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> "Revolutionary Chicanas want the liberation for our people and all oppressed peoples."

> > -Elizabeth Martinez



Chicana Chi·ca·na:

1. A Mexican-American woman or girl.

feminism fem·i·nism:

- **1.** Belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes.
- 2. The movement organized around this belief."

Chicana Feminism

There is no simple definition for Chicana Feminism. It incorporates a wide variety of ideas and theories. Here are some excerpts that help capture the ideas behind Chicana Feminism:

> "Chicana Feminisms constitute a political stance that confronts and undermines patriarchy as it cross-cuts forms of disempowerment and silence such as racism, homophobia, class inequality, and nationalism."

> "Chicana liberation has meant freedom, emancipation from racism and sexism, plus cultural sovereignty: that the cultural integrity and dignity of a people be recognized and respected as equal to any other"

> "Chicana feminists analyzed their situation as women as the result not just of gender but of racial/ethnic, national, linguistic, and class dynamics."

HISTORY OF CHICANA FEMINISM

The Chicano Movement:

The mid to late sixties were a time for radical organization by minority groups. Following the Civil Right Movement (which peaked from 1955-1965) many separate movements began to emerge. There was the Young Lords Party formed by the Puerto Ricans in Chicago and New York, the Black Panthers formed in the California bay area, and the Chicano Movement started to emerge in many different forms.

The first part of the Chicano Movement began with Cesar Chavez and the creation of **National Farm Workers Association**. This organization later became the **United Farm Workers (UFW)**. He and co-founder Dolores Huerta organized grape strikes, non-violent protests, hunger strikes, and marches against the farmers. Some of the major accomplishments of the UFW include improved working environments (the outlaw of DDT), unemployment benefits, and the Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

The Alianza Federal de Mercedes, founded by Reies Lopez Tijerina, was a group that focused on Chicano history within the United States. It wanted to "restore" ownership to those who lived on the land prior to the Mexican- American war. The motto of this movement was "The Land Is Our Inheritance, Justice Is Our Creed." Alianza, as well as the UFW, focused most of its attention on rural and land-related issues. They had failed to address issues of the barrio.

The Crusade for Justice, founded in 1965 by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, did address urban Chicano communities. The goals of this organization were to establish communities controlled by Chicanos and to embrace their cultural nationalism. It focused on Chicano youth and was mainly comprised of students. They rejected assimilation and embraced their culture. They fought to have their

culture become part of the curriculum in their schools. It was an organization for "Chicano Power."

La Raza Unida Party was formed a in Crystal City, TX, in 1970 by Jose Angel Gutierrez. It attempted to "institutionalize Chicano students in national political terms and on a nation wide basis." Crystal City was 80% Mexican-American but they had no representation in the city counsel or on the school board. They organized a boycott against the school through walkouts. Through student walkouts at school, the adults in the Chicano Communities were reached. On April 4th, 1970 four Chicanos from the La Raza Unida party were elected to the school board. Because of the success of La Raza Unida party in Crystal City, many other cities and states in the southwest United States organized their own branches of the party.

These are a few of the major organizations that took place in the Chicana/o movement in earlier and later part of the sixties. Other groups include: the Brown Berets, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), and many other student organizations.

The Anglo Feminist Movement:

The Anglo Feminist Movement came to life in two different ways. The first was with the formation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) which was started in 1966. Adult women and men were those represented in this part of the movement. They wanted equality for women in government, employment and labor unions. The other movement consisted of young women; most of them were currently in just out of college. It was unofficially named the Women's Liberation Movement. The majority of them had been active earlier in the civil rights and antiwar movements. This group was considered more radical than NOW. They focused on issues such as reproductive rights, violence to women, and sexuality. They wanted to change the patriarchal society. Both groups were comprised primarily of women whom were white and middle class to upper class. Some of the main victories of Women's Liberation Movement was the legalization of abortion in 1973, laws dealing with rape and abuse to women, laws pertaining to sterilization, affirmative action programs, and Title IX passed in 1972.

The Chicana Feminist Movement:

In March 1969 the Denver Youth Conference took place. At this conference a workshop was held discussing the role of women in the movement. The women of this workshop stated, "It was the consensus of the group that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated." This was one of the principle actions that sparked the Chicana Feminist Movement. Soon after this, woman began to organize. In May 1971 over 600 Chicanas met in Houston, TX for the Mujeres Por La Raza Conference. The two largest workshops held at this conference were "Sex and the Chicana" and "Marriage-Chicana Style." A survey was taken at this conference showed that 84% of the women there felt as though they were not encouraged to seek professional careers and education was not considered important for Chicanas, 84% thought that there was not equal pay for equal work, and 72% felt as though there was discrimination towards them in La Raza. Along with organizing women's caucuses and holding conferences Chicanas also know that getting their words out there was important as well. In 1973 Encuentro Femenil, the first Chicana Feminist journal, was published. This journal explores the sexism and racism facing Chicanas at the time. It also made distinctions between its movement and the Anglo Feminist Movement. There were other important publications emerging at this time such as the newspaperHijas de Cuauhtemoc and a book of articles called La Mujer En Pie de La Lucha. Chicana feminism, which paralleled to the Chicano movement, helped the Chicana become recognized as a valuable asset in her community. A few prominent names in Chicana Feminism are Mirta Vidal, Anna NietoGomez, Martha Cotera, and Gloria Anzaldua. There are many more that emerged from the feminist and Chicano movement in the seventies and eighties. The struggles for these women were not always easy ones.

The Chicana could not rely on the men in the Chicano Movement or the women in the Women's Liberation Movement. Each of the movements wanted the Chicana to sacrifice her needs for the larger movement. Women who fought for their rights were often told by both groups that they had to choose between being women and being Chicana.

Chicanos and Chicano loyalists often accused Chicanas of being venditas or traitors to the movement and compared to Anglos of the Women's Liberation movement. They are viewed as being antifamily, anti-cultural, and anti-man. They accused them of trying to split the movement and not supporting the cause. The Chicano movement often ignored the request of Chicanas to incorporate issues such as abortion and reproductive choice (along with other issues important to Chicanas) into their platform. This backlash from the community forced Chicanas to discuss how Chicana Feminism should relate its movement to the rest of the Chicano Movement. Loyalists to the Chicano movement felt that racism needed to be addressed before sexism. They used arguments against Chicanas were disrupting the roles or males and females with in the Chicano community. The more independent she became, the more she was labeled by the movement as Mujer Mala (or Bad Women) and the more they were accused of taking up the Anglo woman's fight.

Chicana had two main arguments to counter these accusations. They pointed out historical independent women in Chicano and Mexican history. They used examples of women who fought in the Mexican Revolution. They used examples of indigenous women prior to colonization by Spain and how they were strong, independent equals in the society. They also used nun and writer Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, and more modern references of UFW co-founder and activist Dolores Huerta. The other argument used by Chicanas was "the need to remake the family in struggle against Anglo domination." This was different from the Anglo movement because there was not much importance placed on the family structure in the Anglo movement. Through restructuring the family Chicanas thought the movement would progress further. They wanted to change the traditional gender roles imposed on them while recognizing the importance of the family structure in the Chicana/o community.

There were other differences between the Women's Liberation movement and the Chicana Feminist movement was the inclusion of race and class. The Anglo women focused on gender and felt that Chicanas should choose gender over culture. Chicanas had faced oppression concerning all three of these and did not think that one was more important than the other. Also, Chicanas lack of participation in the Anglo Feminist movement helped to reassure Chicano loyalists that they were not traitors to their culture and community. The Women's Liberation movement viewed the Chicana women, and other minorities as well, as all similar. The classism of the movement failed to recognize the diverse background that these women came from. Anglo feminists felt superior not only in race but in class and often undermined and disregarded the ideology of different minority feminist movements.



CHICANA FEMINIST THEORY & CHICANA FEMINIST ISSUES

Theory:

The oppression of the Chicana is intricate and arises from a multitude of domineering means. She is an ethnic minority, she is woman who is universally oppressed by men, and her Chicano heritage exaggerates this male domination over women. The first type of oppression mentioned is due to ethnicity of the Chicana. The Chicano culture is politically and economically exploited by Anglo society. Chicanos are considered subordinate, dependent and have been subjected to numerous accounts of genocide. Another type of oppression is due to gender. Women across the vast majority of cultures are considered subordinate and are universally oppressed by her male counterpart. In addition, there is also an internal oppression caused by the Chicana heritage. Some identify this as "machismo" and caused by the colonization of the Chicana and must be addressed.

Machismo:

The Machismo is a term very multifaceted in it origins, definitions, and social and cultural implications.

It is theorized that the repeated colonization of Mexico has taken the physical and spiritual power of its people away and has left the Chicano feeling weak. Because the Chicano has been unable to protect his people, (brothers, women, and children) from the violent conquest of his nation, he has developed a strong sense of masculinity as a compensation for his feelings of powerlessness. The same feeling of powerlessness continues to be instilled into the Chicano through his discrimination and oppression, and the washing away his dignity and creating an aggressive and protective nature of "his" woman and family. Another derivation of Machismo may result from the necessity to have and express a Chicano cultural and national identity. Machismo in this frame does not relate to his manhood per se, but to pride in his Chicano Nation. It incorporates family values of responsibility as well as nurturing.

Social Scientists have created a stereotype of Machismo as a type of "masculinity syndrome" and have attributed it to the Latin male. The stereotypes are problematic because they create self-fulfilling prophecies in which both men and women start to become complacent to these assigned gender roles.

La Domesticana Chicana - Traditional Role of the Chicana:

Social Scientists also describe the Chicana. She is perceived to be a submissive, passive, woman under the command of the Chicano. Her roles are typically in the home and she is isolated from and ignorant to the world surrounding her. The Catholic Church is also another factor that perpetuates the roles of women as inferior and maintaining the family and sex roles currently in place. Through the idea of "marianismo" the Chicana is often seen as the "Virgin Mary": she is saintly and motherly, a martyr, a virgin, a wife and sex object.

Griselda Pollack, a Chicana artist, opens a new perspective of the roles of the Chicana based on ideology of femininity. She describes it as both a condition and an effect. If the position of femininity is moved by a change in representation so will the position of the Chicana. "The Chicana strategies of domesticana that emerge from the spaces of femininity, such as the bedroom, the kitchen, and the yard, retake the gaze, the centrality for its own meaning and begin to reposition the Chicana through the reworking of feminine space."

Three Descriptions of Chicana Feminism:

The first description is "Chicana Liberal Feminism." This concentrates on the wants of the Chicana in order to improve the

Chicano community while also focusing on "improving the status of women." The Chicana Liberal Feminist wants access to social institutions and employment. She develops awareness of the Chicana in the community and supports "political strategies" to help better the Chicana. Her focus is on improving both the Chicano Community and the role of the Chicana within it.

The second description is "Chicana Insurgent Feminism." This concentrates on "production and reproduction." The Chicana Insurgent Feminist wants revolutionary change within her community. Her struggles are against "racial discrimination, patriarchy, and class exploitation." She is more radical in her action and less compromising in her thinking.

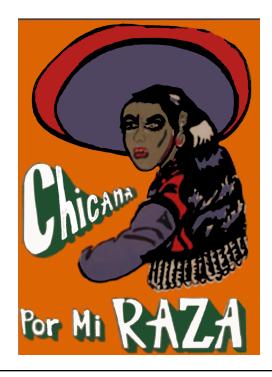
The third description is "Chicana Cultural Nationalist Feminism." Women who belong under this description "identify as feminists but are committed to a cultural nationalist ideology." Although they feel there needs to be changes in gender roles they feel it is necessary to maintain tradition in the Chicano culture.

Lesbianism in the Chicano Community:

Lesbianism is typically a taboo subject in the Chicano community. It rejects preconceived notions of Chicanas and their role within the family structure. It also rejects some of the belief of the major religion within the community. One cannot fully participate in religion and be a lesbian. Lesbianism disrupts the male dominance. It gives women power and control outside her typical role of wife, daughter, sister, and girlfriend. For heterosexual women in the Chicano community there is reluctance for some to associate with lesbians. The idea that they would be considered lesbian or that they are buying into the Anglo culture as Chicana Lesbians are reasons for this reluctance.

The New "Mestiza"

The mestiza consciousness is about allowing for contradictions . It is the "borderlands" of the Chicana. She exists monolingually and bilingually. She exists in an indigenous, Mexican, and American culture. It rejects the sections as race, class, and gender as separate identities and sees them intertwined, all connected to each other. It is about multiple identities and accepting these identities for oneself. It is being queer, being multiracial, being multicultural, being multilingual. It is about challenging what is the status quo and embracing ambiguity.



ISSUES:

Abortion, Reproduction and Health Care:

Chicanas want the right to control their body and make choices concerning them. Health care should be provided a staff that includes the Chicana and should be controlled by the Chicana community. There should be bilingual assistance so the Chicana is always aware of what it going on and able to get the help that she needs. Forced sterilization of poor Chicanas is also a big issue. In the past doctors have rationalized that it is okay to coerce women into sterilization, especially those whom are minority and poor. This is something the Chicana Feminists and all women should make sure does not happen.

Employment and Education:

Chicanas want education that is culturally relevant to them and is free of sexism. Chicanas have been historically and presently underrepresented in education. Chicanas want education for there children that is biligual and will not reject their culture. A few reasons for this is are the lack or support from the public education system and the lack of importance place on education for females in Chicano culture. Employment and education go hand in hand. Problems that exist with employment are communication barriers, lack of information concerning interview techniques and a lack of competitive entry level skills. Even when Chicanas do have the required skills they are not getting equal pay for equal work. They are making less than the Chicano and the Anglo male and less than the Anglo woman.

Restructuring Political Familialism:

The role of the Chicana is typically of the mother and the caregiver . While the family structure is important to the Chicana, she also wants to be recognized as an intricate part of the family and the larger community. Utilizing the talents of the women and seeing them as equals is important.

Child Care:

Child care was a very important issue to Chicana Feminists. They want free child care that was also bilingual and bicultural. They want to be able to seek employment without having to pay amounts for childcare that are equivalent to their rent. They also want the Chicano community to recognize that child was not the duty of the woman but the responsibility of the community.

Rape and Abuse:

Rape and abuse to women must always be taken seriously. Domestic abuse is not the right of the husband. Men must respect their women. It is important to the government that the Chicano community and the government take these issues seriously and take a firm stance again rape and violence.



INTERVIEW WITH MARTHA COTERA

Martha Cotera, author of *The Chicana Feminist* and *Profile on the Mexican American Woman*, sat down for an interview with us on October 27, 2005. She was an active member of the La Raza Unida Party in Crystal City, Texas and one of the prominent Chicana Feminist authors to date. Here are some excerpts from the interview:

Women Within the La Raza Unida Party and the Rights They Fought For:

"We found out very early on, as is usually the case in life with women, that we ended up doing all of the logistical work, getting everything together, doing organizing and the nut and bolts kinds of things. The guys did a lot of talking and fun stuff."

"We [Chicanas] were very interested in issues of domestic violence and rape. We were very interested in reproductive issues, the availability of choice in abortions because a lot of us had been raised on the border where women were getting abortions. We don't think about that. Because of the work that we did, abortion became legalized. That was a big issue with us. These were not big issues for the guys because these were issues that primarily impacted women. And even today I think the most dangerous things that I see are the way some of the policies are implemented. These are issues that don't really affect men that don't care"

"We were working against the war and that was a very big issue that involved women as well as men because we were losing a lot of people in the war. We were working on educational reform. It took a lot of our time and that involved men and women as well. We were working on alternative colleges. My husband and I were actually part of a group that set up a college in south Texas ... It was actually the artists that first came to us as women to complain that they were being excluded from participating. Not excluded from participation, but that the guys didn't want to put the [women] artists in the agenda and then my husband wanted to present affordable housing issues because he's an architect and they didn't want to do that either. Others and I were interested in choice issues. That was a big issue for us and they didn't want to do that either. We thought, Wait a minute, whose movement is this, anyways? So it did take a while to get to that point. "

"Women had a type parallel movement for women's right and were able to incorporate all of these issues successfully into La Raza Party platform. So its one of the few platforms, now that I think about it, that has a reproductive rights choice issue."

Machismo:

"We had a lot of young people, but those were the Brown Berets. But the Brown Berets amazingly so tended to be more sexist than the rest of the movement that included a lot of older people like ourselves...

...A lot of these kids were in colleges and universities and have picked up a lot of socialization by U.S. sociologists who study our communities from the outside looking. That didn't have any clear insight that we were not a machista community as they interpreted the community to be. They've always said that the Mexican American community has a lot of machismo in it, but they don't understand the definition of machismo. There are two definitions: A man that is very sexist and the real definition which is a man of strength and responsibility and who is nurturing. There is a nurturing side of machismo that the sociologists don't talk about. These kids just believed a lot of the sociology and jargon although the reality was very different. Their mothers and sisters didn't pass it onto them. They got it out of textbooks."

Current Issues:

"We have lot of sexism in our communities still and although we have a lot of women who are activists and a lot of women that get involved, we do not have what I would call an active feminist movement right now. We have one at the University level and to some degree with writers and the cultural arts, but not in the community and I think that is something that is a challenge for people like myself. I work at the university level with archives. I do archive research on a very part time basis at the university, but I primarily work at the grassroots level. Its my job and it should be my job to make sure to continue that work. We continue to develop women to be activists, but we haven't really developed a feminist consciousness or feminist theoretical approach to community based activism with today's women....

...All women that care about other women: white feminists, native Americans, Asian American, African American, and Latinas should get back to grass roots The biggest issue is sexuality and the biggest issue is sexual exploitation of women in all of our communities. We have to face that right on because from sexual exploitation a lot of very negative stuff can happen."

Getting Involved:

"It first takes one women getting it started. Then it takes that group to grow and we educate, ourselves first of all. Then you work with the first responders which are generally you counselors, your teachers, your churches, your grass root community groups and you work. It is a very long-term commitment. As other issues have become long-term commitments. We've seen affirmative action has been a longterm commitment. It doesn't just have to be directed at sexuality. It can be directed in general just in terms of self confidence."

Feminism:

"... If you're a woman it just doesn't make any sense not to be a feminist.... People ask me How long have you been a feminist? and I say, Well, when I realized I was a woman. Even when you're very little you notice the differences. How many girls grow up thinking, God, I wish I were a boy! so you could do this or that."

"For woman, feminist or not, that were growing up in the 70's and 80's it was very difficult. There was a lot of antagonism against women, even against the woman not declared feminist. Why? Because we were finally able to get phone number on our own, because were able to get bank accounts on our own, we were able to get abortions, because we could get home mortgages. We couldn't get credit! In 1975, I started a business and I had to give up after two week and have my husband sign for me. I signed his phone bill payment for 20 years and the phone company would not let me get a phone on my own. Women don't realize they couldn't open bank accounts, they couldn't get phone numbers on their own, they couldn't buy a home. Women today have very little knowledge because our history is not taught."

"If you are able to get a phone you're a feminist. You're already cashing in on the feminist legacy. That's why I think we need to

bring back that pride of being a feminist. If you're not a feminist you must be some kind of weird person because you're not owing up to you womanhood. If you're a woman you're a feminist that's all there is too it, unless you're dead. If you're a woman living breathing and surviving and for a woman to survive you have to be a feminist. I already. see my little granddaughter having to stand up for her rights. To deny being a feminist is to deny acknowledgment of what you have."



ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alarcón, Norma, et al., eds. 1983. *Chicana Critical Issues.* 1st ed. Berkeley, CA : Third Woman Press.

This text is a collection of essays and research on the Chicana. It covers many important topics on identity. The book includes representations, narratives concerning political, social, and historical aspects, and also subjects on psychoethics, bioethics, and policies of identity.

Arredondo, Gabriela F., et al., eds. 2003. *Chicana Feminisms.* 1st ed. Durham , NC : Duke University Press.

Chicana Feminisms is a book written in collaboration with scholars, creative writers and artists to bring forth a wide array of perspectives and to show the diversity of the Chicana experience. The book is separated into chapters characterized by the presentation of a specific work of creative expression, Chicana history, interviews, folklores, etc. which is then followed up by and a subsequent critique or commentary which elaborates on the piece. Some of the issues addressed are life on the Mexico-U.S. border, bilingualism, the problems posed by a culture of repressive sexuality, and Chicana feminism in the 60's and 70's.

Blea, Irene I. 1992. La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.

This book examines the different aspects of the life of the Chicana. explores the race, class, gender and the situation of the Chicana. Using a wide range of text and her own personal experiences help explore the social situation of the Chicana as she rejects her gender roles and evolves to what is known as the new Chicana.

Cotera, Martha. September 27, 2005. Interview by Kelly Kieft and Erin Lambers. Ann Arbor, MI:.

The interview with Martha Cotera explored a variety of topics involving the Chicano Movement. Discussed were the roles of women within La Raza Party, similarities and differences between other Chicano organizations involved in the movement like the Brown Berets and also comparisons with the Young Lords Party. Also explored were the unique issues faced by Chicana feminists within the Chicano movement such as reproductive rights, childcare, and property rights. The interview concluded by examining the current issues of Chicana feminism and strategies to address them. **Cotera, Martha P. 1977.** *The Chicana Feminist.* 1st ed. Austin, TX : Information Systems Development.

This text covers the Chicana and her role in the movement in the sixties and seventies. It explores issues concerning Chicana Feminism inside and outside of the movement. It was written during the movement and expresses the opinions and situations of women at that time.

Gallardo, Susana L. Defining Chicana Feminisms In Their Own Words . 2005 [cited Nov. 30 Available from <u>http://chicanas.com/</u> defs.html.

This web page gives definitions of Chicana Feminism. It takes different women whom were active in the movement and uses them to express a broad range of ideas of what the term Chicana Feminism means.

Garcia, Alma M., ed. 1997. Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings. Vol. 1. New York, NY : Routledge.

This book is a collection of Chicana Feminist writings. It is both historically and presently relevant. It contains ideas and thoughts from women who were active in Chicana Feminism. The majority of the writings are from the seventies while some are from the eighties and early nineties. The collections are comprised of many women who were very significant in the start and the continuance of the Chicana Feminist movement.

Gordon, Linda, Baxandall, Rosalyn and Reverby, Susan. Women's Liberation Movement. in Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc [database online]. 1998 [cited 12/14 2005]. Available from <u>http://search.eb.com/women/</u>articles/women's_liberation_movement.html.

This website gives a summary of the Women's Liberation Movement. It discusses the origins of the movement. It also explaines the issues that the movement was fighting for and what the movement has accomplished. It concludes with a description of the current state of the Women's Liberation Movement.

Mirandé, Alfredo, and Enríquez, Evangelina. 1979. La Chicana:The Mexican-American Woman. Chicago, IL : University of Chicago Press.

This book provides excellent historical information regarding the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards, The Mexican revolution, and US expansion. It explores the cultural heritage of the Chicana, the roles of Chicanas within the family and also work and education. It examines the images of the Chicana as portrayed in literature and Chicana feminism finding parallels between much of the Mexican heritage and the Current Chicana situation.

Oberler, Suzanne. 1995. Establishing an Identity in the Sixties: The Mexican-American/Chicano and Puerto Rican Movements. In *Ethnic Lables, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)presentation in the United States*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

This chapter of the book covers the history of the state of our country post WWII and the Latinos place in the country at the time. It gives a brief overview of the start of the Young Lords Party and their history. It then discusses the Chicano and the different organizations that began forming. . It briefly describes the history of each of these movements and how they contributed to the Chicano Movement. It concludes by talking about the roles of women within these movements and how they were oppressed.

Roth, Benita. 2004. *Separate Roads to Feminism.* New York, NY : Cambridge University Press.

This book describes the different avenues taken by the "second wave" of Black, White, and Chicana Feminist Movements. It compares them to each other by explaining their similarities and their differences. It gives the history of each movement and how the different movements intereacted with each other.

United Farm Workers Org. United Farm Workers. 2005 [cited 12/14 2005]. Available from <u>http://www.ufw.org/</u>.

This is the website of the Nationa Farm Workers organization. It outlines current problems that the organization is trying to fix. It also provides a history of the organization and its founders.

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