if that's what you want to do,' you know, 'that's what you want to do. But, you are really young.'<sup>96</sup>

Yáñez' parents did not necessarily want their daughter to abandon the faith, but to approach her future from a practical vantage point. Though often identified as blind

---

<sup>95</sup> Rosales interview.



followers of the Catholic Church, Mexican Americans like Rosales and Yáñez negotiated the role that religion would play in their lives.

While her father aligned himself with the Catholic religion, Elizabeth Zúñiga grew up in the Protestant faith as a result of her mother's influence. She elaborated on her strict upbringing, stating,

We . . . lived a very sheltered life. I mean, we didn't go anywhere, we weren't allowed to do very much. We went to church. Every time the church door opened, we were there, the revivals, Wednesday afternoon, Sunday mornings, Sunday night. We were taught that we didn't dance. I never learned how to dance. You don't dance; you don't cuss; you don't drink . . . you don't smoke. We . . . were just very conservative, very strict life. That's how I was raised. Of course, that in return, gave me the faith that there was a God because . . . we would live by faith. And when you are poor and you don't have much going, you have got to live by faith. Somewhere, somehow, somebody is going to be there and I think that we turned to God. That's how we made it.<sup>97</sup>

Although there were certainly exceptions, as seen with the Zúñiga family, Mexican American women in Texas generally remained followers of the Catholic faith in some form or fashion. Yet, the strict devotion to faith was not a Catholic phenomenon, but an example the role of faith in shaping the family and individual. Many understandably turned to religion to deal with the painful inequities of society. Some continued to question the positions of the Church, especially regarding their attitudes towards social issues, including feminism and birth control.

As seen with religious identity, perceptions of ethnic identity remained just as diverse. Internal and external pressures during this time continued to affect the views of ethnic identity among Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest as men and

---

<sup>96</sup> Yáñez interview.

women attempted to define themselves in rapidly changing environments. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, individuals of Mexican descent in the United States experienced significant changes to their popular identification. In 1973, political scientist Rodolfo Alvarez separated the varying identities of the Mexican community in the United States into four distinct phases over time. His matrix does not address the specific identities of women, but greater revolutions within the entire community, permitting a greater understanding of why women aligned with certain ethnic identities while eschewing others. The first phase, titled the creation generation, begins following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and lasts until the turn of the twentieth century. During this time, Mexicans and Mexican Americans experienced extensive “economic subjugation, followed by race and ethnic prejudice.”<sup>98</sup> Resulting from a U.S. demand for cheap labor as well as political upheaval in Mexico as a result of the 1910 revolution, the next phase Alvarez references as the migrant generation. Primarily arriving in Texas and California, he contrasts this migration of Mexicans with other European immigrants coming to this United States during this time, stating, “They came to occupy the category closest to simple beasts of burden in the expanding regional economy.”<sup>99</sup> The Santa Fe railroad line, by 1910, heavily recruited Mexican families to stabilize working conditions in the Southwest.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, between 1910 and

---

<sup>97</sup> Zúñiga interview.

<sup>98</sup> Rodolfo Alvarez, “The Psycho-Historical and Socioeconomic Development of the Chicano Community in the United States,” *Social Science Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (1973): 924.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 928.

<sup>100</sup> Mario T. García, “The Chicana in American History: The Mexican Women of El Paso, 1880-1920: A Case Study,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (1980): 317.

1930, Mexican immigration to the United States increased by 300 percent.<sup>101</sup> The largest stream of immigration occurred in the 1920s, when approximately 500,000 Mexican arrived in the United States, an estimated one-tenth of Mexico's population at the time.<sup>102</sup>

Around the time of the Second World War, the Mexican American generation slowly emerged, advocating a political and cultural loyalty to the United States. Striving to break free of the virtual caste system in which they had been placed, the Mexican American generation "did achieve enough leisure and economic surplus so that their offspring did not begin from a hopeless disadvantage at birth."<sup>103</sup> Use of the term Latin American also became a popular and politically correct reference to individuals of Mexican descent during this time period. Some feel this resulted from the notion that the term stressed "their affiliation with other Caucasians, principally Anglo Americans."<sup>104</sup>

The Chicano generation, appearing from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, represented a new, electric consciousness amongst Mexican Americans. With regard to the evolution of the word Chicano, two theories exist. As Edward Simmen and Richard Bauerle conclude in their essay "Chicano: Origin and Meaning," the precise origin of the term remains in dispute. The first theory, according to Philip Ortego of the University of Texas at El Paso, "ascribes the word to Nahuatl origin, suggesting that

---

<sup>101</sup> Sánchez, "'Go After the Women,'" 285.

<sup>102</sup> Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1993), 317.

<sup>103</sup> Alvarez, "The Psycho-Historical and Socioeconomic Development of the Chicano Community in the United States," 936.

<sup>104</sup> Olivas, 'Colored Men' and 'Hombres Aqui,' 112.

Indians pronounce Mexicano as ‘me-shi-can-noh.’”<sup>105</sup> The other theory implies the word “was conventionally formed by suffixing *ano* to *chico* (a young boy), exactly as one would form, for example, *Mexicano* from *Mexico*.”<sup>106</sup> Conflicting accounts exist regarding the first printed use of the term Chicano as well. Geographer Richard Nostrand claims the term first appeared in a Spanish-language newspaper in 1911 to differentiate between “a person of Mexican descent who had not been ‘Americanized’ (the ‘Chicano’) and another who had.”<sup>107</sup> He also claims a term similar to Chicano, “Chicamos,” was used as a term of endearment among Hispanos during the 1930s.<sup>108</sup> Simmen and Bauerle, however, claim the word Chicano first appeared in print in 1947, in the summer edition of the *Arizona Quarterly*. Though the author of this particular essay, Mexican American writer Mario Suarez, does not explore the original meaning of the word, he does claim, “the term Chicano is a short way of saying *Mexicano*.”<sup>109</sup>

Even so, comparing their substandard position to other minority groups within the United States, this particular generation, as Alvarez states, “is the first sizable cohort in our history to come to the widespread realization that we can have a considerable measure of self-determination within the confines of this pluralistic society.”<sup>110</sup> Chicano Studies professor José Calderón explains how, in the 1960s, “Chicano groups fought hard to popularize the word Chicano as a replacement for Spanish-American, which

---

<sup>105</sup> Edward Simmen and Richard F. Bauerle, “Chicano: Origin and Meaning,” *American Speech* 44, no. 3 (1969): 225.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>107</sup> Richard Nostrand, “‘Mexican American’ and ‘Chicano’: Emerging Terms for a People Coming of Age,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 42, no. 3 (1973): 398.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>109</sup> Simmen and Bauerle, “Chicano: Origin and Meaning,” 225.

implied the assimilation of the Chicano people into U.S. society, left out the Indian heritage, and implied that Chicano history had its origins in Europe.”<sup>111</sup> Chicano groups also criticized the utilization of a pan-Latino identity that, as one Chicano stated, “naturally glorified in the Anglo tradition, the Spanish conquest of the native Indian and his civilization along with the vicious exploitation of the *mestizo* (Mexican) by the Spaniard.”<sup>112</sup>

Sociologist Laura Gomez added a fifth generation to Alvarez’s analysis in her essay “The Birth of the ‘Hispanic’ Generation: Attitudes of Mexican-American Political Elites toward the Hispanic Label.” The term Hispanic, including Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, Mexican Americans, and others from Central and South America, entered the American vocabulary during the 1970s, derived “largely from Mexican-American policy groups critical of undercounting in the 1970 census.”<sup>113</sup> Gomez explained, “The switch from Chicano to Hispanic by many out-group spokespersons, publications, and institutions has led commentators to argue that the Hispanic label was imposed by external forces seeking an alternative to the more radical Chicano label.”<sup>114</sup> The increasing conservatism of the 1980s as well as the growth of other organized ethnic communities, such as Puerto Ricans and Cubans, contributed to the popularization of

---

<sup>110</sup> Alvarez, “The Psycho-Historical and Socioeconomic Development of the Chicano Community in the United States,” 940.

<sup>111</sup> José Calderón, “‘Hispanic’ and ‘Latino’: The Viability of Categories for Panethnic Unity,” *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 4 (1992): 39-40.

<sup>112</sup> Joseph A. Rodríguez, “Becoming Latinos: Mexican Americans, Chicanos, and the Spanish Myth in the Urban Southwest,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1998): 167.

<sup>113</sup> Laura E. Gómez, “The Birth of the ‘Hispanic’ Generation: Attitudes of Mexican-American Political Elites toward the Hispanic Label,” *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 4 (1992): 46.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

the term. The U.S. Census first used the term Hispanic in 1980.<sup>115</sup> Although many Mexican Americans supported use of the term, this method of identification remained a product of an Anglo-dominated bureaucracy.

Just as terms regarding one's ethnic identity affect the cultural awareness of Mexican American women in Texas, so did the issue of race. As previously explained, Mexican American ethnic/racial identity has remained in limbo in Texas, often as a misunderstanding of the differences between ethnicity and race. The varied complexions among Mexican Americans further complicated the matter. In her article "If You're Light You're Alright': Light Skin as Social Capital for Women of Color," Margaret Hunter expands on the sociological impact of "colorism," a term she describes as "the system that privileges the lighter skinned over the darker-skinned people within a community of color."<sup>116</sup> Arguing that whiteness "is believed to represent civility, intelligence, and beauty," she expands on the theory that skin coloring works as a form of social capital for women of color, affecting major life choices for them.<sup>117</sup> Norma Chávez of El Paso, the progeny of a dark-skinned mother and light-skinned father, struggled with her darker complexion, and often became alienated from her lighter-skinned family members.<sup>118</sup> Herlinda García of Houston expanded on what she called an "unspoken situation" regarding skin color among Mexican Americans. She claimed,

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>116</sup> Hunter, "'If You're Light You're Alright,'" 176.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>118</sup> Chávez interview.

“If you were fair-skinned, you were picked more than those children who were darker.”<sup>119</sup>

The Founding Fathers of the United States failed to define the parameters of whiteness and, therefore, whiteness, so to speak, often entailed that which was not black. Following this pattern of thought, Mexican Americans were often categorized as white. Yet, the 1930 census originally sought to classify Mexicans as a separate race, “who were ‘not definitely white, Negro Indian, Chinese, or Japanese.’”<sup>120</sup> This connotation aroused considerable objection from the Mexican American community and, as a result, the 1940 census clearly delineated Mexican Americans as white.<sup>121</sup>

Many Mexican Americans willingly adopted this “white” identity, often “to avoid social discrimination and, in some cases, as a litigation strategy.”<sup>122</sup> The disparities between legal identification and social practice were indeed noteworthy. Though technically classified as white, Mexican Americans continued to face treatment as second-class citizens, encountering myriad forms of social and economic discrimination, including their frequent prevention from serving on juries in Texas. In the early 1950s, lawyers challenged this widespread practice, with the precedent-setting case eventually making its way to the Supreme Court. In their attempt to negate allegations of discrimination, the state of Texas argued that Mexican Americans were considered white. The Warren Court found otherwise. The acknowledgment of Mexican Americans as a protected ethnic group of people came in 1954 with the Court’s decision

---

<sup>119</sup> Herlinda García interview.

<sup>120</sup> Olivas, ‘*Colored Men*’ and ‘*Hombres Aqui*,’ 128.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 68.

in *Hernandez v. Texas*. This landmark case, argued two weeks prior to the well-known *Brown v. Board of Education*, held that Mexican Americans were recognized and protected under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and not subject to discrimination in jury selection procedures.<sup>123</sup>

For women of Mexican ancestry in Texas, coming to terms with one's ethnic identity could be a sticky process mired in competing allegiances. In her essay titled "Mexicanas and Chicanas," Mexican writer and journalist Elena Poniatowska discusses the painful history along the border between Mexico and Texas and its effects on ethnic identity. "Texans of Latin origin, or Hispanics as they are called now, had no time to become Mexicans," she claims.<sup>124</sup> Poniatowska concludes the Chicano/a remains situated between two worlds, "Mexicans who consider them traitors, and Americans who want them only as cheap labor."<sup>125</sup> Economic standing also influenced the way in which women of Mexican ancestry in Texas perceived themselves. Historian Sarah Deutsch claims, "Women's consciousness, like men's, emerged in a particular context, a particular set of economic and social relations that varied by industry as well as region and era."<sup>126</sup>

Mexican American women in Texas asserted their ethnic identity in a particular fashion as a result of various influences, the first of which relates to the demarcation of a community. Though the terms may differ, the motivations for their use are similar. Their identity remained a construct delineating specific cultural boundaries that

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>124</sup> Elena Poniatowska, "Mexicanas and Chicanas," *MELUS* 21, no. 3 (Autumn, 1996): 36.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 37.



highlight and champion the substance of their ethnicity. Alicia Chacón of El Paso personally preferred the term Chicana as opposed to Hispanic. In describing the differences between the two, Alicia claimed,

I think that there are [*sic*] an assertiveness that speaks to the values, to the core values of Chicanos. Identity with the language and the culture and wanting to promote that rather than . . . for Mexicanos to assimilate. I think there is tremendous pride and strength in people knowing their roots and where they come from and valuing them versus, you know -- just trying to find ways in which you assimilate into the mainstream society. And I think there are many people that . . . don't recognize that strength -- the individual strength that comes to a person when they know who they are and where they come from versus just trying to fit into a mold of what is mainstream America.<sup>127</sup>

To Alicia, the term Hispanic clearly did not encapsulate the language and culture she associates with her identity, but would indeed be used by one who had submitted to the pressures of the greater society.

While the term Chicana undoubtedly referenced a community of American-born women of Mexican ancestry, it was often used selectively, in part because different communities read the term differently. In a 1973 statement to *The Dallas Morning News*, John de la Garza of North Dallas considered the word Chicano/a derogatory, often comparing it with terms such as “‘spic,’ ‘meskin,’ ‘greaser,’ and ‘taco bender.’”<sup>128</sup> A counterpart to the more conservative de la Garza, Rene Martínez, a former Raza Unida member interviewed in the same article, preferred the more militant term

---

<sup>126</sup> Sarah Deutsch, “Gender, Labor History, and Chicano/a Ethnic Identity,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 14, no. 2 (1994): 5.

<sup>127</sup> Alicia Chacón, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, June 22, 1996, El Paso, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Chacón interview).

<sup>128</sup> Tony Castro, “‘Chicano’ Proves Term of Controversy,” *The Dallas Morning News*, February 26, 1973.

Chicano.<sup>129</sup> As a result of a lack of understanding regarding its origins or connotation, its use often evokes the ire or admiration of both those inside and outside of Mexican American communities. Even after the Chicana and Chicano movement, public perception of the term continued to affect its use. Judge Linda Yáñez, who preferred the term Chicana, proclaimed,

I still use that term, but if I don't use it it's only because, it's because some people don't understand what it means, you know. And if I'm trying to make myself understood and not because I don't think it's the best term to use. And as I said, I identify myself first as Chicana and, secondly, as a woman.<sup>130</sup>

Attorney Ofelia Santos of Edinburg, Texas, also preferred to identify herself as a Chicana, but noted, “Of course, sometimes people frown, so I use Mexican American. It depends on the group I’m with.”<sup>131</sup> With Republicans and Conservative Democrats often opting for terms such as Mexican American and Hispanic, political affiliation also influences the ways in which women identify themselves. Judith Zaffirini, a Democratic State Senator from Laredo, Texas, stated she and her family “consider ourselves Mexican-American first and foremost,” and commented that she considers her ethnic identity “an advantage and I consider my bi-lingualism superior.”<sup>132</sup> In terms of her identity, Elvira Reyna, a Republican from Laredo, preferred using the term Hispanic.<sup>133</sup>

Another way in which Mexican American women in Texas choose to identify themselves is by way of geographical location, especially those women born in Mexico. When questioned about her ethnic identity, Elsa García, a noted Tejana artist and singer,

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Yáñez interview.

<sup>131</sup> Santos interview.

<sup>132</sup> Zaffirini interview.

responded, “I don’t like the word Chicano. I don’t relate to it. I guess because I was born in Mexico and I am more of a Mexican American.”<sup>134</sup> Yet, Socorro Medina came to Texas from Mexico at the age of one and belongs to the Mexican American interest group LULAC, the League of United Latin American Citizens. Still, she considered herself a Chicana.<sup>135</sup> Lydia Camarillo, on the other hand, derived her self-identity from various geographical experiences in her youth. Although at the time of her interview, she identified with the broad-based term Latina, she elaborated that in her past, “I have been a Mexicana because I grew up in El Paso and really thought I was Mexicana because I didn’t understand the Chicano experience. When I moved to California, I was Chicana.”<sup>136</sup> This statement also reflects the political connection Lydia associates with her ethnic identity.

The idea that ethnic identity is not a unique component of self-awareness, but one that evolves with time and experience can be seen through the generational lens many Mexican American women have employed over the years. As part of her comedic routine, lesbian writer Monica Palacios repeated the following poem in many of her monologues:

When I was born,  
I was of Mexican-American persuasion  
Then I became a Chicana  
Then I was Latina

---

<sup>133</sup> Reyna interview.

<sup>134</sup> Elsa García, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, April 26, 1996, Arlington, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Elsa García interview).

<sup>135</sup> Socorro Medina, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, February 26, 1998, Amarillo, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Medina interview).

<sup>136</sup> Camarillo interview.

Then I was Hispanic  
Then I was a Third World member  
Then I was a woman of color  
Now I'm just an Amway dealer  
And my life is happening.<sup>137</sup>

In the earlier part of her life, Rosa Rosales used the term Chicana. Yet, in her later years, she claimed,

It has been in my later years that I have used Latino and Latina. And the reason is because actually I am not hung up on titles, you know. If people want to call themselves Mexicanos, Latinos, the only one I really don't like is Hispanic. Even though sometimes I will use it, but I thought Latino would be more of a universal name for all of us, but still, another preference is being Chicano, Chicana.<sup>138</sup>

In Rosie Castro's earlier political activity during the 1960s and 1970s, whether as an activist for the Democratic Party or Raza Unida, she did not hesitate to use the term Chicana. Nevertheless, over the years, her personal preference evolved from Chicana to Mexican American, eventually settling with the all-encompassing term Hispanic.<sup>139</sup> As the political landscape settled, so did these women's perceptions of themselves. Though the term Chicana was not used to depict a specific age group, the fact remains that it is certainly perceived that way in some circles. It has been stated that older Mexican Americans have resented the "slang use of Chicano," and were apprehensive about the Chicano movement as well.<sup>140</sup>

Whether denoting a community, geographic, or generational meaning, many Mexican American women in Texas used the various terms interchangeably. Concerned

---

<sup>137</sup> Ruiz, "Morena/o, blanca/o y café con leche," 344.

<sup>138</sup> Rosales interview.

<sup>139</sup> Rosie Castro, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, July 1, 1996, San Antonio, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Castro interview).

less with specific labels and more with the general nature of identity, women such as Isabel Campos of New Braunfels, Texas used the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably, without allegiance to a specific term.<sup>141</sup> Amalia Rodríguez-Mendoza, a member of the Mexican American Youth Organization, or MAYO, during the 1960s and 1970s, preferred the term Latina, but feels that “Latinos, Chicanos, Mexican Americans, Hispanics, I mean, they are all interchangeable in a way.”<sup>142</sup> Some women did not need to define themselves using specific terminology, but felt that connection within the cultural community to be of greater significance.

The essence of religious and ethnic identity among Mexican American women in Texas remains deeply rooted in cultural, social, and political experiences. Far from an arbitrary identification, Mexican American women in Texas appropriated or dismissed various ethnic identifications based on their own views of themselves and their relation to the larger society. While some modes of identification remained fixed throughout their lifetimes, others shifted over time. Some women have maintained the very identity that shaped them in their younger years just as others later settled for new methods of self-identification with which they felt comfortable. The use of Mexicana, Mexican American, Chicana, Latina, and even the politically correct Hispanic generally encounter little opposition from Mexican Americans or other ethnic communities. Although the process of religious and ethnic identification ultimately remains one of

---

<sup>140</sup> Nostrand, “‘Mexican American’ and ‘Chicano,’” 399.

<sup>141</sup> Campos interview.

<sup>142</sup> Amalia Rodríguez-Mendoza, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, February 8, 1998, Travis County, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Rodríguez-Mendoza interview).

personal choice, these women have been and continue to be influenced by multiple forces, explaining why many were pulled in such different directions.

## CHAPTER 4

### SHADES OF FEMINISM

Amid their embittered struggles against the presence of triple oppression in addition to their personal quests for identity, Mexican American women of the 1960s and 1970s encountered significant conflict over the issue of feminism.<sup>143</sup> What other women of the day considered a cause under which to unite remained a point of contention for these women. The issue of feminism did not unite these women, but revealed further fractures as well as varying cultural understandings of the term itself. Mexican American women often felt pressure from traditional men and women in their communities to disassociate themselves from feminism. Issues surrounding birth control, abortion, and lesbianism further divided those seeking to alter the status of women in the United States. Furthermore, the Anglo-dominated American feminist movement often clashed with the initiatives of Mexican American women, usually because it represented mostly a middle-class sensibility. The feminist movement in Mexico, from which many women of Mexican ancestry in Texas drew their ideology, differed from its American counterpart. The agenda of white women, primarily focused on gender, reflected this dissimilarity. For Mexican American women, the mainstream movement left unaddressed the role of race and ethnicity, thus alienating many of them.

---

<sup>143</sup> I define feminism, in this context, as a movement organized around the belief in social, political, and economic equality of the sexes.

These diverging forces weighed on ethnic women seeking to propagate change within the sphere of women's rights.

Although the history of Mexican women remains one of exploitation, that history also included women who utilized what abilities they had to maintain their standing in a male-dominated society. Contrary to the fiction that a feminist movement never occurred in Mexico, several movements promoting women's rights exist in Mexican history, including numerous stories of strong, resourceful women.<sup>144</sup> Virtually no history of Mexican and Mexican American feminism can be told without mention of the Aztec Empire's most famous heroine, notoriously known as La Malinche, a term that stands for traitor.<sup>145</sup> Born a member of the privileged, educated class around 1505, Malinche's birth name was Malintzín Tenepal.<sup>146</sup> For the most part, indigenous women in ancient Aztec society maintained lifestyles within domestic boundaries, although some held public offices and served as priestesses.<sup>147</sup> Daughters of nobility, however, did receive an education and, as a result, Malinche was fluent in several languages, including Nahuátl and several Mayan dialects.<sup>148</sup> The Spanish *conquistadores*, especially their leader Hernán Cortés, saw in Malinche a valued asset, and they exploited her for personal gain. A vital actor during the Spanish invasion of what is today Mexico, Malintzin-Marina, later christened Doña Marina by her Christian

---

<sup>144</sup> Anna Macías, *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), xii.

<sup>145</sup> Blea, *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender*, 27.

<sup>146</sup> Adelaida Del Castillo, "Malintzín Tenepal: A Preliminary Look into a New Perspective," in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, ed. Alma García (New York: Routledge, 1997), 123.

<sup>147</sup> Richmond, *The Mexican Nation*, 13.



captors, became the link between the two cultures as a concubine and translator for Cortés.<sup>149</sup> Even after the conquest of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán, and after Cortés' Spanish wife joined him in what would become New Spain, Malinche remained his trusted translator and advisor.<sup>150</sup>

Yet, recollections of her remain in dispute, as some have characterized her as “a traitor to the nation because she collaborated sexually and politically with the Spanish colonizers of Indian civilizations.”<sup>151</sup> Others, especially Mexican American women of the mid-twentieth century, insisted she adapted to a situation forced upon her, thus defying traditional images of prototypical women of the time.<sup>152</sup> Noting that the Aztec empire remained one in its decline, historians insist Malinche played a cursory role in the defeat of the natives, a conclusion that would have eventually occurred without her help. Instead, she represented the perseverance of the Mexican women, symbolizing “the people, the dispossession of their homeland, and the reclamation of their land.”<sup>153</sup> The feminist implications of her story are clear. Although Malinche functioned as a mistress, her invaluable advisory role to Cortés remains a testament to her capability and empowerment. Many Chicana writers of the late twentieth century wrote from the perspective of the oppressed, indigenous Indian woman, illuminated in the spirit of

---

<sup>148</sup> Cordelia Candelaria, “La Malinche, Feminist Prototype,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 5, no. 2 (1980): 2.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>151</sup> Marta Sánchez, “La Malinche at the Intersection: Race and Gender in Down These Mean Streets,” *PMLA* 113, no. 1 (1998): 118.

<sup>152</sup> Candelaria, “La Malinche, Feminist Prototype,” 6.

<sup>153</sup> Blea, *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender*, 28.

Malinche. In “Gender, Race, and Raza,” Amy Kaminsky confirms this “declaration of Indian strength is a source of pride.”<sup>154</sup>

Feminist influence remained a characteristic among Mexican women even under Spanish occupation. Juana Inés de la Cruz, known for prefiguring the modern feminist movement in Mexico, represented this strong-willed independence in this traditional era.<sup>155</sup> Born illegitimately to a creole mother and Spanish father in the mid-seventeenth century, Juana Ramírez realized her educational limitations as a poor female.<sup>156</sup> She eventually became a nun to ensure the ability to study seriously, eschewing thoughts of marriage with the understanding she could not be both a mother and a serious scholar.<sup>157</sup> Popularly known as the “tenth muse,” Sor Juana lived most of her life in a convent, becoming a skilled prose writer, poet, and musician.<sup>158</sup> She also frequently attacked the sexual double standard and fervently defended the rights of women, influencing future generations of Mexican and Mexican American women.<sup>159</sup> To this day, Sor Juana stands as a national icon in Mexico, as her former convent is now a center for study, and her image remains enshrined on Mexican currency.<sup>160</sup>

Another group of women who would one day influence later generations of Mexican and Mexican Americans include the *soldaderas* of New Spain and, later, the independent Mexican state. Elizabeth Salas’s thorough work *Soldaderas in the Mexican*

---

<sup>154</sup> Amy Kaminsky, “Gender, Race, and Raza,” *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 1 (1994): 19.

<sup>155</sup> Macías, *Against All Odds*, 4.

<sup>156</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,” Encyclopedia Britannica, [http://www.religionencyclopedia.com/C/cruz\\_sor\\_juana\\_ines\\_de\\_la.htm](http://www.religionencyclopedia.com/C/cruz_sor_juana_ines_de_la.htm) (accessed April 25, 2007).

<sup>157</sup> Richmond, *The Mexican Nation*, 52-53.

<sup>158</sup> Blea, *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender*, 41.

<sup>159</sup> Richmond, *The Mexican Nation*, 53.

<sup>160</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.”

*Military: Myth and History* depicts the varied characteristics that comprise these remarkable women.<sup>161</sup> In contrast to those who linked the *soldaderas* specifically to the Mexican Revolution of 1910, Salas provides a generous history of female Mexican warriors from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. On the battlefield, these women fought next to men and, while traveling and camping, often provided for the community of fighters as nurses, cooks, and laundresses. Described as either fierce fighters of justice or miserable camp followers, Salas admits, “There are few books on the *soldaderas* because they are in a ‘man’s domain,’ and they challenge views about women and war, self-defense, aggression and defiance.”<sup>162</sup>

The female fighters of the Mexican Revolution, *soldaderas* who were also called *Adelitas*, originated from a variety of backgrounds as well. Although most of the women were *mestizas* or Indian women, some were rich and educated while others were poor and illiterate. Professor Alicia Arrizón claims the aristocrats who became *Adelitas* rebelled against “the ideals of their own social class” and were “important advocates of an ideology of resistance and contributed to the development of revolutionary feminist consciousness.”<sup>163</sup> Shirlene Soto, author of *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910–1940* considered *Adelitas* “the essence of Mexican femininity.”<sup>164</sup> Clearly, their identities varied, as some were more feminine than others. Their experiences were as diverse as their

---

<sup>161</sup> Elizabeth Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

<sup>162</sup> Elda Silva, “Adelitas: Women who played key role in Mexican Revolution are getting another look,” *San Antonio Express-News*, September 15, 2002.

<sup>163</sup> Alicia Arrizón, “‘Soldaderas’ and the Staging of the Mexican Revolution,” *TDR* 42, no. 1 (1998): 96.

backgrounds, with varying regional and class affiliations. Yet, Salas explains they cannot be divided into warriors and camp followers because each inherently occupied in both roles.<sup>165</sup>

Contemporary depictions of *Adelita*, Arrizón explains, unfortunately remain “a product of consumerism and the exploitation of the female body,” preserving “nothing of her feminist spirit.”<sup>166</sup> Salas agrees that their primary image as sexual beings has further marred an objective study of them.<sup>167</sup> Norma Cantú argues these images of *Adelitas* and *soldaderas* remain superficial: “Not content with merely keeping the soldiers alive, she is herself a soldier, sometimes donning man’s attire and fighting along with men. But the *Adelitas* and *soldaderas* were not merely followers – they were also military strategists, political thinkers who gave the Mexican Revolution more than tortillas and beans.”<sup>168</sup> Consequently, *Adelita’s* progressive and independent image inspired the women’s movement in Mexico as well as Mexican American women during the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

The development of activist feminist thought began in Mexico in the late nineteenth century, though documentation of this phenomenon did not occur before the early 1970s.<sup>169</sup> Anna Macías, author of *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940*, chronicled the trajectory of this particular movement from its roots in

---

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>165</sup> Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*, 69.

<sup>166</sup> Arrizón, “‘Soldaderas’ and the Staging of the Mexican Revolution,” 108.

<sup>167</sup> Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*, 69.

<sup>168</sup> Norma Cantú, “Women, Then and Now: An Analysis of the Adelita Image versus the Chicana as Political Writer and Philosopher,” in *Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender*, ed. Teresa Cordova (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 9.

<sup>169</sup> Macías, *Against All Odds*, xi.

the 1870s through its slow progression into the twentieth century, expanding on its many barriers along the way. Explaining why the movement ultimately did so little to change traditional attitudes towards women, Macías credits six forces: machismo, the role of the Catholic Church, the lack of unity among Mexican feminists, a lack of support from the dominant press, and the middle-class status of Mexican feminists.<sup>170</sup>

In 1856, an anonymous article appeared in the *El Monitor Republicano* stating there were only five kinds of women. It stated in typical misogynist fashion,

The first are whiners and crybabies, the second spendthrifts, the third only of their appearance, and the fourth are forever praying and attending mass. The fifth, the ‘talentacias’ or the bluestockings, are the worse of all. They eat little, pay no attention to their appearance, constantly bemoan the ignorance of the masses, and consider themselves unfortunate because one lifetime is not enough to read even a millionth of what has been written.<sup>171</sup>

The force of marianismo, defined as a phenomenon that “masks women’s subordination to men as veneration and adoration,” also played a significant role in the suppression or hesitancy of Mexican and Mexican American women to enter into feminist politics.<sup>172</sup> Expanding on how women were forced into defined social and sexual roles under Spanish occupation, Anna NietoGomez explains how marianismo portrayed the woman as “semi-divine, morally superior and spiritually stronger than her master because of her ability to endure pain and sorrow.”<sup>173</sup> The concept of marianismo emerged from religion, as the Virgin of Guadalupe encompassed this notion of

---

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., xiii-xv.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>172</sup> Colette Morrow, “Queering Chicano/a Narratives: Lesbian as Healer, Saint and Warrior in Ana Castillo’s ‘So Far from God,’” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 30, no. ½ (1997): 72.

“motherhood and martyrdom” going hand in hand with the teachings of the Catholic Church.<sup>174</sup> This perception of women further contributed to the notorious double standard practiced by many males.

In spite of these seemingly insurmountable stereotypes, Macías provides ample evidence of diligent women combating these traditional forces relating to education, divorce, and rape. Audacious feminists such as Hermila Galindo even accused the Catholic Church of suppressing feminist forces in the country.<sup>175</sup> The role of feminism in the Mexican revolution of 1910, the two 1916 feminist conferences in the Yucatán, and the activism of the 1930s all played a vital role in decision to permit women the right to run as candidates and vote in the 1958 national elections.<sup>176</sup> The struggle for women’s rights in Mexico differed from that of its U.S., Anglo-dominated counterpart. Suffrage was not guaranteed to anyone in Mexico and, as a result, Mexico’s brand of feminism never linked itself directly to the issue.<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, Mexican feminists never united with their Anglo sisters, which would have provided greater support. Macías explains that Mexican feminists were often “wary of associating with North American feminists,” who many felt represented the imperialist ways of the Americans.<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>173</sup> Anna NietoGomez, “La Chicana-Legacy of Suffering and Self-Denial,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, ed. Alma García (New York: Routledge, 1997), 49.

<sup>174</sup> Morrow, “Queering Chicano/a Narratives,” 72.

<sup>175</sup> Anna Macías, “Women and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920,” *The Americas* 37, no. 1 (1980): 64.

<sup>176</sup> Macías, *Against All Odds*, 108-110.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

This suspicion of American carried over into the Chicana feminist movement as well. Mexican American women would have similar difficulty uniting with their Anglo counterparts during this time. Several ethnic women writers have provided explanations regarding the hesitancy of many women of color to join the Anglo feminist movement, including a fear of dividing the community, lack of knowledge of feminism, and the relationship of women to the church.<sup>179</sup> Often rejecting policies regarding birth control and abortion as a result of their affiliation with Catholicism, ethnic women often found it difficult to find a place among the Anglo feminist movement and chose not to participate. Judith Zaffirini of Laredo, who, perhaps as a result of her strong religious convictions, remained inactive in campus politics during the 1960s at the University of Texas, claimed to be a pro-life feminist, supporting equal opportunity for women.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, Catholic women of Mexican ancestry often struggled over their allegiance to their male-dominated religion and the demands of the Anglo feminist movement. Expectedly, many conservatives denounced feminism as “anti-Catholic.”<sup>181</sup> Christel Manning, professor of religious studies at Sacred Heart University, explains that while many liberals supported feminism and believed in abortion, “they also took pains to show that they agreed with the basic Catholic teachings on abortion and had reservations about the feminist movement’s support for it.”<sup>182</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> Margaret Simons, “Racism and Feminism: A Schism in the Sisterhood,” *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 2 (1979): 384.

<sup>180</sup> Zaffirini interview.

<sup>181</sup> Christel J. Manning, “Women in a Divided Church: Liberal and Conservative Catholic Women Negotiate Changing Gender Roles,” *Sociology of Religion* 58, no. 4 (1997): 382.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

As a result of the patriarchal attitudes of men within their communities, women of Mexican ancestry in Texas often felt the pressure to tolerate or suppress feminist sympathies. Many Mexican American men felt that since both men and women within their community were persecuted, the need to address inequities between the two seemed fruitless. Consequently, male members of the Chicano movement often rejected the utility of feminism between 1968 and 1971.<sup>183</sup> Describing the role of sexism within the realm of Chicano studies, Cynthia Orozco describes the various Chicano sexist ideologies that existed about feminism. The first one explains the problem lies with the Anglo, not the macho, forcing women to focus their attention on issues outside of their communities. That feminism remained a construct of the Anglo middle class was another example of their attempts to inhibit real change between men and women. Another popularly promoted fallacy about feminism implied that it “was a diversion from the ‘real’ and ‘basic’ issues, that is, racism and class exploitation.”<sup>184</sup> The last excuse used to deter women of Mexican ancestry from promoting the tenets of feminism claimed that it threatened to destroy the foundations of *la familia*.<sup>185</sup> Clearly, Mexican American women faced manipulation from both internal and external sources regarding the issue of feminism during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

While a significant part of the obstacles Chicana feminists faced emerged from the religious conservatism and sexism within their own communities, another part came out of the mainstream feminist movement in the U.S. The Anglo feminists did not

---

<sup>183</sup> Anna NietoGomez, “La Femenista,” *Encuentro Femenil* 1, no. 2 (1974): 34-35.

<sup>184</sup> Cynthia Orozco, “Sexism in Chicano Studies and the Community,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, ed. Alma García (New York: Routledge, 1997), 265.



confront the issue of ethnic discrimination and ethnocentrism within their own movement.<sup>186</sup> Pam Deutsch, an Anglo feminist interviewed by *The Dallas Morning News* in 1973, stated of women's rights, "I feel that if a woman wants to be a housewife, that's great. If she wants to be a housewife and work, great, too. If she wants to remain single, that's also great. I feel a woman should be able to decide, without social and legal pressures, how she wants to live."<sup>187</sup> Deutsch's comment reflects the unmistakable divide between Anglo and minority women. Focusing solely on gender, she clearly failed to consider the full range of sociological factors that often inhibit women of color from participating so eagerly in the feminist movement. Expanding on this disconnect, Cecilia Suárez had aptly asserted just a year earlier,

Our issues are bread-and-butter ones; Women's Lib is trying to get equal job opportunities, but we are still trying to get our women into school. We have special problems. For example, our meetings have to be in the daytime, because the average Spanish-speaking husband won't let his wife come out at night.<sup>188</sup>

As a result of conflicting objectives between Anglo and Mexican American women, many Chicanas sought to focus primarily on women's issues directly related to their respective communities. Commenting on her estrangement from the feminist movement in 1979, Wilma Espinoza, president of the Mexican American Women's National Association, stated of the National Organization for Women, "I think they are viewed by minority women as 'the National Organization for White Women.'" She

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>186</sup> Simons, "Racism and Feminism," 385.

<sup>187</sup> Mary Ficklen, "Women must work to liberate themselves," *The Dallas Morning News*, May 25, 1973.

<sup>188</sup> "Women's Liberation Revisited," *Time*, March 20, 1972.

further added, “We focus on Chicanas, and they don’t. We watch what they do, but we have our own agenda.”<sup>189</sup> Also feeling this sense of alienation, women of Mexican ancestry in Texas shared in this struggle with the condescending methods of the Anglo feminist movement. Rosie Castro, who claimed to be a feminist, felt of the Anglos, “They were very patronizing at times.” She further stated, “Whatever they saw as their agenda, they tried to impose in everybody else.”<sup>190</sup> María Martínez remarked that the superior tone of the Anglo feminist movement repelled her. She claimed, “To me . . . it’s an issue of automatically assuming . . . that only white women were going to lead.”<sup>191</sup> Rosa Rosales who held a similarly negative perception of the Anglo feminist movement, explained,

So, when they asked me one time I went to speak and I said that we could, we as Latinas, could not really identify with the white Anglo women movement because of historical experience and everything was different. And . . . I saw them as . . . you know, woman, woman, woman. You know what I mean? If you did a little in-depth study, it was white women that they were promoting and not Latinos or minorities. So, I already knew all this, I already had a bad perception of the white woman [*sic*] movement.<sup>192</sup>

The Anglo feminist movement appeared unresponsive to the needs of ethnic women.

Elaborating years after the Movement on why the “Mexicanas” and “gringas”

could not get work together to form an interethnic Women’s Political Caucus in 1983,

Ofelia Santos claimed,

---

<sup>189</sup> Leslie Bennetts, “Feminists Cool to NOW Stand Against Carter,” *The New York Times*, December 21, 1979.

<sup>190</sup> Castro interview.

<sup>191</sup> María Elena Martínez interview.

<sup>192</sup> Rosales interview.

We found out . . . in forming the women's political caucus that the Anglo women liked us fine as long as we were the battered women and the victims. But, if we were women on the same level as them, it was insane. And, so, we had those kinds of problems. Vying for leadership. Who's going to run the organization? Well, you know, just because we are Mexicanas we didn't want to be the grunts . . . So, we fought real hard for the leadership. And, so, one year the Mexicana would be president and the next year a gringa would get it. You know what I mean? Because enough Mexicanas would vote for that, for that Anglo. So, you know, eventually it kind of just disbanded.<sup>193</sup>

The feeling of being used as a pawn in a larger battle that slighted the interests of Mexican American women remained fairly common.

Though these feminist movements remained in conflict, they shared uneasiness about how to deal with lesbianism. Addressing how the issue of lesbianism has harmed the women's movement, a 1972 *Time* magazine article quoted a N.O.W. official stating, "I have heard a woman called Communist, radical, bitchy, everything-and she can take it. But if anyone so much as breathes the word lesbian at her, she goes to pieces."<sup>194</sup> Fearing this particular issue would overshadow other issues, leaders of the women's movement sought to downplay its presence within the movement, especially at marches and rallies.<sup>195</sup> How women of Mexican ancestry reconciled this issue inside and outside of their respective cultural environments remains of keen interest to those seeking to understand her quest for identity during the 1960s and 1970s.

To date, comparatively little has been written about lesbian women of Mexican ancestry in the United States. Yet, what literature has been produced carefully articulates the multidimensional plight of Mexican American lesbians. Carla Turjillo's

---

<sup>193</sup> Santos interview.

<sup>194</sup> "Women's Liberation Revisited."

*Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* remains a pivotal work, with essays from activist lesbian women such as Cherrie Moraga, Ana Castillo, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Emma Pérez.<sup>196</sup> This impressive assortment of literature includes discussions of the complicated struggles regarding sexuality, identification, and stigmatization among women of Mexican ancestry. Ana Castillo's essay "La Macha: Toward a Beautiful Whole Self" explains, "The less education, the less privilege, the more discomfort she feels with the language of dominant culture, and with her alienation from that culture, the less apt a young woman will be to challenge the social mores of her community."<sup>197</sup> In her work *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*, Castillo criticizes the role of Catholic indoctrination in suppressing women's sexuality. Alma García also addresses the issue of lesbianism in her edited work *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*.<sup>198</sup> Published in 1997, this collective effort also addresses lesbianism within the Chicano community. Claiming lesbians within the Mexican American community intimidate their male counterparts, Carla Trujillo argues that "Chicana lesbians are perceived as a greater threat to the Chicano community because their existence disrupts the established order

---

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Carla Trujillo, ed. *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 1991).

<sup>197</sup> Ana Castillo, "La Macha: Toward a Beautiful Whole Self," in *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, ed. Carla Trujillo (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 1991), 43.

<sup>198</sup> Alma García, *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

of male dominance, and raises the consciousness of many Chicana women regarding their own independence and control.”<sup>199</sup>

Just as women of Mexican ancestry often faced resistance over the issue of lesbianism from women in the Anglo feminist movement as well as Mexican American men, they also faced prejudice from other Mexican American women. Viewed as a “white” or “Anglo thing,” the Mexican American lesbian became synonymous with the Spanish term *vendida*, meaning “sellout” or “ethnic traitor.”<sup>200</sup> When Cherrie Moraga’s first book of essays and poems titled *Loving in the War Years* was released in 1983, she left the country. Discussing her reasoning for leaving, she told the *Austin American-Statesman*, “I thought ‘They’re going to kill me.’ I just couldn’t bear to see what the response was going to be.”<sup>201</sup>

Clearly, Mexican American lesbians faced opposition on several fronts, impeding their ability to genuinely express themselves. This reception from the dominant community did not apply only to those of Mexican origin. The first and only All-Texas Lesbian Camp-Out was held in Austin, Texas, the last week of May in 1975. Lesbian women, including those of Mexican ancestry, from Austin, Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, and other smaller cities converged on Paleface Park near Austin to organize and socialize. After spending the Saturday swimming and talking, issues of security erupted as a group of intoxicated men descended on the group,

---

<sup>199</sup> Carla Trujillo, “Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano Community,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, ed. Alma García (New York: Routledge, 1997), 281.

<sup>200</sup> Morrow, “Queering Chicano/a Narratives,” 66.

<sup>201</sup> Belinda Acosta, “Moraga taps into the Chicana lifeline,” *Austin American-Statesman*, October 24, 1992.

intimidating the women and threatening some with violence.<sup>202</sup> As a result of experiences such as this one, literature regarding the experiences of Mexican American lesbians during the 1960s and 1970s in Texas remains scarce. Furthermore, in light of the bustling activity of the time, the issue of sexuality remained largely unaddressed during this time. As María Martínez explained of the issue of sexuality during the 1960s and 1970s, “I think definitely at that time of the movement most of . . . the Chicanos and the Chicanas that were involved were definitely not even aware of sexual preference.”<sup>203</sup> Although rarely addressed on a community-wide basis, individual allegations of lesbianism posed a genuine threat for women living outside the bounds of tradition. Never marrying, Irma Rangel of Kingsville recalled allegations surrounding her sexual orientation in the mid-1970s. As a female attorney running for state representative, she recalled the mayor of Elsa, Texas, Mr. Castaneda, wanting to address a potentially incendiary issue with her. She explained,

He had a grocery store and so he would meet me in the back and I am there by myself and all these are men, you know. So, I am surrounded by the men and I say, ‘Well, what’s the matter?’ They are saying that, you are one of the others, you know, you are a lesbian. And I said, well, ‘Why are they saying that?’ He says, Well, you are not married. I said, ‘Well, let me tell you, I say, I am not a lesbian.’ I said, ‘And it is nothing wrong, they are human, but I am not one.’<sup>204</sup>

Although Rangel clearly held nothing against lesbianism, she was expedient in disclaiming this potentially incendiary allegation. For the most part, however, the issue of sexual preference remained undiscussed in the Mexican American community in

---

<sup>202</sup> Janis Kelly, “Texas Lesbians.” *Off Our Backs: A Women’s Newsjournal*, October 31, 1975, 8.

<sup>203</sup> María Elena Martínez interview.

<sup>204</sup> Rangel interview.

Texas during this time. For the most part, these women contemplated the role of feminism in their lives, weighing the positive and negative effects it might have on their cause for civil rights. Drawing on their history of feminism, some women of Mexican ancestry in Texas cultivated their own version of it according to their cultural perspectives of politics, masculinity, and the role of women. Mexican American women in Texas had ample sources from which to draw their feminist inspirations.

However, some women drew their stimulation from role models within their own domiciles. Born in Harlingen, Texas in 1950, Elvira Reyna and her two siblings never knew their father. Their mother, Magdalena Betancourt, never took her husband's name after they married. After the family moved to Dallas when Elvira was a young girl, a friend of the family mentioned to her mother that she should acquire welfare to make ends meet. Although they lived in housing projects and funds remained limited, her mother stated, "I don't want that. I am going to raise my children on my own."<sup>205</sup> To this day, Elvira considers her mother to be a feminist and a major influence on her belief system. Prototypical feminists of the time might not have viewed this as feminist behavior per se, yet, Reyna clearly fashioned her own definition of feminism to accommodate her understanding of the term. Similarly, subordinate matriarchal figures also influenced feminist tendencies in young Mexican American women. Regarding her strong feminist posture, Maria Jiménez affirmed,

It [feminism] came with a position of inequality, having sensed inequality and injustice from a very early age . . . My mother, even though she was, and she still is, very traditional in, you know, she's never had a job outside the home and very much does what my father

---

<sup>205</sup> Reyna interview.

says . . . And, and my grandmother Manuela who was such a strong woman figure. I think that helped in, in my understanding that a woman could be very strong figures in that context . . . It was the time of the question of those roles. And I remember . . . I wrote my first article defending the right of women to participate for the *Papel Chicano* which Alfredo Vasquez had in Houston. And I remember the reaction amongst some of the fellow Chicano activists was, 'Well, you're OK. That's good gringo way viewing the role in the family, the culture.' There was a lot of opposition, but what I did was just research the history of the Mexican people. That's why Sor Juana Inez, about the feminist movements in the Yucatan, the participation of women who, for one thing or the other, como Dona Pepa, Josefa Dominguez (like Mrs. Pepa, Josefa Dominguez), and the revolution, you know. The many women who led battalions and fought in the revolution and you know, to fight for the rights of education, of women in Mexico. They fight for the right to vote in the Fifties for the women of Mexico. So whenever I was questioned by Chicano activists who thought that I would blurt out the litany of facts, historical figures and facts, and then, something I say, but, you know, 'That's my history. I don't know where your history comes from, the history of the Mexican people. It includes the history of the struggle for the equality of women.' And so, they couldn't argue with me.<sup>206</sup>

Further dismantling stereotypical images of traditional women of Mexican ancestry, María jovially claimed that her husband taught her how to cook.<sup>207</sup> The same men who advocated the historical struggle of Mexican and Mexican American people in the United States conveniently forgot the portion of history that empowered its women. Nevertheless, comments from women like Jiménez often fell on deaf ears.

As revealed by the cleavages among women's perceptions in the feminist movement of the mid-twentieth century, Mexican American women held differing perceptions of feminism. María Berriozabal's perspective of feminism reveals what Anna Macías describes as the "imitation of manhood."<sup>208</sup> Macías aptly invokes the

---

<sup>206</sup> Jiménez interview.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Macías, *Against All Odds*, 158.



example of female soldier *La Coronela*. “She not only dressed like a man, she cursed like a man, and thought like a man. Only then did men accept her as an equal.”<sup>209</sup> On feminism, Berriozabal claimed,

A feminist is a political designation, you know, I am a feminist and I am feminine . . . I am not ashamed to say I am a feminine person, you know, I think it is being a mujer [woman], you know, it’s una mujer y es un hombre masculino y una mujer femenina [a woman and it is a masculine man and a feminine woman]. It is like the gender thing . . . but to me, it is two different things, but in my grandmothers, it was really two different ways of being. Una mujer que andaba mucho afuera haciendo, [A woman who was outside a lot doing,] she was feminine, too. And it was not that my grandmother, abuelita, was not feminist . . . I feel that there are two sides definitely and I know that I have, in me, as a human, my masculine and feminine, too; and that I nurtured both and I think, for most of my life, I nurtured a lot of my masculine abilities, that people give you that designation, you know. It would be wonderful if one day we don’t have to use that.<sup>210</sup>

She seemed to almost apologetically link the political with that which is masculine, explaining that it is indeed possible for her to maintain her feminine, female perspective while maintaining her feminist tendencies. Such an understanding of feminism remains undoubtedly rooted in the patriarchal environment in which she was raised.

But some women escaped this environment. These women held progressive views on topics such as single parenting and marriage. Though the Catholic Church prefers children be born within wedlock, some women refused to give in to this ecclesiastical pressure. While working for the San Antonio River Authority, Irma Mireles, an active member of both Raza Unida and LULAC, became pregnant.

---

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>210</sup> María Berriozabal, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, July 16, 1996, San Antonio, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Berriozabal interview).

However, she refused to get married simply for the sake of getting married, and instead opted to raise her child by herself.<sup>211</sup> Gloria de León enjoyed providing an explanation behind her decision not to change her name when she married her husband, Ernesto Nieto. She recounted,

I love telling this story because a lot of people used to think that I was a very strong, liberated woman, and that the reason I refused to change my name was because I was a liberated woman. But, the reality is that when I was about ten or twelve, my Dad . . . said, "There's not going to be anybody to pass on my name," you know. "And all of you are going to get married and you're going to assume other names." And I turned to him and I said, "Daddy, when I grow up I'm never going to change my name." And so, I didn't, you know. By the time I met Ernesto, I had already bought my house. I had my credit established. People knew me professionally as Gloria de León. And I've always felt that marriage is a status not an identity, you know. And I felt, I've always felt that way about who I am. I didn't feel like who I was needed to necessarily be tied into the fact that I belonged to Ernesto, like de Nieto, or something like that, you know, the way it used to traditionally be. That's not who I am. Ernie and I are full partners. And so, I'm Gloria de León.<sup>212</sup>

Yet, her decision remained emblematic of what women's groups during the 1960s and 1970s advocated. Though certainly making a statement about her connection to her family, Gloria also renounced an antiquated tradition that, in her mind, inherently subjugated women.

Another perception further separating women of Mexican ancestry in Texas from their Anglo sisters revolved around their feelings regarding the cohesive nature of community. Those who aligned themselves primarily with the Anglo feminist

---

<sup>211</sup> Irma Mireles, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, June 6, 1998, San Antonio, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Mireles interview).

<sup>212</sup> Gloria DeLeón, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, February 2, 1998, Austin, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as DeLeón interview).

movement had the option of choosing to promote issues that hoped to benefit women directly. Yet, for most, the focus of Mexican American women remained on alleviating the tribulations of their entire community. María Martínez preferred that the focus of her activism remain within the full scope of her community, choosing to call herself a humanist as opposed to a feminist. She revealed a concern for the rights and privileges of Mexican American women as well as men, explaining, “Feminists tend to be geared more into just women’s issues. As a humanist I would, not only [support] women’s issues, which are very important to me, but also issues of, of community issues that involve men and women.”<sup>213</sup> Her statement also explained why Anglo women were so unwilling to accommodate Mexican American women, as they refused to turn their backs on men for the sake of their gender. With regard to politics, when asked if she had greater impact as a Mexican American or a woman, Alicia Chacón quickly responded, “Always as a Mexican-American because that is the banner that I carried . . . I would support the women’s movement and I supported the affirmative actions on their behalf, but my real interest . . . has been the advancement of Mexican-Americans.”<sup>214</sup>

Just as the Anglo feminist movement failed to unite under one ideological banner, so did Mexican American advocates of women’s rights. A different historical foundation and understanding of feminism, discord with the Anglo women’s movement, and resistance from within their respective communities affected their experiences addressing the role of women’s liberation during the 1960s and 1970s in Texas. Though attempts to group Mexican American women into a specific mold exist, women of

---

<sup>213</sup> Rosales interview.

Mexican ancestry in Texas cannot be so easily categorized.<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, efforts to do so undermine the plethora of perspectives that existed among these women during this evolving period. Some Mexican American women embraced feminism to a greater extent just as others chose to sacrifice their personal, social, and political agendas for the greater good of their entire community. Although they often disagreed with one another, they did not permit Anglo women to define feminism for them. Their complex history and varied experiences ensured that their approach to feminism would be just as diverse. Although many Mexican American women may have been divided over issues often linked with the Anglo women's movement, their commitment to their communities remained unwavering in a time of dramatic change.

---

<sup>214</sup> Chacón interview.

<sup>215</sup> For further reading on this subject, see Beatriz Pesquera and Denise Sequera's sociological study of how race-ethnicity, gender, and class shaped Mexican American women's political consciousness and orientation toward feminist politics. See "There is no Going Back: Chicanas and Feminism," in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, ed. Alma García (New York: Routledge, 1997) 294-309.

## CHAPTER 5

### IDENTITY AND ACTIVISM

Existing histories of political activity among Mexican Americans in Texas during the 1960s and 1970s emphasize male leadership and participation, often with little concentration on the various roles of women. While their voice has, at times, remained unarguably passive, Mexican American women in Texas participated in political activism in diverse and often conflicting ways. Nevertheless, confusion exists over the political roles of these women during the movement.

In 1980, soon after the movement, Sylvia Gonzales, a professor of Mexican American Studies at San Jose State University, claimed that Mexican American women were indeed divided over how to respond to their role in the civil rights movement. However, she incorrectly asserted, “At no time did she step beyond her traditional role and assume leadership.”<sup>216</sup> As a result of such conflicting perspectives, much of the literature chronicling the Mexican American civil rights movement in Texas focuses on its male-dominated leadership. As former MAYO and Raza Unida activist Viviana Cavada quietly claims, “They don’t emphasize the role of the woman.”<sup>217</sup> While many of these historians credit the worthy contributions of women to the cause, their voice

---

<sup>216</sup> Sylvia Gonzales, “Toward a Feminist Pedagogy for Chicana Self-Actualization,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 5, no. 2 (1980): 49.

remains comparatively passive. Only in the past several decades has the political involvement of Mexican American women been given further consideration. Mexican American women in Texas participated in politics differently than their male counterparts. Sylvia García, the first Mexican American woman to be elected Controller for the city of Houston, agreed, stating,

I think that generally women do do politics a little bit different than men. I have found women to be more inclusive. Women are less authoritative in their management style. And I think that women are usually a little more sensitive with . . . employees and sensitive to some more of the contemporary issues. I don't think that there's any major difference that I've noticed between . . . ethnic lines or racial lines. I think, I've noticed more in terms of . . . gender issues.<sup>218</sup>

The myriad marches, boycotts, strikes, and political organizations that evolved in Texas during the 1960s and 1970s occurred against the backdrop of a repressive social, political, and economic environment. Not limited to Texas, this discontent arose in other Southwestern states, especially California, New Mexico, and Colorado where prominent figures like César Chávez, Reyes Tijerina, and Corky Gonzales led various initiatives promoting social justice. While these men often basked in the glow of media attention, women continued their struggle, often silently accepting their largely secondary status within the civil rights movement. The idea that Mexican American women, who often worked with as much passion as their male counterparts, should postpone their claims for equal rights so as not to harm the greater movement seemed

---

<sup>217</sup> Viviana Cavada, Interview by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, June 29, 1998, Crystal City, Texas. Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Cavada interview).

<sup>218</sup> Sylvia García interview.

disingenuous. Their tolerance had a limit, however. By 1970, women became more anxious about their positions and roles within the political sphere.

Prior to the emergence of Mexican American political associations such as the Mexican American Youth Organization, or MAYO, and La Raza Unida Party, other political organizations existed in Texas with a similar goal of combating the effects of ethnic discrimination. In 1929, a period often referenced as one of assimilation for many of Mexican descent in the United States, several middle-class Tejanos founded the League of Latin American Citizens, or LULAC, in Texas.<sup>219</sup> Initially, LULAC only accepted U.S. citizens as members, often promoting a variety of assimilation tactics, including the promotion of the English language.<sup>220</sup> This strategy did not, however, suggest the group renounced their Mexican identity. In *Chicanismo: The Forging of A Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans*, Ignacio García explains why the founders of LULAC did not seek to abandon their origins. He claims, “They sought to ‘maintain a sincere and respectful reverence for [our] racial origin.’”<sup>221</sup> Instead, they viewed assimilation as a means to gaining their full rights as American citizens. Following World War II, another interest group known as the American GI Forum evolved to promote the rights of Mexican American veterans. In 1948, Dr. Hector García and attorney Gus García formed the organization in response to the refusal of a funeral director in Three Rivers, Texas, to bury soldier Félix Longoria.<sup>222</sup> LULAC tried not to

---

<sup>219</sup> Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 89.

<sup>220</sup> Arturo Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1996), 93-94.

<sup>221</sup> Ignacio García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of A Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 20.

<sup>222</sup> Rosales, *Chicano!*, 96-97.

involve itself directly with electoral politics, while the American GI Forum openly sponsored voting registration drives and endorsed candidates.<sup>223</sup> Women remained involved with LULAC from the beginning, even though they were not initially encouraged to join the organization. In 1937, Alicia Dickerson Montemayor of Laredo became the first woman elected to the office of Second Vice-President General of LULAC.<sup>224</sup> Ladies LULAC councils, gender-segregated chapters, formed in the 1930s, but by the 1950s, women had slowly begun to integrate with men.<sup>225</sup>

By 1960, however, Mexican Americans' inequitable socioeconomic situation stimulated more concern than the legal inequalities which had concerned the earlier activists. Only thirteen percent of all Mexican Americans had a high school education and less than six percent had attended college.<sup>226</sup> Furthermore, during this time the per capita income for Mexicans in the Southwest was \$968 compared to \$2,047 for Anglos.<sup>227</sup> In Corpus Christi, a saying existed among Chicanos: "The only way a family can get out of debt here is for their son to get killed in Vietnam, so they can collect on his insurance policy."<sup>228</sup> The hope for change that inspired organizations such as LULAC and the American GI Forum failed to remedy the growing concerns among the Mexican American community. In 1961, the Political Association of the Spanish-Speaking Organizations, or PASSO, formed with a slightly different agenda than some of the older advocacy groups. The men and women of PASSO recognized the need to

---

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>224</sup> Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 91.

<sup>225</sup> Cynthia Orozco, "League of United Latin American Citizens," Handbook of Texas Online, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/LL/wel1.html> (accessed November 2, 2006).

<sup>226</sup> García, *Chicanismo*, 26.

<sup>227</sup> Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 98.



take their political activism further, and articulated what Ignacio García terms “a new militancy.”<sup>229</sup> The members of PASSO appeared more assertive with their demands, vowing to confront mainstream institutions in their fight for civil rights. Nonetheless, in late 1963, after internal fragmentation and infighting, the once vibrant and auspicious organization began to see a decline in membership.<sup>230</sup>

Still, many continued to feel alienated from the electoral scene, especially following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, who had pressed for the rights of Mexican Americans.<sup>231</sup> President Lyndon B. Johnson, who succeeded Kennedy, appreciated the potential political power of the Mexican American constituency, leaving many feeling optimistic about progress. Yet, they were sadly disappointed, and their relationship with the Johnson administration remained tempestuous. In March 1966, years after Johnson assumed control of the White House, fifty Mexican American leaders walked out of a conference in Albuquerque sponsored by the EEOC, complaining it had not “served or hired any of their people.”<sup>232</sup> Mexican Americans eventually came to realize that the two-party political system in the United States would not rescue them from the throes of poverty and sociopolitical alienation. In 1965, the National Farm Workers Association, led by César Chávez in California, set the stage for what would become a national campaign for Mexican American rights. Unrest in the Southwest spread rapidly, as groups throughout the territory sought to

---

<sup>228</sup> Richard Beene, “Chicanos Staging Revolution,” *The Dallas Morning News*, August 17, 1969.

<sup>229</sup> García, *Chicanismo*, 24.

<sup>230</sup> José A. Gutiérrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 69.

<sup>231</sup> García, *Chicanismo*, 28-30.

organize their resources to promote their varied agendas. While Chávez focused on the rights of the farm workers, Reies López Tijerina of New Mexico promoted property rights with his organization Alianza Federal de las Mercedes, the Federal alliance of Land Grants.<sup>233</sup> Colorado resident and former boxing contender Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales founded the Crusade for Justice in 1966 after having worked within a system, the Democratic Party, that did not seek to mitigate the collective grievances of his community.<sup>234</sup>

By the mid to late 1960s in Texas, Mexican American political activity began to operate outside the bounds of some of the older organizations, such as LULAC, GI Forum, and PASSO. The Mexican American Youth Organization emerged during this time in Texas, founded by five young men in San Antonio. In 1967, José A. Gutiérrez, Mario Compean, Willie Velásquez, Igancio “Nacho” Pérez, and Juan Patlan organized MAYO as a response to the estrangement they felt from mainstream America.<sup>235</sup> In his memoir titled *The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal*, Gutiérrez explains the name MAYO evolved “as a deliberate attempt on our part to postpone the media controversy that was surely to erupt.”<sup>236</sup> Although the organization evolved into Raza Unida Party in January 1970 and officially disbanded in 1972, in its five years of

---

<sup>232</sup> Julie Leininger Pycior, “From Hope to Frustration: Mexican Americans and Lyndon Johnson in 1967,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1993): 471.

<sup>233</sup> Rosales, *Chicano*, 154.

<sup>234</sup> Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government’s War on Dissent* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

<sup>235</sup> Gutiérrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant*, 99.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

service, MAYO remained a political marvel in Texas.<sup>237</sup> The notorious group organized efficiently, held conferences to discuss pertinent issues, sponsored walkouts, including the famous Crystal City walkout of 1969, and promoted educational, social, and political reform for Mexican Americans.<sup>238</sup>

However, the role of women involved in MAYO remains largely unaddressed. For example, in Armando Navarro's lengthy study, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas*, only three pages address the role of women, reflecting Navarro's claim that the leadership remained "all male."<sup>239</sup> Gutiérrez' *The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal* does a more thorough job of examining the roles of women. He clarifies that while many women often participated happily and willingly in the more logistical side of organization, such as making coffee, preparing food, or cleaning meeting halls, others contributed to the actual planning and direction of the group.<sup>240</sup> Along with the five founders of MAYO, wives such as Luz Gutiérrez and Elena Patlan "became principal architects" of the new organization.<sup>241</sup>

Raza Unida Party began in January of 1970 as a third party committed to defeating what Armando Navarro describes as an American "plutocracy governed by an

---

<sup>237</sup> Teresa Palomo Acosta, "Mexican American Youth Organization," Handbook of Texas Online, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/MM/wem1.html> (accessed November 2, 2006).

<sup>238</sup> Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>240</sup> Gutiérrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant*, 37, 106.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 106.

omnipotent power elite.”<sup>242</sup> Evolving from MAYO, the Raza Unida Party advocated several objectives, including the public ownership of natural resources, national healthcare, the abolition of capital punishment, withdrawal from Vietnam, bilingual education, and the abolition of the Texas Rangers.<sup>243</sup> Although some MAYO members opposed Raza Unida Party, most supported the idea of a third party and, by October of 1971, 25% of its members were women.<sup>244</sup> Compared to its predecessor, MAYO, Raza Unida Party did much to promote the role of women within its organization. Following its founding, Mujeres por La Raza Unida developed, advocating the participation of women within the Chicano Movement. By 1972, 36% of county chairs and 20% of precinct chairs were women.<sup>245</sup> The impact of women could be seen in selection of Alma Canales as the ticket’s candidate for Lieutenant Governor in the 1972 Texas election cycle.<sup>246</sup>

Mexican American women in Texas were attracted to political activity for myriad reasons at various stages throughout their lives and, as expected, their experiences were just as diverse. Oftentimes, their political activity began with local Democratic Party factions. Rosie Castro’s interest in politics began while she attended college at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio. She gained ample experience as President of the College Democrats and the Bexar County Young Democrats. From handing out bumper stickers to going door to door registering voters,

---

<sup>242</sup> Armando Navarro, *La Raza Unida Party: A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two-party Dictatorship* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

Rosie managed many job duties. She recalls approaching women to register to vote only to hear some of them reply, “I would like to register to vote, but why don’t you leave them [the registration forms] because I have to ask my husband,” or “My husband votes but I don’t.”<sup>247</sup> Regardless, by the late 1960s, Rosie left the Democratic Party in favor of something more radical. She stated,

It was just real obvious that we were getting nowhere fast. I mean, Mexicanos were not an integral part of the party, not at the state level and not at the national level and even not at the local level. Our people were excluded and treated differently basically because we were Chicanos.<sup>248</sup>

Her break with the establishment occurred at a time when the Chicano Movement in Texas reached its zenith, and Rosie relished this era of community empowerment. Involved in numerous marches and boycotts, she had a harsh encounter with the authorities during the San Antonio Savings Association boycott in 1970. She was arrested and jailed for walking and picketing in front of the building after witnessing the abusive behavior of the police, even towards pregnant protesters. Yet, these experiences did not deter her from pressing on with her agenda. For Rosie, the Movement remained a pivotal part of her life, and when Raza Unida declined in the late 1970s, she recalled feeling “depression” and “disillusionment,” and abandoned politics for several years.<sup>249</sup>

As a nineteen-year-old at the University of Houston in early 1970, María Jiménez recalled a similar feeling of dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party. She

---

<sup>246</sup> Tony Castro, “La Raza: Might It Tip the Scales?” *The Dallas Morning News*, March 12, 1972.

<sup>247</sup> Castro interview.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

sought to expand her political experience and focus on issues pertinent to her community. Leaving the Young Democrats, María joined the university branch of MAYO. As an active member, she recalled,

I was elected to the student body president. No, I was elected to the vice presidency and then the president resigned, but that was an agreement that we made. It was a deal we made before I ran with, with that group of people which they represented more of the white liberal. That he would resign in six months and I would be president six months because the Chicanos didn't want me to run with an Anglo, but, nor the Blacks. And then, the women didn't want me to run with a man. So we, we negotiated and that was the agreement. And the focus of MAYO was we were really asserting the rights of the students in the context of . . . opening up admissions . . . And eventually . . . a program was established for recruiting. We . . . pressured for the Mexican American Studies. We went down to the state legislature with a proposal that we wrote. And a line item was placed for the funding of the Mexican American Studies.<sup>250</sup>

Women like María clearly felt they could have a greater impact on society outside the mainstream political party system. Like other Mexican Americans at the time, disappointment with the Democratic Party arose from a lack of attention or marginalization, leading women like María to find other outlets for political expression.

Irma Mireles of San Antonio became affiliated briefly with the Mexican American Youth Organization through the urging of a friend. At the young age of twenty-one, Irma largely contributed in an administrative fashion at the San Antonio offices of MAYO under the tutelage of Rosie Castro. Following the slow decline of MAYO in the early 1970s, Irma became active in Raza Unida. As a single woman without children, Irma worked anywhere from forty-five to sixty hours a week collecting signatures for petitions and really working to get the party officially on the

---

<sup>250</sup> Jiménez interview.

ballot for the 1972 election cycle. Her work with Raza Unida taught her the specifics of election code. She recalled, “I remember that the Texas Election Code book was our little Bible.”<sup>251</sup> In 1974, Irma became the chair of Raza Unida in Bexar County, a term that lasted two years. Of this heavy responsibility, Irma claimed, “Getting precinct chairs was the, was the hardest. And training them because we had to have training classes for them.”<sup>252</sup> She worked with the understanding that many were afraid or too occupied with their busy schedules to work for the party. Nonetheless, her experiences with Raza Unida empowered her with the skills and to run and win a position on the San Antonio River Authority in 1976. The twelve board members were all white men with the exception of Irma, who stated, “That was a very frustrating six years because it didn’t matter what I said or did.”<sup>253</sup> Irma served one term, the first Mexican American women to win a city spot in an urban county. In her later years, Irma became affiliated with LULAC, citing a lack of choices as her reason for joining.<sup>254</sup>

Born and raised in San Antonio, Rosa Rosales never involved herself in the political activity of the late 1960s. Other than accompanying her husband to a few demonstrations here and there, she essentially remained apolitical during this time. Only when her family moved to Michigan as a result of her husband’s academic career did she find her way, politically speaking. Two years after moving to Michigan, in 1974, Rosa flourished as an activist, involving herself in various women’s groups. Of her growing experience, she explained,

---

<sup>251</sup> Mireles interview.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

I began to address issues which I really didn't need Rudy anymore. I mean, it was hard still for some of these groups that we had, but like the third world caucus, you know, that was women's issues. The going [*sic*] to the women's prison, that was also not Rudy. It was me with some other groups. And I think it was . . . in Ann Arbor two years that I started . . . being more of an activist on my own and not necessarily . . . with Rudy there all the time.<sup>255</sup>

Following her return to San Antonio in the late 1970s, at the behest of her friend Angie García, Rosa became politically involved in LULAC. Initially fearing it remained more of a social club as opposed to a purely political organization, Rosa scoffed at the idea. Her friend pragmatically explained, "An organization is what you make of it."<sup>256</sup> Rosa subsequently joined the organization in 1978, eventually becoming state director.

Alicia Chacón attempted to reconcile her commitments to both the state Democratic Party and to Chicana and Chicano organizations. While serving on the Isleta ISD School Board from 1970 to 1978, Alicia dabbled in a variety of political activities, including assisting both Chicana and Chicano organizations as well as the Democratic Party. She claimed to have supported women's rights as well as other affirmative action programs, yet, her true passion revolved around furthering the sociopolitical cause of the Mexican American community. She elaborated,

Many groups had formed made up of young people and a few adults -- but, really the young people were already very organized . . . Here you would find the United Chicanos. There was MECHA, and there was MAPA. And they were really beginning to be very, very active and want to be active. I helped them as much as I could. I was still working for the Democratic Party and I would, you know, make things available for them.<sup>257</sup>

---

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Rosales interview.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Chacón interview.



Unlike other members of the Mexican American community, Alicia clearly did not feel compelled to abandon the two-party political system to further the cause of her community.

Clearly women of Mexican descent in Texas maintained a political presence during the 1960s and 1970s, advocating strong reform for their respective communities. Many experienced the off-putting effects of chauvinism. Irma Mireles, an active member of MAYO and later Raza Unida, held her own, so to speak, especially when it came to men. She elaborated,

I think there were quite a few men that were real chauvinists. For women to be respected by men in the movimiento you needed to keep your private life out of the political scene. And I learned that pretty well early on. So . . . I kept to myself as far as having personal relationships with the men. The other thing I realized that you had groupies. And those were the women that gave the rest of us who were serious about what we were doing a bad name. And they didn't have a real purpose for being there other than chasing the men. And I had . . . a bigger agenda than men.<sup>258</sup>

Not only were serious women like Irma struggling to gain and maintain credibility among the men in their community, they had to deal with the discrediting presence of women known as “groupies,” or those who sought to promote their own personal social agenda.

As an active member of Raza Unida, Rosie Castro claimed the organization did a lot for women, giving them ample responsibility and authority, but that the male-dominated structure remained in place.<sup>259</sup> She recalled feeling very much a part of the

---

<sup>258</sup> Mireles interview.

<sup>259</sup> Castro interview.

decision making, regardless of what she was doing, claiming, “I never saw it as, you know, the guys are not responsive therefore we need to picket the guys.”<sup>260</sup> Nevertheless, some Mexican American men within the various political organizations valued the contributions of women, yet felt they did not belong in positions of leadership. As a member of MAYO in Austin during the late 1960s and early 1970s, María Martínez recalled feeling slighted from leadership positions as a result of her gender:

I think . . . it was a big discussion within the MAYO, you know, when we were organizing at UT and at . . . the time when women attempted to run for chair person. The . . . arguments or some of the positions of some of the men, you know, came from a very machistas (macho-oriented) or sexist point of view in that women couldn’t lead. That women had their place, but it was not in the leadership role, that they were just not effective leaders.<sup>261</sup>

María further explained how she resented the notion that her gender rendered her less than capable of maintaining a leading role within the political organization. Having been raised with a “dominant” father who “made all the decisions,” María claimed she quickly rebelled against the idea of automatic male supremacy.<sup>262</sup>

As a student at the University of Texas in Austin from 1969 to 1972, Amalia Rodríguez-Mendoza had ample opportunity to organize with the local chapter of MASO, the Mexican American Student Organization, which became UT MAYO in 1971. Resulting from her broad experience working within the university organization, including the fact that she was one of the few females actively involved, another

---

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> María Elena Martínez interview.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

member asked Amalia to run for President, an offer she readily accepted. Yet, a man running against her for the position, Rumel Fuentes, simply did not want a woman in charge of the organization, “no matter what.”<sup>263</sup> The organization compromised by permitting another candidate named Paul Vélez to run as President and for Amalia to run as Vice-President. But this did not end the discord within the group. Of the decision to hold a workshop for women at one of the UT student conferences, Amalia explained,

We should never have brought that up. Some of those guys were really upset. They boycotted the conference. And all we wanted to do was, look, just talk among ourselves. Because we felt that if we didn't, that if it was a mixed group that women wouldn't say some...we didn't even have an agenda. We just wanted to get together and see what our women thinking about or what do we want to do. I mean . . . we just wanted to be together. Well, some of the guys got really upset about it. And so, I remember those times, like the time where everything was in turmoil and you know, there was a lot of, I guess, a lot of disagreements in the way that...I think because we were being assertive or asserting ourselves at the time, you know. It wasn't sort of something that some guys expected.<sup>264</sup>

Amalia conveyed the struggle many women faced: wanting to promote change within her community while feeling relevant at the same time.

In her article “Chicanas speak: about feminism & the women’s liberation movement,” Bridget Wynne explained that initially Chicanas viewed the struggle of Mexican American men and women as one in the same. Experiences with sexism, unfortunately, led many women involved to feel that ““fight(ing) for the fulfillment of

---

<sup>263</sup> Rodríguez-Mendoza interview.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

the Chicano while denying equality to women should not be the direction of the movement.’”<sup>265</sup>

Feelings of marginalization from men as well as influences from the Anglo feminist movement instigated several Mexican American women’s conferences during the 1970s. Mexican American women sought to organize their thoughts and perspectives in a united effort to combat the various forces of repression. On May 28, 1971, over six hundred Mexican American women from twenty-three different states converged at the YWCA in Houston, Texas, for the first national Chicana Conference to address various issues regarding women’s rights.<sup>266</sup> Approximately 80% of those attending were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three and from various universities across the United States.<sup>267</sup> The role of machismo, discrimination in education, and the role of the Catholic Church were discussed at this conference as well as issues regarding sex and marriage.<sup>268</sup> These women not only directed their anger at Anglos, who often viewed women of Mexican ancestry in a marginalized and irreverent fashion, but also at men of Mexican ancestry who consistently perpetuated the double standard of seeking to liberate themselves but not their female counterparts. Many women of Mexican ancestry in Texas were tired of sidelining their pursuits for the good of the male-dominated community.

---

<sup>265</sup> Bridget Wynne, “Chicanas speak: about feminism & the women’s liberation movement,” *Off Our Backs: A Women’s Newsjournal* 9, no. 10 (1979): 10.

<sup>266</sup> Jennie Chávez, “Women of the Mexican American Movement,” *Mademoiselle*, April 1972, 150.

<sup>267</sup> Marta Cotera, “La Conferencia De Mujeres Por La Raza: Houston, Texas, 1971,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, ed. Alma Garcia (New York: Routledge, 1997), 224.

<sup>268</sup> Mirta Vidal, “New Voice of La Raza: Chicanas Speak Out,” *International Socialist Review*, October 1971, 7-9.

As positive as the outcome may have looked on paper, the actual conference typified the cleavages among women of Mexican descent with regard to their commitment to women's rights. By Sunday morning, the final day of the conference, over half of the women walked out, arguing in favor of maintaining allegiance to the community over the specific interests of women.<sup>269</sup> Others walked out of the conference to protest what they viewed as the YWCA's favoritism towards black civil rights.<sup>270</sup> Clearly, the women who attended this forum were not united. Anna NietoGomez and Elma Barrera, organizers of the event, discussed in their article "Chicana Encounter" the hurt and disappointment they felt at the infighting and negative behavior of many of the women who attended:

More than 600 Chicanas arrived that last weekend in May. But less than half let us know they were coming. Although, most were happy to be together, the groupies used our inexperience in conference organization to disrupt. How did we know more than 300 women would feel the need to come? 'We have no place to go, give us transportation.' Like rude guests, they began to treat us like servants. 'I have no money to register. Why should I pay? This is an irrelevant women's lib conference anyway. Give us gas fares, and plane fares, we want to go home.'<sup>271</sup>

Nevertheless, for those who remained, four resolutions evolved from the two days of dialogue and introspection:

1. Sex and the Chicana – That free legal abortions and birth control in the chicano community be provided and controlled by Chicanas and that double standards be eliminated.

---

<sup>269</sup> Francisca Flores, "Conference of Mexican Women in Houston – Un Remolino," *Regeneración*, 1, no. 10 (1971): 1-2.

<sup>270</sup> Mary Brinkerhoff, "Chicano Lib Inspires Race to Unite," *The Dallas Morning News*, June 2, 1971.

<sup>271</sup> Anna NietoGomez and Elma Barrera, "Chicana Encounter," *Regeneración* 2, no. 4 (1975): 49-51.

2. Choices for Chicanas in education and occupation – That educational institutions encourage Chicanas towards pursuing higher education.
3. Marriage, Chicana Style – That the traditional role of the Chicana within the marriage context no longer be acceptable due to her involvement in the movement. In order to facilitate and encourage Chicanas involvement and provide services for working Chicanas, child care centers should be promoted and established in the Chicano communities.
4. Religion – That as *mujeres de la raza* [women of the Raza], Chicanas recognize the Catholic Church as an oppressive institution and oppose any institutionalized religion.<sup>272</sup>

Attempting to establish a national communication, these women focused on practical needs for their community, as opposed to impracticable philosophical goals. Although they loosely called for an end to the traditional form of marriage, these women interestingly failed to arrive at a separate resolution demanding equal treatment among the sexes within their own group. One attendee, Grace Olivares, the first woman to graduate from Notre Dame law school, stated bluntly, “women must push for equal rights, not the empty goal of liberation.”<sup>273</sup> Yet, for the most part, the equal rights many sought among their male counterparts remained largely unaddressed at this particular conference, as the concern over double standards referenced in the first resolution appeared an afterthought with little elaboration.

A year and a half after the first National Chicana Conference, female members of La Raza Unida party assembled in San Antonio in early August of 1973. Almost 200 women from over twenty counties in Texas met in an effort to continue promoting the development of La Raza Unida throughout the state. They also took the opportunity to

---

<sup>272</sup> Sonia López, “The Role of the Chicana within the Student Movement,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, ed. Alma García (New York: Routledge, 1997), 104-105.

<sup>273</sup> “Equal Opportunity Is ‘A Lie,’ Chicanas Told,” *The Houston Chronicle*, May 30, 1971.

share their personal experiences with other attendees. In contrast to their Houston conference of 1971, these women ended their meeting with a firm commitment to support Chicana candidates for party offices, to continue to politically educate other Chicanas, and encourage other women to actively support La Raza Unida.<sup>274</sup>

Political participation of Mexican American women in Texas during this time comprised a wide spectrum of approaches. Some women advocated a conservative or more practical approach while others espoused a more aggressive method. A common mantra used by more practical activists during this period aimed at calming radical or violent voices by appealing to voter power. This effort to reach a practical goal urged, “The voting right is more powerful than the atom bomb,” as María de Hernández of San Antonio so eloquently exclaimed in 1970.<sup>275</sup> This statement exposes the varied dynamics among these female activists. Women of Mexican descent in Texas did not always affiliate with the various Chicana and Chicano groups, as many retained solid ties to the Democratic Party. Irma Rangel of Kingsville certainly supported the initiatives of the these ethnic organizations, but preferred to foster her allegiance with the Democratic Party. She maintained quite the resume in Texas politics, becoming the first Mexican American women to be a prosecutor for the District Attorney’s office in Corpus Christi, Texas, the first Mexican American woman to set up a law office in Kingsville, Texas, and the first Mexican American woman to be elected Party Chair of

---

<sup>274</sup> Evey Chapa, “Mujeres Por La Raza Unida,” *Caracol* 1, no. 2 (1974): 3-5.

<sup>275</sup> Paul Frye, “Boycott Churches, Says Raza Unida,” *Austin-American Statesman*, July 12, 1970.

the Democratic Party in Kleberg County.<sup>276</sup> Of her decision to remain with the Democratic Party, she explained,

I remember being interviewed on the radio station when I was running for state chair. And they asked me . . . ‘Well, what do you think of the Raza Unida Party?’ And I said, you know, ‘I have great admiration for those who are in the Raza Unida Party because they have got the guts to go and do a lot of things that I wouldn’t do. I think we have the same goals. We have different methods of achieving these goals.’ I said, but you know, ‘it was Raza Unida, in my opinion, that opened the doors that much wider for us on [sic] the Democratic Party.’ Otherwise they wouldn’t come seeking us for the Democratic Party. And that was [my] opinion and it is still the same opinion . . . I couldn’t be something other than what I had been born to be. And that was Democratic.<sup>277</sup>

Rangel maintained her loyalty to the Democratic Party throughout her tenure as a politician in Texas. She also credited ethnic associations such as Raza Unida for reminding the Democratic Party of the vital constituency they have in the Mexican American population. While many Mexican American women aligned themselves with the Democratic Party or with ethnic groups such as MAYO and Raza Unida to promote substantive change within their communities, others favored with the Republican Party. As the first female Mexican American woman ever elected to the Texas legislature, Elvira Reyna boldly stated, “I am a Republican because I feel my personal conservative beliefs are more aligned with the Republican Party.”<sup>278</sup>

Other prominent women maintained a certain distance from the Chicano Movement. Judith Zaffirini, a Democratic state senator from Laredo, maintained a very disciplined college life during the 1960s, rarely involving herself in the chaotic political

---

<sup>276</sup> Rangel interview.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Reyna interview.



environment at the University of Texas in Austin. Nevertheless, her parents and grandparents had been involved in politics in Texas, so she was exposed to this type of activity at an early age. Once she and her husband moved back to Laredo in the 1970s, Judith became involved in precinct, county, and state conventions.

Much like Judith Zaffirini, Anita Martínez, a third generation Mexican American, became active in politics later in life. At the age of forty-four, a friend urged Anita to run for the Dallas City Council, a position no Mexican American had ever held. After discussing the matter with her husband, Albert Martínez, heir to the successful El Fenix restaurant chain, Anita accepted the offer. Sponsored by the influential Citizens Charter Association, Anita ran for a position on the city council against twenty-eight other candidates and won without a run-off, receiving 52% of the vote. From 1969 to 1973, Anita initiated change in West Dallas as the highest-ranking Mexican American official, promoting a variety of programs, including bilingual education for the city's Latino residents.<sup>279</sup> In 1970, Richard Menchaca, chairman of the Mexican-American Coalition, an umbrella organization for fifteen Mexican American groups, stated of Anita, "She's been a great asset for us, because she opens the doors that never before have opened."<sup>280</sup> He concluded that Mexican Americans, at the time, were represented on five city boards due to Martínez' efforts, adding, "and thanks to her the Mexican-American community has taken an interest in city affairs."<sup>281</sup> Furthermore,

---

<sup>279</sup> Anita Martínez, interviewed by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez, October 26, 1998, Dallas, Texas, Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas, (hereafter cited as Anita Martínez interview).

<sup>280</sup> Roy Hamric, "Mexican-Americans Construct Coalition," *The Dallas Morning News*, November 22, 1970.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

park and recreation equipment and programs broadened dramatically in Mexican American neighborhoods, a Mexican American was named Assistant Director of Human Relations Commission, and paved streets and sidewalks were expedited in Mexican American neighborhoods.<sup>282</sup>

For all of her efforts to improve the lives of Mexican Americans, many criticized Anita as phony, pejoratively calling her the “Mexican Shirley Temple.”<sup>283</sup> Anita Martínez became a target as a result of what other Mexican Americans considered her weak and ineffective politics. Certainly, photo opportunities, such as the one with President Nixon signing her sombrero in 1969, hindered her ability to relate to the more militant segment of Mexican Americans seeking to alter the socioeconomic imbalance.<sup>284</sup> Claiming she spent more time dedicating water fountains or attending flower shows than addressing pertinent issues such as police brutality, she became known as “the coconut,” brown on the outside, but white on the inside.<sup>285</sup> Nevertheless, she confronted those who directly challenged her motives. Never one to back down from a challenge, Anita recalled a heckler at one of her town council meetings in which a young man named Pete Martínez claimed, “Oh, you've come over here out of your ivory tower. You come and give your little speech, and then, you head back, and then, we never hear from you again.” Anita’s response, however, disarmed the gentleman. She called out to him, expressing her appreciation stating, “You know, I really think that you would make a very effective leader for your community because you had the

---

<sup>282</sup> “Dallas City Council Woman: Biographical Sketch,” *La Luz*, August 1972.

<sup>283</sup> “Mexican Shirley Temple Turns Off Chicanos,” *Chicano*, Dallas, Texas, June 17-24, 1971.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

courage to speak up. And I said, but it's got to be constructive. And I will work for you, with you, as long as you're constructive and we can get things done.”<sup>286</sup>

The activism of Mexican American women did not revolve strictly around activities within the various universities or direct electoral participation. Women from less privileged backgrounds, especially those who worked in agricultural and industrial fields, significantly affected the civil rights movement during the 1960s and 1970s. Alicia Chacón of El Paso, the first woman elected county judge of a major urban county in 1990, recounted that the Chicano Movement would not have been possible without the support of labor, which included the participation of women.<sup>287</sup> Regretfully, the pro-business atmosphere in Texas would prove to be just as stubborn as those pressing for change. Although not as comprehensive as in California, limited unionization had taken place in Texas during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>288</sup> Notorious for being a state with strict right to work laws established in 1947, Texas remained known among business types for being a prime location for various industries.<sup>289</sup>

By the mid-1960s, organizing farm workers in Texas remained a goal of many pro-labor organizations, including the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. In July, 1966, eleven people, including two priests and three women, began a 400-mile march from Rio Grande City to the state capital of Austin in support of a \$1.25

---

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Anita Martínez interview.

<sup>287</sup> Chacón interview.

<sup>288</sup> Rosales, *Chicano!*, 120.

<sup>289</sup> Texas Farm Workers Support Committee, *The Struggle of the Texas Farm Workers' Union*, (Chicago: Vanguard Books, 1977).

minimum wage.<sup>290</sup> The march remained a response to a month-long strike of melon pickers in South Texas, and while the strike had failed, the chief organizer, Eugene Nelson, promised to continue the fight for the increased minimum wage.<sup>291</sup> Participation in the march grew from city to city and, by the time the group reached Sullivan City, Texas, over 100 people had joined the original group.<sup>292</sup> Women and their children mingled with men in this fight for economic justice. Natalie Méndez, a 23-year old farm worker, stated, “We have been working all our lives in the fields for 50 to 85 cents an hour.” She added, “It is hot but we will not drop out.”<sup>293</sup>

By the time the group reached Austin on Labor Day, the throng of supporters had swollen to over 10,000 people.<sup>294</sup> Although a cowardly Governor Connally refused to meet with the group on Labor Day or to appoint a special session to discuss the issue of the wage increase, the fact that the Mexican American community united over such an important issue remained a coup for organizers.<sup>295</sup> The two-month long march reinforced the idea of social justice on a scale unseen before among the state’s two million Mexican American inhabitants, 300,000 of whom were registered to vote for the first time in 1966.<sup>296</sup> Unfortunately, by 1978, the Texas Farmworkers Union, formally created in August of 1975, still did not maintain collective bargaining rights for their

---

<sup>290</sup> “Clergy Led Farm Workers On March To State Capitol,” *Alice Echo*, July 11, 1966.

<sup>291</sup> James Baumgerner, “Valley Marchers Find Protest a ‘Gasser,’” *Del Rio Herald*, July 5, 1966.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> Garth Jones, “Texas Politics Sure To Feel Effects of Valley March,” *San Antonio Express News*, September 11, 1966.

<sup>295</sup> “Connally Meets Marchers; Says ‘No Special Session,’” *Valley Morning Star*, September 1, 1966.

<sup>296</sup> Martin Waldron, “Farm Workers in Texas End Two-Month March,” *The New York Times*, September 5, 1966.

workers.<sup>297</sup> Roy Fernández, a case worker with the union, explained that it took César Chávez ten years to win such rights for farm workers in California. He claimed, “The obstacles in Texas are even larger.”<sup>298</sup>

The fact that workers faced a seemingly insurmountable battle against the titans of industry did not dissuade women from launching their various campaigns throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Mexican American women continued to participate in pro-labor activity during this era of civil rights advocacy, often working alongside men in a united effort. On November 29, 1968, 250 Heulgistas, or strikers, officially began their campaign against Economy Furniture in Austin, Texas. Of the 250 strikers, 40% were Mexican American women. In a strike newsletter from January of 1970, an unnamed female striker explains the shared work of both the men and women who participated in the strike. She explained the duties of picketing, leafleting, marching, and making signs or posters “are equally shared—men and women picket together in the rain and ice, in freezing and scorching temperatures in front of the factory.”<sup>299</sup> Yet, she did not address the fact that women were not given equal recognition. Although men and women shared common tasks, they were not often given the credit they deserved as equal partners in the fight for civil rights.

A similar level of leadership among women of Mexican ancestry would be seen years later in the Farah strike of 1972. This monumental strike in El Paso remains one of the most important strikes for Mexican American women during the civil rights

---

<sup>297</sup> “Life in Texas Hard to Migrant Worker,” *The New York Times*, December 17, 1978.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

movement in Texas, also garnering significant national attention. On May 10, 1972, 4,000 workers, almost all of whom were Mexican American, went on strike against Farah Manufacturing Company.<sup>300</sup> Approximately 85% of the strikers were women.<sup>301</sup> The grievances of the workers primarily revolved around low pay, unreasonable production schedules, and working conditions.<sup>302</sup> The anti-union sentiment of management remained riddled with racism, and the strike cast divisions throughout the Mexican American community.<sup>303</sup> Yet, women soldiered on and remained focused on their cause. This concentration often affected the domestic stability of some households, as the strike certainly altered women's attitudes towards patriarchal men. One woman stated,

I was so involved that I was forgetting everything. My husband started getting very angry at me, and I was giving him a hard time. You know, at the time I didn't realize that I was hurting my kids and my husband. At the time I just felt that this was something I had to do, and if my husband liked it or didn't like it he was going to have to accept it.<sup>304</sup>

One teenager proclaimed, "Mom used to be a slave. But since the strike she thinks for herself. It's a lot better."<sup>305</sup> Their activism, in many cases, greatly increased their confidence. While the workers faced myriad obstacles, they had a lot of support from church leaders as well as other national figures. Senator Gaylord Nelson, then a

---

<sup>299</sup> "Las Chicanas." *Adelante: Austin Chicano Huelga*. January 1970. Pancho Medrano Papers. University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections.

<sup>300</sup> Emily Honig, "Women at Farah Revisited: Political Mobilization and Its Aftermath among Chicana Workers in El Paso, Texas, 1972 – 1992," *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996): 425.

<sup>301</sup> Laurie Coyle, Gail Hershatler, and Emily Honig, *Women at Farah: An Unfinished Story* (El Paso: Reforma, 1979), 2.

<sup>302</sup> Philip Shabecoff, "Farah Strike Has Become War of Attrition," *The New York Times*, June 16, 1973.

<sup>303</sup> Coyle, Hershatler, and Honig, *Women at Farah*, 30.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-42.

Democratic Senator from Wisconsin, announced in July of 1972 a “citizens committee for justice” to support the workers in their strike.<sup>306</sup> Support sprang up well outside of Texas when, as seen in September, 1973, roughly 300 delegates from the Industrial Union Department took part in a boycott at Davidson’s Department Store in Atlanta protesting the continuing sale of Farah slacks.<sup>307</sup>

After two years of unbending persistence, the Farah plant became unionized. Along with this union contract came an hourly increase of 55 cents over the next three years, a medical insurance plan, job security and seniority rights, and a grievance procedure.<sup>308</sup> Although the company continued to make life difficult for the workers in addition to cutting back some of the amenities gained through the strike, the legacy of the strike retained its strength.<sup>309</sup> As Lena Leyva simply stated, “Mostly the dignity of the people is at issue here. We want respect.”<sup>310</sup> These women certainly earned the respect of their peers, and even stunned union representatives in the process. At the beginning of the strike, representatives for Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America claimed they were not ready for a strike at Farah for another two or three years. After two years of striking, a union representative stated, “Historically, the Mexican-

---

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>306</sup> “Supporting Strikes,” *The Dallas Morning News*, July 28, 1972.

<sup>307</sup> Marie Mulvenna, “Farah Pants Company Ripped By Atlanta Demonstrators,” *The Georgia Bulletin*, September 13, 1973, online edition, <http://www.georgiabulletin.org/local/1973/09/13/c/>.

<sup>308</sup> Coyle, Hershatter, and Honig, *Women at Farah*, 51.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>310</sup> “Organizing Fight Meant Hardships for Workers,” *The Dallas Morning News*, March 3, 1974.

American community hasn't been cohesive enough to sustain this kind of strike. But they have made believers out of all of us by now.”<sup>311</sup>

The Raymondville, Texas Onion Strike of 1979 remained another example of women valiantly promoting change in their communities. A documentary film titled *Valley of Tears* features footage of the strike as well as discussions with the young woman who instigated the rebellion against the powerful interests of the city. As the documentary explains, discord between the ranchers and onion pickers centered around the need for a worthy minimum wage. By late 1979, the workers in the fields received a mere 25 cents per onion sack.<sup>312</sup> Periodically flashing back to her time during the strike, the film interviews former strike leader Juanita Valdez about her role in the direct action as well as the consequences of her choices. Although local police arrested her for going directly to the onion fields to persuade others to strike, she looks back with the thought that “this is where we all became Americans.”<sup>313</sup> Unfortunately, the ranchers broke the strike with scabs who eagerly welcomed the opportunity to work. In retrospect, Valdez claimed, “nothing was lost.” The spirit and organization of the Mexican American community, especially women and children who made the ordeal bearable, directly challenged the wealthy business interests, diminishing their apparent helplessness.

Politically active women of Mexican descent often attribute their success to the powerful presence of the Mexican American civil rights movement or Chicana and Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. For the most part, this period did much to

---

<sup>311</sup> Shabecoff, “Farah Strike Has Become War of Attrition.”

<sup>312</sup> *Valley of Tears*. Prod. and dir. Hart Perry. 77 min. Perry Films. 2005. DVD.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.



promote a deeper awareness and confidence among women. In addition to greater political participation, the movement granted women a keen sense of political consciousness that propelled many of them into action, whether their efforts centered on electoral politics or union activity. The progress many Mexican American women made in the mid-twentieth century often paved the way for future generations. Viviana Cavada claimed the political activity of the 1960s and 1970s highlighted characteristics of her personality that she did not previously understand. She elaborated on the personal effects of the Chicana and Chicano movement, stating, “I’m so glad it happened. I’m so glad that I had the foresight to join into it because I was a very mousey person. I had no, absolutely no self esteem.”<sup>314</sup>

For many women, the civil rights movement gave them a sense of purpose and reinforced introverted types who were often bashful of or lacked experience with direct political confrontation. The civil rights movement in Texas has a similar impact on Margaret Gómez. Having graduated from Travis High School in 1962, Margaret progressively became an active member of the political scene in the capital city. After attending meetings of the local city council, the commissioner’s court, and the school board, Margaret made the decision to further involve herself in her community. She explained,

My participation was, you know, increased [*sic*]. I graduated from answering the phone and licking the envelopes to organizing, to getting out the vote, to registering voters, to walking this whole precinct . . . And then also being in touch with people at the university, Anglo students who then grew up. They stayed here in jobs with state agencies. And . . . our coalition became a little bit larger. So . . . I spent a lot of time, just an

---

<sup>314</sup> Cavada interview.

awful lot of time . . . at various meetings and being involved in various issues . . . some that were particular to our community and in East Austin, some that were city wide like . . . the nuclear power plant issue, and some that were county wide. Redistricting and then the . . . legislative races. I mean just the whole thing almost. So . . . I think I spent from 1969 till 1980 doing those kinds of activities.<sup>315</sup>

The more Margaret learned about the various political processes, the more comfortable she felt taking on more responsibilities. In 1981, when a position for a constable in Precinct Four opened, Margaret decided to run, becoming the first woman to ever hold such a position in Texas. Utilizing the many skills she procured working within local government, Margaret excelled at her work, serving in this particular position for fourteen years.<sup>316</sup>

Severita Lara, one of the student leaders of the Crystal City school walkout in 1969 claims the Chicana and Chicano movement, especially Raza Unida, did much to promote the interests of women. She described,

We participated in decision making. When Ciudadanos Unidos (United Citizens), after the change right, that women were not allowed to vote and . . . the change that happened, women had an equal say. Also allowed, the men were supportive of women running for offices and we were seen as equals. I didn't grow up in that era where women were not supposed to go to school and you were supposed to get married. So, I have always believed that women could do anything . . . they wanted to and that even though there is lots of obstacles, we . . . have to be objective. But yes, La Raza Unida opened up our . . . mind to, there was a possibility. So, that was a door that was opened for us women. Yes, we can go to school. We are an equal . . . we can go out there. We can speak out.<sup>317</sup>

Of her political activity in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Austin, María Martínez

---

<sup>315</sup> Gómez interview.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Lara interview.

recalled the presence of Mexican American women, working with men throughout various political initiatives. She explained,

I think the . . . leadership role, when my . . . sense of it is that in any organization, especially the here in . . . Austin, that . . . there was always women involved in all aspects of the work. Most of the women were students and so therefore we depended on . . . that . . . skill for them to help us organize. We organized the party. I mean, it was basically the . . . women. It was like . . . there was a compliment of what we could do and what, you know, the guys could do. But I think it was the women in . . . Austin that pretty well set up the polls, set up the party structure, initiated some of the...started the first paperwork trying to get signatures so that we could have the . . . party on . . . the ballot and . . . began that process. So the women . . . and the men did all the work together. I mean, we were constantly trying to figure it out together at that time.<sup>318</sup>

Severita and María painted a comparatively glowing picture of the roles of women within the Chicana and Chicano movement, revealing the fact that not all women felt the demeaning influence of machismo during this time. Some clearly felt they were an integral part of the entire process. Ofelia Santos credited this movement with granting women a variety of leadership responsibilities as well as raising awareness of issues pivotal to Mexican Americans in particular, claiming, “women were allowed to take leadership roles in that organization and actually run for office. And, they became elected officials for the first time in their hometowns.”<sup>319</sup> The incidence of women working with men during the civil rights movement proves that its success would have been significantly marginalized had women not chosen to speak up for their communities and, by extension, themselves.

---

<sup>318</sup> María Elena Martínez interview.

<sup>319</sup> Santos interview.

Undoubtedly, the political activity of Mexican American women during the 1960s and 1970s paved the way for their future progeny, inspiring them with their unmasked determination and courage. By calling for change within and outside of their communities, these women shook up a social system that had consistently repressed them for decades. Although many women remained united in terms of their goals, their experiences and philosophies could not have been more diverse. Education levels, income levels, and even support from their families and husbands differed from one woman to the next, which is precisely why their political activity cannot be told from one perspective. Even the perception of chauvinism varied among these women, with some citing the presence of sexism and others arguing that men and women worked together without incident. Party affiliation, the role of nationalism, chauvinism, and the varying degrees and nature of political focus and activity comprise only a few of the diverse characteristics of these dynamic women. Each came to participate in the civil rights movement in her own way, leaving her a distinguished place in Texas political history.

## CHAPTER 6

### LEGACY AND CONSEQUENCES

The predicament of Mexican American women during the late twentieth century proved to be a proverbial double-edged sword. In retrospect, it appears they had few choices. They could choose to remain passive about the triple oppression that plagued their lives or challenge the decades-long status quo, risking the alienation of those inside and outside of their respective communities. The choices as well as the consequences of their activism, whether they fell within the realm of feminism or another type of political activity, varied from woman to woman. Some women had overwhelmingly positive experiences during and after the civil rights movement, eventually procuring prestigious jobs as a result of their activism of the 1960s and 1970s. Others unfortunately experienced negative reactions as a result of their involvement. Far from homogeneous, the diversity of their experiences often directly reflected their respective abilities to cope with the pressures of an inequitable society.

Despite the consequences, their legacy remains an important aspect of Texas political history. Herlinda García emphasized the positive aspects of her engagement with the Mexican American civil rights movement in Texas. She credited the movement with eradicating fear among women formerly too frightened to fight for their rights:

“I am not white, Anglo Saxon, woman; that I am not from a family of professional parents; that I was poor, and deprived. That I am a woman. It is because of these things

that I am going to make a difference, that I am going to make it work. But the only way that you are going to make it work is to eradicate fear.”<sup>320</sup> As a result of this awakened consciousness, many Mexican American women went on to achieve impressive gains throughout the state of Texas. María Berriozabal praised women of the movement for her success. In 1981, she ran for a position on San Antonio’s city council. Though she commended her campaign team for assisting with this achievement, she acknowledged that her success evolved as a result of previous battles, often fought by other Mexican American women. She stated,

I was proud to be elected as the first Mexican American woman. The first Latina ever elected to a local council in the country, ever . . . But the reason that I was able to do it and the reason that Henry was able to do it was because by 1981, when we won, and late ’80 when we ran, there had been the history of the Chicano movement in the ’60s and a lot of us got in because we were not the ones that were identified. We were not the names, it was not Rosie Castro. Rosie Castro ran in 1971 and she couldn’t win. And then I ran in ’81 but I would never have done it if she hadn’t done it. And if all those people hadn’t been rabble rousing outside. It is like they are the ones that do the dirty work and get themselves a reputation and, and all that negative stuff and then it is others who get in, you know. And I have always been very conscious of that.<sup>321</sup>

Since 1986, Judith Zaffirini has been a Texas State Senator, which is quite an accomplishment considering that ten years later, only thirty-one women held seats in this section of the Legislature.<sup>322</sup> As a result of her involvement in West Dallas as a member of the city council, the city of Dallas established the Anita Martínez Recreation Center as a tribute to her efforts on behalf of the Dallas Mexican American

---

<sup>320</sup> Herlinda García interview.

<sup>321</sup> Berriozabal interview.

<sup>322</sup> Zaffirini interview.

population.<sup>323</sup> Born in 1960 just prior to the emergence of the civil rights movement, Diana Orozco claims the activist women of this time inspired her to become a lawyer, a dream she fulfilled upon graduating from Southern Methodist University Law School in 1985. In 1994, she became the first Mexican American woman elected justice of the peace in Dallas County.<sup>324</sup>

While the Mexican American civil rights movement certainly left its positive legacy of empowerment for many women and future generations, negative consequences of activism inevitably surfaced. As a teacher in the Eagle Pass Independent School District during the time of the walkout, Viviana Cavada assisted in the circulation of a petition supporting the teachers involved. An estimated twenty-three teachers from her district signed the petition, including Viviana. Her participation in this project ensured trouble with her superiors at the school where she taught. She claimed the superintendent, a white male, called her into his office, asking, “What do you people want anyway?”<sup>325</sup> Viviana realized her battle in favor of freedom of speech had been lost, and the school decided not to renew her contract for the following year. After applying to many districts throughout South Texas, one advisor finally admitted, “Look, I really like you. I really would like to hire you. But don’t even try to apply to any school district in Texas. You will not get hired.”<sup>326</sup> Professional positions were not the only ones lost among many apparent instances of retaliation during the civil rights movement. On April 5, 1971, Mr. Dommert, one of the owners of Richie’s Lucky

---

<sup>323</sup> Anita Martínez interview.

<sup>324</sup> Orozco interview.

<sup>325</sup> Cavada interview.

Seven Convenient Store in Houston, fired Natividad Rodríguez, a checker who had maintained employment with the company for eight years.<sup>327</sup> Tivie believed she had been fired for running for precinct judge in 1969, although the company maintained they fired her because she could not get along with other checkers.<sup>328</sup>

The consequences of sociopolitical activity manifested themselves in other ways and at different times in their lives. Marrying Francisco Villarreal in April of 1974, María Jiménez felt she had found the most “progressive Mexican I had known in terms of women’s rights.”<sup>329</sup> She explains he sought a politically conscious partner but, over the years, he changed his mind. Her activism sadly led to her divorce in October of 1985. She never remarried, claiming, “Nobody will tolerate me.”<sup>330</sup> Clearly, the costs of political activity exceeded the bounds of employment, personally destabilizing relationships as well. Often, the political past of many members of the Mexican American civil rights movement, especially those directly associated with Chicana and Chicano organizations, unexpectedly affected them in the future. As a member of the more radical MAYO, Rosie Castro encountered the repercussions of her political activity early on. Even as an active member of the Chicana and Chicano movement during the late 1960s, she recalls receiving threats in the form of phone calls and letters, in addition to enduring verbal insults that vehemently proclaimed her a “ball-busting bitch.”<sup>331</sup> Applying for jobs often turned into a direct analysis of her past political

---

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Maggie Landron, “Battle for Tivie at Richeys,” *Papel Chicano* 1, no. 15 (April 1971): 6.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Jiménez interview.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Rosie Castro, *Tejano Voices*, UTA.



background, ending with the unfortunate conclusion that she was too “militant” or “radical.”<sup>332</sup> Giving birth to twin boys in 1974 and raising them as a single mother, Rosie explains that she postponed the discussion of certain painful parts of her past with her sons until they were in high school. When referring to the Chicana and Chicano movement, she admitted, “I don’t think you could recreate the same thing now,” yet, Rosie continued to work with local campaigns, fomenting the same type of change she advocated in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>333</sup>

Of the Mexican American civil rights movement, Rosie Castro claimed, “While some things changed, many things stayed the same.”<sup>334</sup> Debbie Frieze Torres, a radical activist turned conservative Republican from El Paso, also agrees that many of the changes she advocated in the 1970s have not yet evolved into a reality for many of the Mexican American population.<sup>335</sup> While the fruits of their activism may not have always ripened to their desirable degree, the involvement of Mexican American women in the civil rights movement proved to be just as important as that of men. In addition to maintaining numerous domestic responsibilities and perhaps sustaining employment outside of the home, women contributed to the movement in a variety of valuable ways. One scholar aptly observed, “Chicano history without the Chicana would be ‘false’ and ‘truncated.’”<sup>336</sup> Although some of these women ultimately failed to achieve their desired goals, the era comprising the Mexican American civil rights or Chicano

---

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Joe Oliver, “Chicano Activists Look Back,” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 20, 1998.

<sup>336</sup> García, “The Chicana in American History,” 316.

movement was one of evolution for them. For generations, racism, sexism, and poverty often prevented women of Mexican ancestry in Texas from participating in the political sphere, but their actions changed this forever. Emanating from their participation remained a message of pride, hope, and determination for the future.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Archival Sources

The following interviews were conducted by Dr. José A. Gutiérrez. They are held in the Tejano Voices Collection, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections Division, Arlington, Texas in video, digitized, and transcription format:

Berriozabal, María, July 16, 1996, San Antonio, Texas.

Camarillo, Lydia, April 13, 1996, San Antonio, Texas.

Campos, Isabel, January 16, 1998, New Braunfels, Texas.

Castro, Rosie, July 1, 1996, San Antonio, Texas.

Cavada, Viviana, June 29, 1998, Crystal City, Texas.

Chacón, Alicia, June 22, 1996, El Paso, Texas.

Chávez, Norma, June 21, 1996, El Paso, Texas.

DeLeón, Gloria, February 2, 1998, Austin, Texas.

García, Elsa, April 26, 1996, Arlington, Texas.

García, Herlinda, June 26, 1996, Houston, Texas.

García, Marina, February 28, 1998, Lubbock, Texas.

García, Sylvia, July 22, 1999, Houston, Texas.

Gómez, Margaret, June 13, 1998, Austin, Texas.

Jiménez, María, June 14, 1998, Houston, Texas.

Lara, Severita, July 22, 1998, Crystal City, Texas.

Martínez, María Elena, December 3, 1998, Del Rio, Texas.

Martínez, Anita, October 26, 1998, Dallas, Texas.

Medina, Socorro, February 26, 1998, Amarillo, Texas.

Mireles, Irma, June 6, 1998, San Antonio, Texas.

Orozco, Diana, February 23, 1998, Dallas, Texas.

Ramírez, Norma, July 25, 1996, Zapata County, Texas.

Rangel, Irma, April 10, 1996, Kingsville, Texas.

Reyna, Elvira, February 12, 1998, Mesquite, Texas.

Rodríguez-Mendoza, Amalia, February 8, 1998, Travis County, Texas.

Rosales, Rosa, February 8, 1998, San Antonio, Texas.

Santos, Ofelia, June 17, 1998, Edinburg, Texas.

Tagle, Hilda, June 14, 1998, Corpus Christi, Texas.

Yáñez, Linda, January 14, 1998, Edinburg, Texas.

Zaffirini, Judith, June 10, 1996, Laredo, Texas.

Zúñiga, Elizabeth, October 25, 1997, Ballinger, Texas.

### **Periodicals**

Acosta, Belinda. "Moraga taps into the Chicana lifeline." *Austin American-Statesman*. October 24, 1992.

Baumgerner, James. "Valley Marchers Find Protest a 'Gasser.'" *Del Rio Herald*. July 5, 1966.

Beene, Richard. "Chicanos Staging Revolution." *The Dallas Morning News*. August 17, 1969.

Bennetts, Leslie. "Feminists Cool to NOW Stand Against Carter." *The New York Times*. December 21, 1979.

Brinkerhoff, Mary. "Dallas Women Attending Chicana Conference." *The Dallas Morning News*. May 29, 1971.

- Castro, Tony. "'Chicano' Proves Term of Controversy." *The Dallas Morning News*. February 26, 1973.
- Castro, Tony. "La Raza: Might It Tip the Scales?" *The Dallas Morning News*. March 12, 1972.
- Chávez, Jennie. "Women of the Mexican American Movement." *Mademoiselle*. April 1972.
- "Clergy Led Farm Workers On March To State Capitol." *Alice Echo*. July 11, 1966.
- "Connally Meets Machers; Says 'No Special Session.'" *Valley Morning Star*. September 1, 1966.
- "Dallas City Council Woman: Biographical Sketch." *La Luz*. August 1972.
- "Equal Opportunity Is 'A Lie,' Chicanas Told." *The Houston Chronicle*. May 30, 1971.
- "Farm Strike Could Turn Into Social Movement." *Big Springs Herald*. July 17, 1966.
- Ficklen, Mary. "Women must work to liberate themselves." *The Dallas Morning News*. May 25, 1973.
- Frye, Paul. "Boycott Churches, Says Raza Unida." *Austin-American Statesman*. July 12, 1970.
- Hamric, Roy. "Mexican-Americans Construct Coalition." *The Dallas Morning News*. November 22, 1970.
- Jones, Garth. "Texas Politics Sure To Feel Effects of Valley March." *San Antonio Express News*. September 11, 1966.
- Landron, Maggie. "Battle for Tivie at Richeys." *Papel Chicano* 1, no. 15 (April 1971): 1-16.
- "Las Chicanas." *Adelante: Austin Chicano Huelga*. January 1970. Pancho Medrano Papers. University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections.
- "Life in Texas Hard to Migrant Worker." *The New York Times*. December 17, 1978.
- Lund, Caroline. "I could never explain this to Mrs. Gomez." *Chicano*. Dallas, Texas. June 17-24, 1971.

“Mexican Shirley Temple Turns Off Chicanos.” *Chicano*. Dallas, Texas. June 17-24, 1971.

“Migrant Labor Camps Likened To ‘Tiger Cages’ by Senator.” *San Antonio Express*. July 11, 1970.

Mulvenna, Marie. “Farah Pants Company Ripped By Atlanta Demonstrators.” *The Georgia Bulletin*, September 13, 1973, online edition, <http://www.georgiabulletin.org/local/1973/09/13/c/>.

Oliver, Joe. “Chicano Activists Look Back.” *The Dallas Morning News*. September 20, 1998.

“Organizing Fight Meant Hardships for Workers.” *The Dallas Morning News*. March 3, 1974.

“Seven Women Pregnant In Experiment on Pill.” *The Dallas Morning News*. July 10, 1971.

Shabecoff, Philip. “Farah Strike Has Become War of Attrition.” *The New York Times*. June 16, 1973.

Sherrill, Bob. “Migrant Misery.” *The Austin Statesman*. September 1, 1960.

Silva, Elda. “Adelitas: Women who played key role in Mexican Revolution are getting another look.” *San Antonio Express-News*. September 15, 2002.

“Supporting Strikes.” *The Dallas Morning News*. July 28, 1972.

Waldron, Martin. “Farm Workers in Texas End Two-Month March.” *The New York Times*. September 5, 1966.

“Women’s Liberation Revisited.” *Time*. March 20, 1972.

Vidal, Mirta. “New Voice of La Raza: Chicanas Speak Out.” *International Socialist Review*. October 1971.

### **Books, Articles, and Essays**

Acosta, Teresa Palomo and Ruthe Winegarten. “*Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History*.” Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.

- Alvarez, Rodolfo. "The Psycho-Historical and Socioeconomic Development of the Chicano Community in the United States." *Social Science Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (1973): 920-942.
- Amott, Teresa and Julie Matthaei. *Race, Gender, and Work: A multi-Cultural Economic History of Women in the United States*. Boston: South End Press, 1996.
- Aragón de Valdez, Theresa. "Organizing as a Political Tool for the Chicana." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 5, no. 2 (1980): 7-13.
- Arrizón, Alicia. "'Soldaderas' and the Staging of the Mexican Revolution." *TDR* 42, no. 1 (1998): 90-112.
- Barajas, Heidi Lasley, and Jennifer L. Pierce. "The Significance of Race and Gender in School Success among Latinas and Latinos in College." *Gender and Society* 15, no. 6 (2001): 859-878.
- Barton, Paul. *Hispanic Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists in Texas*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.
- Basham, Richard. "Machismo." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 1, no. 2 (1976): 126-143.
- Blackwelder, Julia Kirk. *Women of the Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio, 1929-1939*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984.
- Blea, Irene I. *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992.
- Calderón, José. "'Hispanic' and 'Latino': The Viability of Categories for Panethnic Unity." *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 4 (1992): 37-44.
- Candelaria, Cordelia. "La Malinche, Feminist Prototype." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 5, no. 2 (1980): 1-6.
- Chapa, Evey. "Mujeres Por La Raza Unida." *Caracol* 1, no. 2 (1974): 3-5.
- Cota-Cárdenas, Margarita. "The Chicana in the City as Seen in Her Literature." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 6, no. ½, MWSA: Selected Conference Proceedings, 1980 (1981): 13-18.
- Coyle, Laurie, Gail Hershatter, and Emily Honig. *Women at Farah: An Unfinished Story*. El Paso: Reforma, 1979.

- De León, Arnoldo. *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821 – 1900*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1983.
- Deutsch, Sarah. "Gender, Labor History, and Chicano/a Ethnic Identity." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 14, no. 2 (1994): 1-22.
- Dolan, Jay, and Gilberto Hinojosa, eds. *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.
- Fehrenbach, T. R. *Fire & Blood: A History of Mexico*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1995.
- Flores, Francisca. "Conference of Mexican Women in Houston – Un Remolino." *Regeneración*, 1, no. 10 (1971): 1-5.
- García, Alma, ed., *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- García, Ignacio M. *Chicanismo: The Forging of A Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997.
- García, Mario T. "The Chicana in American History: The Mexican Women of El Paso, 1880-1920: A Case Study." *The Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (1980): 315-337.
- Gómez, Laura E. "The Birth of the "Hispanic" Generation: Attitudes of Mexican-American Political Elites toward the Hispanic Label." *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 4 (1992): 45-58.
- Gonzales, Sylvia. "Toward a Feminist Pedagogy for Chicana Self-Actualization." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 5, no. 2 (1980): 48-51.
- Griswold del Castillo, Richard. "Tejanos and California Chicanos: Regional Variations in Mexican American History." *Mexican Studies* 1, no. 1 (1985): 134-139.
- Guerrero, Andrés G. *A Chicano Theology*. New York: Orbis Books, 1987.
- Gutiérrez, José A. *The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.
- Honig, Emily. "Women at Farah Revisited: Political Mobilization and Its Aftermath among Chicana Workers in El Paso, Texas, 1972 – 1992." *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996): 425-452.



- Hunter, Margaret. "'If You're Light You're Alright': Light Skin as Social Capital for Women of Color." *Gender and Society* 16, no. 2 (2002): 175-193.
- Kaminsky, Amy. "Gender, Race, and Raza." *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 1 (1994): 7-31.
- Kelly, Janis. "Texas Lesbians." *Off Our Backs: A Women's Newsjournal*. October 31, 1975, 8.
- MacDonald, Victoria-María. "Hispanic, Latino, Chicano, or 'Other'? : Deconstructing the Relationship between Historians and Hispanic-American Educational History." *History of Education Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2001): 365-413.
- Macías, Anna. *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Women and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920." *The Americas* 37, no. 1 (1980): 53-82.
- Manning, Christel J. "Women in a Divided Church: Liberal and Conservative Catholic Women Negotiate Changing Gender Roles." *Sociology of Religion* 58, no. 4 (1997): 375-390.
- Matovina, Timothy. *Tejano Religion and Ethnicity: San Antonio, 1821-1860*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.
- Matovina, Timothy and Gerald Poyo, eds. *¡Presente! US Latino Catholics From Colonial Origins to the Present*. New York: Orbis Books, 2000.
- Morrow, Colette. "Queering Chicano/a Narratives: Lesbian as Healer, Saint and Warrior in Ana Castillo's 'So Far from God.'" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 30, no. ½ (1997): 63-80.
- National Association for Chicano Studies. *Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.
- Navarro, Armando. *La Raza Unida Party: A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two-party Dictatorship*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.
- NietoGomez, Anna. "La Femenista." *Encuentro Femenil* 1, no. 2 (1974): 34-47.

- NietoGomez, Anna, and Elma Barrera. "Chicana Encounter." *Regeneración* 2, no. 4 (1975): 49-51.
- Nostrand, Richard. "'Mexican American' and 'Chicano': Emerging Terms for a People Coming of Age." *The Pacific Historical Review* 42, no. 3 (1973): 389-406.
- Olivas, Michael A., ed. *'Colored Men' and 'Hombres Aqui': Hernandez v. Texas and the Emergence of Mexican-American Lawyering*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 2006.
- Poniatowska, Elena. "Mexicanas and Chicanas." *MELUS* 21, no. 3 (Autumn, 1996): 35-51.
- Potter, Jacklyn. "If I had all the money I wanted, I'd get the electricity turned on, buy some food...": migrant women farmworkers." *Off Our Backs: A Women's Newsjournal* 10, no. 10 (1980): 10.
- Pycior, Julie Leininger. "From Hope to Frustration: Mexican Americans and Lyndon Johnson in 1967." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1993): 469-494.
- Richmond, Douglas W. *The Mexican Nation: Historical Continuity and Modern Change*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002.
- Rodríguez, Jeanette. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
- Rodríguez, Joseph A., and Vicki Ruiz. "At Loose Ends: Twentieth-Century Latinos in Current United States History Textbooks." *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 4 (2000): 1689-1699.
- Rodríguez, Joseph A. "Becoming Latinos: Mexican Americans, Chicanos, and the Spanish Myth in the Urban Southwest." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1998): 165-185.
- Rosales, F. Arturo. *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1996.
- Ruiz, Vicki. *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in the Twentieth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Ruiz, Vicki L. "Morena/o, blanca/o y café con leche: Racial Constructions in Chicana/o Historiography." *Mexican Studies* 20, no. 2 (2004): 343.

- Ruiz, Vicki, ed. *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Salas, Elizabeth. *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.
- Sánchez, Marta. "La Malinche at the Intersection: Race and Gender in Down These Mean Streets." *PMLA* 113, no. 1 (1998): 117-128.
- Segura, Denise A. "Chicana and Mexican Immigrant Women at Work: The Impact of Class, Race, and Gender on Occupational Mobility." *Gender and Society* 3, no. 1 (1989): 37-52.
- Simmen, Edward and Richard F. Bauerle. "Chicano: Origin and Meaning." *American Speech* 44, no. 3 (1969): 225-230.
- Simons, Margaret. "Racism and Feminism: A Schism in the Sisterhood." *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 2 (1979): 384-401.
- Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1993.
- Texas Farm Workers Support Committee. *The Struggle of the Texas Farm Workers' Union*. Chicago: Vanguard Books, 1977.
- Truillo, Carla, ed. *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*. Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 1991.
- Vigil, Ernesto B. *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government's War on Dissent*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.
- Wynne, Bridget. "Chicanas speak: about feminism & the women's liberation movement." *Off Our Backs: A Women's Newsjournal* 9, no. 10 (1979): 10.
- Zavella, Patricia. "Abnormal Intimacy: The Varying Work Networks of Chicana Cannery Workers." *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 3 (1985): 541-557.

### **Online Reference Works**

- Acosta, Teresa Palomo. "Mexican American Youth Organization." Handbook of Texas Online. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/MM/wem1.html> (accessed November 2, 2006).

---

. "Raza Unida Party," Handbook of Texas Online,  
<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/RR/war1.html>  
(accessed November 2, 2006).

Encyclopedia Britannica. "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz." Encyclopedia Britannica.  
[http://www.religion-encyclopedia.com/C/cruz\\_sor\\_juana\\_ines\\_de\\_la.htm](http://www.religion-encyclopedia.com/C/cruz_sor_juana_ines_de_la.htm)  
(accessed April 25, 2007).

Orozco, Cynthia. "League of United Latin American Citizens." Handbook of Texas  
Online. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/LL/wel1.html>  
(accessed November 2, 2006).

## **Film**

*Valley of Tears*. Prod. and dir. Hart Perry. 77 min. Perry Films. 2005. DVD.

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

A native of Virginia, Stephanie Schacherer received her Bachelor's in Political Science from Baylor University in May, 2000. While working full-time as a paralegal for Baron & Budd, P.C., she received a Master of Liberal Arts from Southern Methodist University in December, 2004. For the past two years, she has worked to complete her Master of Arts in history from the University of Texas at Arlington. She currently works as a Contracts Analyst for an IT company in North Texas.