

The Persistence of Colorado Chicana Activism in Higher Education From the 1960s to 1980s

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Introduction

As a Colorado Chicana activist, Neva Romero proudly served the Chicano student movement at the University of Colorado Boulder. As a member of United Mexican Americans Students (UMAS), she participated in the student occupation of UMAS headquarters in Temporary Building #1 in May of 1974.¹ During that protest, she, along with five other Chicano activists died in two separate bombings in Boulder. Her obituary in *El Diario de la Gente*, the UMAS student newspaper, described Romero as “strong, committed, proud” and “intelligent, clear minded, and frank.”² She had been pursuing a degree in Education, and advocated in support of “the importance and necessity of a bilingual-bicultural program for the Boulder Valley schools.” Fearless, she said to the school board, “I see my culture dying.’ She blamed the public schools for failing to support the Chicano.”³ She confronted educational institutions on their systematic failure to support all students.

Romero’s story demonstrated the spirit of solidarity and power within the Chicano movement during that time. The student movement faced resistance in institutions of higher education, but the hidden story of Romero offered clues to a history within that history. How did a former homecoming queen become a student leader and an ardent Chicana activist? Knowing the challenges, she may have had to face, what brought her to that point? Fellow Chicano activist Juan Espinoza hints at what her journey may have entailed. He recalled, “I thought she was just a pretty face who used her looks to her advantage. But as I got to know her, I saw her commitment

¹ “About, UMAS y MEXA,” University of Colorado Boulder, accessed March 23, 2020, <https://www.colorado.edu/studentgroups/umasymexa/about>.

² Theresa Gallegos, “Neva Romero,” *El Diario de la Gente*, June 11, 1974.

³ Gallegos, “Neva Romero.”

and passion to the things she believed in.”⁴ How did women like Romero overcome these gendered assumptions, forge a place for themselves in the Chicano movement, and create identities as Chicanas? These are the questions this thesis seeks to answer.

The United States civil rights movements spanned across the 1960s to 1980s. The Chicano movement sparked from structural oppression and violence. The movement changed based on the political, social, and cultural climate across the nation. Colorado’s Crusade for Justice was a foundational aspect of the movement that spread through the western region. The historiography on the movement has generally focused on male Chicano leaders, giving less attention to the participation of Chicanas. As Maylei Blackwell argued that the documented history of the movement “used a temporal linearity that locates women’s and feminists’ interventions outside of movement histories instead of including them in a larger agenda for social justice integral to the legacy of the Chicano movement.”⁵ In fact, the dominant timeline of the movement “consistently ‘adds on’ Chicana feminist interventions, periodizing them within the logic of the decline (or sometime part of the cause of the end) of el movimiento.”⁶ This leaves with few tools to understand stories like Romero’s.

Given that activism among women of color in Mexican and Indigenous communities persisted before the 1960s era of civil rights, associating women with the downfall of the movement makes little sense. Moreover, this historical narrative does account for the figure of the liberated Chicana. The movement built the notion of ‘us versus them,’ Chicanos versus Anglos, which left women either to support their men or appear to support the oppressor.

⁴ Juan Espinoza, quoted in Joe Contreras, “Who Really Killed Neva Romero & ‘Los Seis de Boulder’? XicanIndie Film Festival,” *Latin Life Denver*, n.d. <https://www.latinlifedenver.com/community/who-really-killed-neva-romero-los-sis-de-boulder-xicanindie-film-festival-continues/>.

⁵ Maylei Blackwell, *iChicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 29.

⁶ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 29.

Chicanas needed to be loyal to the Chicano community and family. But even Romero's brief biography suggests that women were able to develop imaginaries of "the liberated Chicana" within an arena that demanded loyalty to the movement.

To understand how Chicanas did so, a different approach is needed. Blackwell advocated for a broader concept of power: "Chicana feminist historians understand power as multisited, occurring in dominant society as well as the family, the community, and movement organizations."⁷ That perspective draws connections across generations and incorporates actions beyond the formal structures of the movement, such as "everyday" acts of social resistance and efforts to reinterpret tradition. Mexican and Indigenous women established a foundation that influenced their daughters and granddaughters as "most Chicana activist... stated that it was their mothers, *abuelas* (grandmothers), or *tías* (aunts) who served as their role models."⁸ The mothers, grandmothers, and ancestors inspired young Chicana activists. Each generation adapted their techniques and engaged in platforms available in the societal environment. Analyzing the evolution of Chicana "genealogies of resistance" complicates the history of Chicana persistence as the genealogies recognizes the women that came before the 1960s and how the young women of the Chicano movement era built on those histories and developed their own imaginaries and identities.⁹ As this thesis will show, Colorado Chicanas in higher education weaponized multiple forms of resistance, both overt activism and everyday acts of personal liberation to resist oppressive external forces in the 1960s to 1980s.

The Importance of the "Chicano/a" Identity

⁷ Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 28.

⁸ Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 47.

⁹ Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 14.

The United States government and society employed derogatory labels for people of color which symbolized power and oppression. The colonialist driven labels stripped communities of color of their right to self-identify themselves. The word ‘Chicana/o’ emerged from the 1960s as a self-proclaimed label used to assert one’s presence in the United States’ social and political environment. Labels such as Chicana/o, Mexican American, Hispanic, Spanish, Latinx, and Indo-Hispano represent “a specific historical moment and at times specific political identity or challenge.”¹⁰ Chicana/o aligned with the 1960s Chicano Civil Rights Movement (Chicano Movement). The name was a “signifier of political consciousness and cultural identity for young Mexican Americans.”¹¹ The decision to use the word Chicano was debated among members, because “Chicano was a pejorative that indicated people of Mexican descent living in the United States Southwest of lower social class.”¹² Also, the term Mexican American tended to refer to “middle-class individuals” who accepted the American identity, while Mexican immigrants held “different levels of U.S. and Mexican acculturation.”¹³ Activists used “ethnic pride” to appropriate and reinterpret the term ‘Chicano.’¹⁴ They turned the “initial pejorative meaning, namely, the negative associations with being outsiders and lower class, by embracing their supposed “lowered class.”¹⁵ They transformed the ‘Chicano’ label that society viewed as deficits into a positive that “framed their own cultural and social particularity and status as a source of their strength.”¹⁶

¹⁰ Nydia Martinez, “The Struggles of Solidarity: Chicana/o-Mexican Networks, 1960s–1970s,” *Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (2015): 521.

¹¹ N. Martinez, “The Struggles of Solidarity,” 521.

¹² N. Martinez, “The Struggles of Solidarity,” 521.

¹³ N. Martinez, “The Struggles of Solidarity,” 521.

¹⁴ Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 113.

¹⁵ Enrique Sepúlveda, written feedback comments to author, April 3, 2020.

¹⁶ Enrique Sepúlveda, written feedback comments to author, April 3, 2020.

The collective Chicana identity publicly distinguished them as social activists in the United States press and media. The public connotated Chicana/os as activists with a political agenda, and Chicano Movement values. To call oneself a “Chicana/o” was a form of activism in itself, because the name placed the individual in the political environment. In short, the name ‘Chicana/o’ established a new individual and collective identity.

The name ‘la Chicana’ was significant in how Chicanas identified and positioned themselves as activists. Chicanas used the name to assert themselves in spaces and as motivation for liberation. The term situated women directly with their Chicano brothers and fathers as they fought with their men against “the oppressive forces and injustices being imposed on Chicanos.”¹⁷ Chicano men had not viewed Chicanas as equal partners in the movement. However, the public recognition of Chicanas in the Chicano Movement space was a cheerful feeling as “the liberated Chicana seeks liberation not only for herself but for her people as well.”¹⁸ Also, the term separated Chicanas and the white women’s liberation. Chicana students viewed the distinction as positive because it separated the “gringa values” from “Chicana values.”¹⁹ Chicanas created space that valued and prioritized Chicanas’ needs.

The term Chicana identified them as part of the Chicano Movement and as women. The negative stereotypes associated with the label, Chicana, pushed women to self-define their role as an activist, which “implies that she lays down the foundation of social interactions with Chicanos, other Chicanas, and institutions on her grounds or according to her rules.”²⁰ They used

¹⁷ Evelyn Martinez, “La Chicana: ‘Establishing a Positive Self-Image,’” *El Diario de la Gente*, February 20, 1973.

¹⁸ Martinez, “Positive Self-Image.”

¹⁹ Martinez, “Positive Self-Image.”

²⁰ Becky Marrujo, “La Chicana- ‘Barefoot and Pregnant?’” *El Diario de la Gente*, March 20, 1973.

their Chicana identity to assert themselves in historically marginalized spaces and redefined the definition of Chicana.

Chicana Resistance in Multiple Contexts

Chicanas displayed consistent acts of resistance, liberation, and emancipation in multiple arenas: the Mexican American community, higher education, and the Chicano movement. Resistance does not only imply direct or public activism, but also may private challenges to an established norm, including acts of self-redefinition, personal assertion, and liberating themselves from cultural assumptions. The act of going against the grain symbolized, on the one hand, the awareness of preconditioned behaviors and, on the other, an attempt to intentionally challenge the standard. What “resistance” meant differed within each of these contexts, as Chicanas defied norms established by tradition, administration, and movement culture.

Women took action within the family space to resist Indigenous and family values that the movement used as a form of oppression. The act of attending college and participating in activism “expanded the “traditional” role of women” within the Mexican American community.²¹ The Mexican American gender roles in high school and the community “constricted” freedom of Chicanas more than their male partners.²² Higher education provided the “opportunity to work within a political movement.”²³ Thus, various Chicanas expressed their freedom from traditional roles by participating in Chicano student politics and organizations.²⁴

²¹ Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 131.

²² Roth, *Separate Roads*, 136.

²³ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 136.

²⁴ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 136.

Benita Roth argues that “What Chicana feminists wanted was a greater political presence in the wider Chicano movement, both by organizing in autonomous groups and in women’s caucuses within mixed Chicano organizations.”²⁵

Chicanas defiantly resisted the formation of the “philosophies of Chicanismo and *carnalismo* [brotherhood]” within the movement.²⁶ They publicly and privately protested the patriarchal norm of Chicano-oriented organizations. They vocalized their rejection towards the argument that “Chicano cultural preservation required that men play strong public roles, and that women support them in private.”²⁷ For example, a Chicana student at San Diego State University “rejected her election to the position of secretary, arguing that women were seen as capable only doing such clerical tasks” in the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán (MEChA).²⁸ She directly disrupted the sexist behaviors and was then elected as treasurer. All of these acts of resistance, even if sometimes on the small and local scale, shaped both Chicana identity and the movement as a whole.

Roth argued that the “Chicana feminist politics” transformed into a “consciousness-raising group that was also researching the history of la Chicana.”²⁹ Women of color disguised modern feminism as group supporting the historical women in Mexico who held a “tradition of activism in the community.”³⁰ Roth examined the Chicana activist group Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc at Long Beach State University and commented on the strategic camouflaging of a women’s political organization behind the tradition of Mexican women.³¹ The Chicanas were

²⁵ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 130.

²⁶ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 136.

²⁷ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 137.

²⁸ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 137.

²⁹ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 139.

³⁰ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 139.

³¹ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 139.

more open to joining a ‘researching group’ rather than a feminist group because the movement viewed “any feminist activism was characterized as petty, studying history gave feminism as kind of weight that went beyond the individual.”³² The practice of disguising the Chicana agenda applied throughout the Western U.S., as similar patterns appear in Colorado and elsewhere: “early Chicana feminist organizing was characterized by the express desire to stay linked to men and to existing Chicano organizations while promoting a greater role for women in service to the Chicano cause.”³³ Chicanas intentionally used forms of activism and resistance against the emerging traditional Chicano norms.

Historiography

Chicana activism spans across state borders; therefore, scholars have approached Chicana history from various locations. However, scholars have more heavily researched California Chicana activism due to the large population of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Mexican immigrants, Chicanax, and Latinx. Also, California was a central hub for the Chicano Movement. The United Mexican American Students (UMAS) organization by 1968 had “ten chapters in Los Angeles-area colleges and universities.”³⁴ Scholars in Chicana history also research the 1971 Conferencia de Mujeres por la Raza (National Chicana Conference) in Houston, Texas, as it was the “watershed event for Chicana feminists.”³⁵ Since California and Texas offered larger concentrated populations and key moments to research, scholars have neglected in-depth research into Chicanas in Colorado.

³² Roth, *Separate Roads*, 139.

³³ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 139.

³⁴ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 135.

³⁵ Roth, *Separate Roads*, 132.

Furthermore, research conducted on the Colorado Chicano movement emphasized the Crusade for Justice in Denver. Ernesto B. Vigil, in *Crusade for Justice*, approached Chicano history through the “cosmology of male heroes that reifies the “great man” narrative and interpretive structure.”³⁶ Vigil accounted the Colorado role in the movement to be “out of proportion to the size of its Mexican-origin population.”³⁷ His writing dismissed the relationship between Chicanas and the charismatic Colorado leader of the Crusade, Rodolfo Gonzales, also known as Corky. Vigil interpreted the “spearhead of the movement in Colorado was the Crusade for Justice under the leadership of Rodolfo Gonzales.”³⁸ Blackwell would argue that Vigil’s research consequently marginalized Chicanas “interventions outside of movement histories instead of including them in a larger agenda for social justice integral to the legacy of the Chicano movement.”³⁹ Vigil’s research does not distinguish Chicana politics as a separate and equal power in the Chicano Movement.

Vigil included a subsection titled “Women, College Students, and Labor in LRUP (La Raza Unida Party)” within the broader chapter of “Colorado in the Early 1970s: Education, Elections, Parks, and Prison Activism” in *Crusade For Justice*. The first sentence reads, “college activists and women played a role in the party’s early stages,” which undermined the continuous work of Chicanas in La Raza because it confirmed students and women to a limited time period.⁴⁰ Vigil undermines the contributions of women in higher education by literally erasing their substantial impact on the Denver, Colorado Chicano narrative. Vigil does not mention the National Chicana Conference in 1971, which was direct evidence of the “growth of

³⁶ Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 28.

³⁷ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 18.

³⁸ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 18.

³⁹ Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 29.

⁴⁰ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 165.

a national political movement and potential political unity among Chicanas at the height of the Chicano movement.”⁴¹

The political movement of Chicanas, in fact, only continued to grow, with a three-day statewide conference ‘Up with Chicanas’ held in 1975 at SCSC’s (Southern Colorado State College) College Center.⁴² The Colorado State University, Pueblo student newspaper, *Arrow-CSU Pueblo*, published the success of the event, as it hosted “300 participants,” who were mostly Chicanas.⁴³ Women discussed ideas and strategies for the presence of Chicanas in non-traditional careers and “vowed to support each other on all issues affecting the status and struggle for feminine and racial equality.”⁴⁴ Chicanas created political networks through the “Up with Chicanas” conference and established “a communication link for Chicanas all over the state.”⁴⁵ Vigil’s history of the Colorado Chicano Movement failed to account for this significant event, thus denying “the historical importance of women’s autonomous agency within the movement.”⁴⁶ He dismissed the political network and agenda of Colorado Chicanas created as a part of the Chicano movement. In-depth research on Colorado Chicana activism is necessary because Chicanas in Colorado persisted to weaponize forms of public and private activism to resist oppression.

Blackwell’s *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* represents a foundational secondary source in the field of Chicana history. She focused on the Southern California region and her book used “the culmination of many years of archival

⁴¹ Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 161.

⁴² Pat Santos, “Chicanas Pledge Mutual Support,” *Pueblo, Pueblo County, CO (CSU-Pueblo Student Papers)*, April 17, 1975.

⁴³ Santos, “Chicanas Pledge.”

⁴⁴ Santos, “Chicanas Pledge.”

⁴⁵ Santos, “Chicanas Pledge.”

⁴⁶ Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 11-12.

research” and “rich oral histories” she conducted with “pioneering Chicana activist and theorist Anna NietoGomez and the member of the Hijas de Cuauhtémoc.”⁴⁷ Blackwell’s academic work introduced historical revisionist arguments and generalized theories about Chicana activism. Her work is credible among peers in the academic field of Chicana history. Various Chicana scholars before Blackwell, such as Cherie Moraga, Emma Pérez, and Gloria Anzaldúa, helped to establish a rich academic field. Blackwell and other leading scholars push the historical narrative and field of Chicana history.⁴⁸

Blackwell’s in-depth research equipped her to argue that scholars must “place them [Chicanas] within a critical genealogy of women’s resistance that has emerged from the experiences of women of color.”⁴⁹ With her close examination of the Chicana la familia Blackwell argued that “political familism both reinforced and disrupted the patriarchal arrangement of la familia, but as a political imaginary la familia was not fully reimagined in the Chicano movement, nor was its patriarchal anchoring dislodged.”⁵⁰ Blackwell’s research noted generalized approaches California Chicanas practiced and how they “forged movement spaces... by building new political subjectivity that linked their own struggle for education and political rights to those of their foremothers.”⁵¹ This thesis will touch on similar overarching themes of generational activism, the complex relationship between la familia and the movement and explore how they manifested in the Colorado context. Also, it will analyze the techniques Chicanas used to establish a political and cultural imaginary of a liberated Colorado Chicana.

⁴⁷ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 1.

⁴⁸ Enrique Sepúlveda, written feedback comments to author, April 3, 2020.

⁴⁹ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 47.

⁵⁰ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 83.

⁵¹ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 101.

Chicana Imaginaries of Liberation

The concept of a “social imaginary” needs to be understood as an intentional action to regain control in an oppressive environment. Colorado Chicanas persisted to act in such a way through their different forms of resistance against external oppressive forces. Scholars, such as Ramón Saldivar, Andrea Dyrness, and Enrique Sepúlveda situate “social imaginary” in the context of Charles Taylor’s description.

Saldivar stated that “political theorist Charles Taylor (2004) uses ‘social imaginary’ to describe ‘the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.’ ‘... the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings. As Taylor (2004, p.23) notes, ‘this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends.’”⁵² Colorado Chicanas intentionally created a form of ‘social imaginary’ that situated their ‘social existence’ and drew attention to the ‘deeper normative notions and images’ in societal expectations. Scholar Lilia Soto’s concept of “cultural and political imaginaries” builds on Taylor’s conceptualized description of imaginaries.

Soto’s study, focused on transnational girls, began with the argument that “girls are not victims.”⁵³ Instead, she traced their ability to “develop migrant imaginaries that empower a fragile agency that enables them to see themselves as active subjects rather than passive

⁵² Ramón Saldivar, “Social Aesthetics and the Transnational Imaginary,” in *A Companion to Latina/o Studies*, ed. Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 411; Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). Recommended by Enrique Sepúlveda, written feedback comments to author, April 3, 2020.

⁵³ Lilia Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands: Mexican Teens Caught in the Crossroads of Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 204.

objects.”⁵⁴ The forms of resistance Chicanas weaponized demonstrated a similarly empowered fragile agency. Chicanas transformed print culture, created new artistic representations, and reclaimed narratives to form new cultural and political imaginaries.

Schmidt Camacho defined the ‘imaginary’ as “a symbolic field in which people come to understand and describe their social being.”⁵⁵ Camacho labeled the shared experiences girls held from continuous movement through spaces as “mobility imaginaries.”⁵⁶ Soto used Camacho’s concept of ‘mobility imaginaries’ and examined “how they [migrant girls] imagine and idealize their own present and future.”⁵⁷

Colorado Chicanas used imaginaries in a similar format Soto observed in migrant girls, however they identified with different positionalities. Soto focused on how migrant girls managed and engaged with ambiguous time and space through developed “temporal and spatial imaginaries.”⁵⁸ Migrant girls developed imaginaries as a technique to cope with the uncontrollable externalities. She argued that migrant girls “envision and enact new imaginaries, temporalities, and spatialities from which new ways of being women can emerge.”⁵⁹ The girls controlled their ability “to imagine, to hope for a different future, is a space where we can witness agency.”⁶⁰ Soto identified these young temporalities regarding time as manifesting as a “general sense of being stuck, of waiting.”⁶¹ Girls had no control over whether they migrated. They imagined their future homes, schools, and physical spaces through developed spatial

⁵⁴ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 204.

⁵⁵ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 10.

⁵⁶ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 10.

⁵⁷ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 10.

⁵⁸ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 11. Throughout this thesis “temporal and spatial imaginaries” refers to Lila Soto’s work in *Girlhood in the Borderlands*.

⁵⁹ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 11.

⁶⁰ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 25.

⁶¹ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 22.

imaginaries. Chicanas used their own imaginaries in various times and spaces in developing an imaginary of a liberated Chicana.

This thesis will examine three specific tactics and contexts from which Chicanas could assemble their new imaginary. Chapter one examines the ways Chicanas reclaimed the traditional and folklore inspired by “Aztlán” that Chicanos marketed as the foundational values in the movement. The second chapter analyzes how Chicanas engaged with the education system, moving from schools to universities, both navigating and resisting the assumptions of institutions governed by whites. Lastly, chapter three will consider the internal agenda and politics inside the student Chicano movement, and the ways Chicanas addressed both covert and overt sexism of the “brotherhood,” including facing questions of intersectionality and developing multiple forms of feminism.

Blackwell’s *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* relied partly on archived materials from California Chicana’s Hijas de Cuauhtémoc group, which was a feminist student group in the Chicano student movement. The group “published one of the first Chicana newspapers in 1971.”⁶² Blackwell’s research utilized the available print culture in her arguments. Colorado Chicanas, in comparison, used print as a means of advocacy, however, in contrast to establishing a Chicana newspaper they inserted themselves into Chicano student run newspapers.

This thesis utilizes an online archived public newspaper collection called the Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection (CHNC). The data source contains sources from 400 individual newspaper titles published in Colorado from 1859 up to 2019. The wide range of titles provides scope of the Chicano student movement across Colorado through various university published

⁶² Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 2.

newspapers. The Colorado State Library administrates state funding towards digitizing sources and maintaining open-public access to the collection. The CHNC has strict copyright regulations that limit them in only digitizing sources that the publisher provides permission to scan.⁶³ Thus, the collection is not comprehensive of an entire collection but curated by the published in what they want the public to view. However, despite the publishers' ability to restrict access to certain editions of newspapers Colorado universities are often able to relinquish the permission of student run newspapers to the CHNC.

For example, Colorado universities like the University of Colorado Boulder granted the CHNC permission to digitize the United Mexican American Students newspaper *El Diario de la Gente*, because they produced the newspaper on campus. The CHNC digitized all 63 published issues of *El Diario* from October 1972 to April 1983.⁶⁴ The student-run newspaper “committed to reporting on Chicano student activities and the movement for Chicano civil and educational rights on campus, and throughout Colorado and the U.S.”⁶⁵ The students used *El Diario* to strategize Chicano activism and debate identities of race, gender, and sexuality. Other Colorado universities that owned the copyright to student-run newspapers also granted CHNC permission to digitize their collections. Other Colorado university newspapers included in the collection are the *Fourth Estate* [University of Colorado Denver], *Arrow* [Colorado State University, Pueblo], and, *UCCS Weekly* [University of Colorado, Colorado Springs].

Chicanas vocalized their presence in spaces, such as higher education and the movement though expressive outlets like newspapers. Their voices are distinguishable in the sources,

⁶³ “About Our Collection,” Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, accessed March 23, 2020, <https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org/?a=p&p=home&e=-----en-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxCO%7ctxTA-----0->

⁶⁴ “Historical CU Boulder Newspapers Digitized for CHNC,” University of Colorado Boulder, last modified April 5, 2019, <https://www.colorado.edu/libraries/2019/04/05/historical-cu-boulder-newspapers-digitized-chnc>.

⁶⁵ “Historical CU Boulder Newspapers.”

because as active leaders Chicanas vocalized the struggle to wage and define the course of the movement. But tracing their stories *as Chicanas* requires a special focus, beyond simply documenting their presence. As Blackwell suggested,

Chicanas are critical to document because they created new political identities, solidarities, forms of consciousness, and artistic modes of production, and most important, because they show how Chicana organizing in the 1960s and 1970s, whether in mixed organizations or women's group created a new ways of being political and organizing in ways that empowered others.⁶⁶

Colorado Chicanas persistently resisted oppressive external structures and forged new imaginaries from these emergent identities and solidarities, from new forms of art and consciousness. Their actions not only deserve to be in the historical narrative but understood, as they transformed acts of public and private activism into weapons against oppression.

⁶⁶ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 37.

Chapter One: Influence of Aztlán on Chicanas

The Chicano movement produced a culture underneath a new collective Chicano identity that encompassed activists from different nationalities, social and economic backgrounds. The new identity worked to reframe “their existing cultural formations and roots by re-narrating the indigeneity and ancestral connections” to Aztlán.¹ One of the ways it did so was by “mapping a physical nation of people (Aztlán) onto the current southwest United States region out of a mythical Mexican legend,” imagined as a pre-colonial, Mexica homeland of “Aztlán.”² This produced a dual effect. On the one hand, early Chicano activists reclaimed the oppressed Mexica beliefs and values to serve as a new source of solidarity. This new Chicano identity centered around social justice and challenged the American power structure. On the other, a traditional definition of family institutions influenced the culture, as the structure and practices within *la familia* translated into the movement. This offered a more complex set of gender issues, particular for Chicanas. In the process of developing a collective identity, the community produced cultural and political imaginaries that incorporated these gender complexities even as they offered new possibilities for liberation.

Colorado Chicane students in higher education echoed this process, connecting Mexican Indigenous roots to the Chicano movement. Chicana activist Priscilla Falcon reflected upon the communities “in search of identity. They (the Chicano community) were in search of... of a place that they could historically claim.”³ Falcon expressed the power of knowing and vocalizing the oppressed history of Mexicans before the westward expansion as “we had experienced

¹ Enrique Sepúlveda, written feedback comments to author, April 3, 2020.

² Enrique Sepúlveda, written feedback comments to author, April 3, 2020.

³ *Symbols of Resistance: A Tribute to the Martyrs of the Chican@ Movement*, directed by Brenda Montaló and Freedom Archives (Firm)(Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2017), 2:21-2:23.

colonialism. We had experienced the idea that we have been exposed from the land that we had many of us had lost the language.”⁴ Another Chicana activist, Deborah Espinosa, also emphasized how “what was really passionate for all of us was the knowledge that we were colonized people.”⁵ Chicanas experienced pride and power in reclaiming Indigenous history, as students developed a collective Mexica identity.

Collective, however, did not mean singular. As Colorado Chicano student Kiko Martinez emphasized, the “Chicano Movement wasn’t monolithic. There were a lot of different formations in it.”⁶ Still, there was a strong common thread to many formations. Martinez, for example, emphasized the different influence of Reies Lopez Tijerina’s New Mexican land questions and Cesar Chavez’s United Farm Workers labor union on the student activism. Notably, he only mentioned the impact of dominant male leaders on student organization. The lack of reflection on powerful female leaders speaks to the movement’s heightened masculinity. The prominent male leaders in Colorado used the reclaimed pride in Indigenous roots as the foundation of the student movement. Chicanas thus approached this process of building collective identity by navigating the multiple influences of indigeneity, the concept of Aztlán, traditional family structures, and male dominance. In that way they attempted a double-transformation: taking traditional symbols already repurposed to support a masculine vision of liberation and transforming them to include the contributions, needs, and rights of women in the broader fight for justice.

Early Chicano Activism in Denver, Colorado

⁴ *Symbols of Resistance*, 2:40-2:45.

⁵ *Symbols of Resistance*, 3:13-3:15.

⁶ *Symbols of Resistance*, 7:25- 7:27.

Colorado's cultural and urban movement, Crusade for Justice, sponsored the 1969 Denver Youth Liberation Conference (1969 Denver Conference). Rodolfo Gonzales, also known as Corky, was the head of the Crusade of Justice and a nationally recognized leader. His view of activism and attitude towards the new Chicano directly influenced the conference. The 1969 Denver Conference symbolized the foundation of Chicano youth activism in the Colorado.⁷ The students actively engaged in creating a purpose within the movement. The student led newspaper, *Fourth Estate*, at the University of Colorado Denver, described the conference as "the Chicano manifestation of the liberation movement of the Third World... this conference was a fist in the Chicano movement."⁸ Conference leaders intended to determine the identity of Chicano activists as questions of "Who are we? Where are we going? How do we get there?" heavily circulated conversations.⁹ Conference leaders and attendees extensively discussed the "organizational techniques or the role of the student in the movement."¹⁰ Thus, the conference established the organizational roots of the Chicano student operation.

Corky Gonzales implicitly and explicitly tailored the 1969 Denver Conference atmosphere towards his social justice agenda, beliefs, values, and modes of activism. The Crusade for Justice had power in being one of the earlier experiences students had with the movement. Students' impression of the new Chicano developed from their interactions with the conference, which had a central focus on promoting the concept of Aztlán. Scholar Maylei Blackwell argued that "Chicano nationalism, as an ideological platform, was defined at the 1969 Denver Youth Liberation Conference, where over one thousand participants worked on passing

⁷ Manuel Lopez, "Chicano Youth Conference EDITORIALS AND OPINION VIVA LA RAZA!" *El Fourth Estate-University of Colorado Denver*, April 16, 1969.

⁸ Lopez, "Chicano Youth Conference."

⁹ Lopez, "Chicano Youth Conference."

¹⁰ Lopez, "Chicano Youth Conference."

resolutions embodied in the manifesto *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*.”¹¹ Students internalized Chicano nationalism as key to the success of Chicano social justice. Blackwell stated that “initially cultural nationalism was meant to resist the historical inaccuracies of white supremacy and to provide the rich ground for cultural renewal and innovation to flourish,” as it created a “common ground and political grammar to unify disparate regions, identities, and social locations.”¹² Corky Gonzales’ endorsement of Chicano nationalism through Aztlán solidified the credibility of the ideology, because he had influential power as a Crusade for Justice leader.

Establishing Indigenous Ideals and Masculinity in the Chicano Movement

The Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education formalized the “1969 *Plan de Santa Barbara*” at the University of California, Santa Barbara conference, which structured the agenda of the movement.¹³ The 1969 *Plan* established the el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) which marked “the shift away from UMAS (United Mexican American Students), the Mexican American Youth Organization. (MAYO), and Mexican American Students (MAS) and a place to put *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán (Plan)* into action.”¹⁴ The conference worded the *Plan* to demonstrate, “ethnic pride in its consciousness of a ‘proud historical heritage,’ but its poetic wording creates great interpretive difficulties. It declared unity in gender-based terminology (‘brotherhood unites us, and love for our brothers makes us a people whose time has come’).”¹⁵ Scholar Ernesto B. Vigil stated that the *Plan* was “provocative in its advocacy of ‘revolutionary acts’ by youth and was traditionalist, or conservative, in its

¹¹ Maylei Blackwell, *iChicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 92.

¹² Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 92.

¹³ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 60.

¹⁴ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 60.

¹⁵ Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 98.

defense of culture, morals, and values like ‘respect’ and ‘family and home.’”¹⁶ Vigil’s statement showed that the Plan had contradictions, because it encouraged both revolution and tradition. However, the plan separated revolution to refer to public acts, while tradition remained an internal ‘defense’ within the family. Chicanos used the newfound pride in Aztlán to develop a “subaltern masculinity.”¹⁷ They used “outlaw masculinities such as pinto or cholo” as “revolutionary prototypes.”¹⁸ Corky Gonzales embodied the “figures of resistance representing self-determination, masculinity, and Chicano-ness (or people-hood).”¹⁹ He stood as the “movement icon’s self-determined, heterosexual masculinity” and “was a model for young militant Chicano men.”²⁰ Young Chicanos “idealized and deployed” the “subaltern masculinity... as a mechanism to decolonize Mexicano/Chicano people.”²¹

The *Plan* influenced the Chicana Indigenous connection to Aztlán, but Chicanos installed “subaltern masculinity” at the center of the Mexicana identity. They “adopted Aztec imagery and heritage as their own,” because they connected with the “warrior” image.²² Corky Gonzales’ 1969 Denver Conference engrained the image of Aztlán in the movement, and as scholar Vicki Ruiz has argued, it “offered a potent nationalist vision linking the Aztec past to a Chicana future.”²³ Since leaders built the movement’s foundation upon the connection, Chicanas had to work within a masculine environment- in both traditional and activist terms.

¹⁶ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 100.

¹⁷ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 96.

¹⁸ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 96.

¹⁹ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 97.

²⁰ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 97.

²¹ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 97.

²² Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 106.

²³ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 104.

Impact of the Mexica Identity on Chicanas

The traditional Indigenous folklore of Aztlán that represented men as warriors subjected women to traditional patriarchal familial structures. The new Chicano vision endorsed this nationalism through cultural heritage. The traditional images that served as a source of pride and strength for men simultaneously worked against women's liberation. Chicanas challenged the historical symbols that undermined women's contributions. They took oppressive traditional cultural and political ideals of *indita* (female indigeneity), embodied in such figures as La Llorona, La Malinche, La Virgen Maria, and La Adelita, and reinterpreted and weaponized them as symbols for Chicana imaginaries of liberation. This chapter will examine the impact of *indita* and La Adelita on the formation of the liberated Chicana imaginary, while chapter three will expand on the significance of La Llorona and La Malinche.

The traditional structure of *la familia* subjected Chicanas in the southwest during the interwar period and leading up to the 1960s to stereotypes of Indigenous women. The public representation of *indita* assumed family oligarchy, and the presence of patriarchy in the family structure reinforced the stereotypes.²⁴ Indigenous Mexican women acted against family and community control with the intent of liberation. Chicanas constructed new narratives and adapted old ones produced by the patriarchal practices embedded into the family structure. Their reconstructed prints and narratives dismantled cultural and political family ideals as they publicly

²⁴ Brenda M. Romero, "The Indita Genre of New Mexico: Gender and Cultural Identification," in *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change*, ed. Cantú and Nájera-Ramírez (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 57-58. The definition and usage of *indita* evolved from a music genre description to a representation of Indigenous and Mexican women across Mexico and United States southwest borderlands.

documented liberation from the expected behaviors. Chicanas challenged the notion of women being unwelcomed in public political spaces.

From Chicano Ideals to Chicana Imaginaries

To engage in political and cultural activism, early Chicanas used empowering techniques akin to those Lilia Soto referenced as temporal and spatial imaginaries that served as a means of active empowerment.²⁵ In her book, *Girlhood in the Borderlands: Mexican Teens Caught in the Crossroads of Migration*, Soto focused on “girlhood” as teenage girls experienced an “in-between stage of not quite being children or adults, but also of in-between stages of their identities that emanate from the categories of age, citizenship, and social membership, class, race, and gender.”²⁶ Chicanas in higher education, like teenage migrant girls, experienced the in-between stages: child to adult, girl to women, and family-dependent to self-determination. The patriarchal family structure idealized Chicanas in higher education to supportive like a mother, but helpless like a daughter.

A Chicana stated in a La Raza publication that Chicanos separated their ideal Chicanas from other women through public “tokenism.”²⁷ The tokenized women “merely had to parrot a lot of the rap that the *vatos* [dudes] put out.”²⁸ In short, ideal Chicanas were supposed to be completely supportive of the male’s agenda and actions like a mother. Chicanos praised the unwavering support by setting “her up as the true example of what the women’s role was all

²⁵ Lilia Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands: Mexican Teens Caught in the Crossroads of Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 204.

²⁶ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 22.

²⁷ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana (reprinted from La Raza, Vol.1 no.6,” [n.d.], retrieved from United Mexican American Students (UMAS) papers, University of Colorado Boulder Libraries, Special Collections, Archives and Preservation Department.

²⁸ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

about.”²⁹ Men intentionally awarded women who filled the ideal, which is problematic because the structure of “awarding” implies superior and inferior relationship. They “symbolically” placed their ideal Chicana on a pedestal and portrayed her as “the queen or Aztec princess of the organization.”³⁰ They praised the supportive characteristics in Chicanas, while also belittling her through being a paternal presence. Ruiz research found consistency in Chicanos who “envisioned themselves as placing women on bronze pedestals as Chicana queens or Aztec Princesses.”³¹ The word “bronze” referenced a common medium for statues and key label of identity as bronze people. Chicanos casted the pedestal in a beautiful appearance that represented the liberation of bronze people, however, it was a confining position.

She continued to explain that the ideal Chicana in the eyes of the Chicano “was to be possessed, cared for like a Chicano takes care of his little sister, not equal to the men.”³² The assumed “older brother” role subjected Chicanas to an inferior position of being incompetent and needing help. Also, the diction of “little sister” signaled that Chicanos viewed Chicanas as younger, which holds association to being socially and politically naïve, immature, inexperienced, and innocent. Chicanos thus built characteristics of inferiority into the definition of the ideal woman. Colorado Chicanos similarly held an idealization of a “true” Chicana and publicly tokened their preferred idealized women in this way.

Chicanas turned the tables and used such Chicano ideals as a weapon against oppression. They changed the narrative of the ideals to symbolize imaginaries of Chicana liberation. The ‘Chicana experience’ within family oligarchies and patriarchal practices, however, should not be generalized as their ideas of the ‘Chicana’ varied based on their experience with power

²⁹ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

³⁰ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

³¹ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 109.

³² United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

structures. The United States culture perpetuated a single-story that movements of color represented a synonymous front. This perception erases individualism within a movement, which reduces the complexity social activism and devalues the significance. Chicanas held disagreements about what they imaged as the liberated Chicana. Some viewed the division among Chicanas as a weakness in their activism. However, their uses of diversity proved to be a strength, because they created multiple imaginaries of female liberation.

Chicanas had varied experience within the family unit, which aligns to Soto's findings of the "distinct experiences and frames of mind" of teenage girls.³³ However, despite the distinct experience of the women Soto argued that "they all generate migrant imaginaries."³⁴ Soto observed that teenage migrant girls produced imaginaries from working with the "tools they have in the arenas that are open to them."³⁵ The girls used "tools" within the structures "open" to them. Soto acknowledged that the girls could not access the full range of arenas as some were closed. Thus, the girls worked within the opened spaces that allowed them to "envision and enact new imaginaries, temporalities, and spatialities from which new ways of being women can emerge."³⁶ Girls used the available space to visualize and act upon imaginaries, which Soto argued was a "new" form of entering womanhood. Chicanas, along with women of earlier generations, similarly created imaginaries of a liberated women.

The Legacies of *Indita*

Mexico and the United States' southwest readily incorporated the perceptions of the *indita* into their country's dominate culture. The colonization of Indigenous people villainized

³³ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 11.

³⁴ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 11.

³⁵ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 11.

³⁶ Soto, *Girlhood in the Borderlands*, 11.

“native” identity, hence the importance in reclaiming pride in Indigenous identity in Chicano nationalism. Scholar Brenda M. Romero researched New Mexico’s relationship to *indita*.³⁷ Romero found that Spanish Mexicans “denied and suppressed direct acknowledgment” of Indian relatives, and the “imposition of Spanish surnames obscured indigenous ancestries, aiding the process of suppression.”³⁸ Colonization fostered an environment that made Spanish Mexicans reject Indigenous roots and simultaneously installed a process of erasing the physical name that represent Indigenous identity and ancestry. The Indigenous identity was colonized, violently targeted, and oppressed by the United States social structures. Romero’s writing focused on New Mexico and commented generally on American southwest including Colorado.

The word, *indita*, originated in Mexico and identified a song genre.³⁹ The influence of the song genre “diffused as far north as present-day New Mexico.”⁴⁰ *Indita* emerged on the border land as an “expressive culture that reflects this process of social construction in the nineteenth century and continues to do so today.”⁴¹ The art genre appeared “to be informed by hidden and not-so-hidden cultural conceptions, some mythical, of what it means to be an Indian woman and, by extension, a *Mexicana* in New Mexico and Mexico.”⁴² *Indita* embodied the public’s perception of Indian women reflected in the cultural atmosphere that the public experienced. Popular culture repeatedly represented *indita* as a real woman, which increased the risk of the public internalizing the description as a norm.

³⁷ Romero, “Indita,” 56. The term ‘New Mexico’ refers to “part of the northern frontier of Mexico for 250 years and no a U.S. state bordering El Paso, Texas, and Juarez, Mexico” (57).

³⁸ Romero, “Indita,” 56.

³⁹ Romero, “Indita,” 56-57.

⁴⁰ Romero, “Indita,” 56.

⁴¹ Romero, “Indita,” 58.

⁴² Romero, “Indita,” 58.

The nineteenth century and colonial model of *indita* presented similar “stereotypical attitudes about indigenous women as sexual objects and as the subjects of course, crude humor.”⁴³ The perception condemned Indigenous women to a “sexual object,” which erased their personhood. The model represented an external force that dehumanized Indigenous women to the status of an object used for sexual gratification by others.

Romero argues that the concept transformed between spaces, because “while the Mexican *indita* focuses on erotic images and love, the New Mexican *indita* is more typically a lament.”⁴⁴ The initial connotation is problematic in simplifying a women’s identity. The diction of “love” restricted the reality that women held relationships beyond romantic ones. Also, it negatively perpetuated a norm that equated women with “love” and shunned women that might express something other than love. This norm created an environment where Chicanos questioned Chicana activism, because Chicanos expected the role of women to be singularly focused on love and support of men, rather than, say, espousing political opinions or career aspirations. The word “eroticism” extended the focus on love into the sexuality of Indigenous women. Cultural stereotypes rendered Indigenous women as highly erotic and sexualized their behaviors. The notion stripped women of their power and control over sexuality. When used towards Indigenous women, the framing of “love and eroticism” confined their identity to a singular sexualized concept. When repeated, this had a wide effect on the public views of the identity of Indigenous women.

Oppression was a pattern, because the public viewed the ‘New’ Mexican as “more typically a lament.” The descriptive phrase “a lament” demeaned women as overemotional and

⁴³ Romero, “Indita,” 58.

⁴⁴ Romero, “Indita,” 65.

weeping. The generalized connotation became a pattern as the negative stereotype of sadness and weakness did not fit into the projected Chicano nationalism strength. Resistance towards the traditional notion of *indita* was not easy, because the movement wanted to reclaim Indigenous beliefs and values. This belief about Indigenous women worked against their participation in the movement as equals. Chicanas had to revise these visions in order to develop imaginaries of a liberated Indigenous women. They took the negative *indita* and shaped it to benefit their liberation.

Dismantling the Oppressive Notions of *Indita*

One key avenue for these acts of reinterpretation was student newspapers. Chicanas in higher education across the United States worked within print culture to control the production of a new La Chicana identity. Colorado Chicanas challenged oppressive stereotypes by using print as a tool of resistance. Through self-expression in print they advocated for their narratives and imaginary of liberation. Blackwell's research on California universities argued for the importance of print beyond imagined communities. She pushed beyond Benedict Anderson's "notion of imagined communities to include 'image(d) communities' to call attention to the role of circulation of images in the Chicano movement print media played in the formation of political community."⁴⁵ The images produced essentially allowed a "larger imagined community that linked activists through visual images."⁴⁶ The existence of a "visual culture" allowed viewers inside a "imaged collective self-representation and depicted the struggles that were occurring within organizations and movement culture across the country."⁴⁷ Blackwell argued

⁴⁵ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 109.

⁴⁶ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 109.

⁴⁷ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 109.

that Chicanas in higher education printed with intentions as activists to produce “visual images and new symbols as a political practice and collective conversation of reimagining historical subjectivity across temporal and spatial borders.”⁴⁸ Colorado Chicanas paralleled these efforts in California, sharing in the spread of Chicano nationalist activism across the southwest.

Print culture represents one form of emancipation, because it allowed Chicanas control over their public representation and the ability to engage directly in “political and symbolic work.”⁴⁹ Blackwell argued that political and symbolic work in printing “broke down the unitary concept of the citizen-subject of Aztlán as male, thereby diversifying and multiplying the subjects of resistance enlisted in a Chicana/o project of liberation.”⁵⁰ Chicanas used print as a weapon to shatter the heightened idea of Aztlán equating “unitary” in the movement. Blackwell’s argument placed “diversifying and multiplying” of “subject of resistance” as a result of political and symbolic work. Through the state’s iconic Corky Gonzales, universities in Colorado had continuous exposure to and influence of Aztlán as the core meaning of the Chicano movement. Colorado Chicanas strategically diversified and multiplied the presence of Mexica women within printed representations. Chicanas in Colorado universities had to be intentional in how they represented the liberated women as both a warrior and still aligned with traditional ideals Chicanos held from Aztlán culture. Their direct political and symbolic work in representation then shattered the “unitary concept.”

The 1975 edition of *Diario de la Gente* at the University of Colorado Boulder published the following illustration (Figure 1). The imagery of the “La Chicana de Aztlán” changed the perception of a helpless *indita*. This woman carried a weapon on her back. The illustrator drew

⁴⁸ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 109.

⁴⁹ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 109.

⁵⁰ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 109.

the woman as serious. Her eyes demand the viewer to question what the woman is intently gazing at as she is not illustrated looking at the weapon on her back or the infant in her arms. She



Figure 1: Illustration of “La Chicana de Aztlán.” Courtesy of “Page 9 Advertisements Column 1 (Chicana Poetry),” *El Diario de la Gente*, July 17, 1975. Retrieved from the online Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection.

is focused on something beyond what is placed upon her.

One can infer from that the woman is holding an infant based on the way she is cradling the blankets. The inference of her holding an infant is not coincidental. The illustrator drew the expected gendered behaviors of bearing children, thus linking this image with established ideals as well as the goals of Chicano/as liberation for repopulation. However, the illustrator subtly manipulated the Aztlán narrative by covering the infant’s face. The infant is only noticeable when the mother holds the infant. Thus, the illustrator drew the infant dependent upon the mother, which one could interpret as a women’s power over her reproduction. The print embedded Aztlán norms, while representing an imaginary of a liberated woman through the political and symbolic work. This student’s printed image ruptured the *indita* notions of Indigenous women as “sexual objects,” “love and eroticism,” and “lament.” The illustrator’s

portrait of the woman is serious and rejects notions of women being passive, weeping, and younger. The illustrator drew a strong complex woman that refused to be perceived as a singular notion in the movement. A new imaginary of the Chicana emerged published images like these. They helped create a new imaginary that was neither just a version of Aztlán nor a male dominated vision, but instead formed a weaponized tool that resisted the singular identity.

Despite the image of female strength and power, the context for this image suggests more complexity. The Chicano movement was immersed in “iconography,” as “imagery from the Aztec world and the Mexican Revolution reinforced and challenged traditional notions of gender.”⁵¹ The iconography divided early Chicanas into identifying with either the “feminists,” the “loyalists” or “La Adelita.”⁵² Early Chicanas criticized the feminists’ identity as being “*vendidas*” or “*falsas*,” while the “loyalists believed that one should “stand by your man” and “have babies por la causa.”⁵³ Feminists and loyalists approached Chicana liberation in extreme oppositions.

Chicanas reclaimed the Indigenous story of “La Adelita” or the *soldadera* identity. They introduced stories of powerful Indigenous Mexican women into the movement. Chicanas diversified the subjects that represented the movement by adding La Adelita as a model of a revolutionist. La Adelita was a “strong, courageous woman garbed in the iconography of the Mexican Revolution,” because she “was not a threatening image to Chicano nationalists,” but instead “implied that the woman fights besides her man and cares for his needs.”⁵⁴ In this way, the identity was non-threatening to Chicanos and recognized the contributions of Chicanas. The

⁵¹ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 100.

⁵² Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 111.

⁵³ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 111.

⁵⁴ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 111.

icon was embraced because “*soldadera* embodied a conflicted middle ground between loyalist and feminist, one that could be fiercely independent, yet strongly male-identified.”⁵⁵ The image of “La Chicana de Atzlán,” above can be seen as a version of “La Adelita,” simultaneously resisting and complying with traditional notions of gender, which also held out the possibility of creating an alternate path forward. This vision led them to act strategically, to decide what and when to push the boundaries within the family patriarchy.

Historical Resistance to the Gendered Social Structure of La Familia

The formation of family structure adapts to the political and cultural climate surrounding their development. The responsibilities given to family members depend on the external forces, such as their physical environment, socioeconomic class, or sudden events that can influence their family. In the early 1900s the United States recruited labor from Mexico. Migrant families had to adapt their family structure to the societal forces in the United States. American jobs pushed their families into “migrant camps, boxcar barrios, or mining towns.”⁵⁶ The mining communities in southern Arizona and Colorado discerned a “cultural construction of class.”⁵⁷

The following characteristics separated Mexican and Mexican American communities:

Typical of working-class Mexican and Mexican-American households, the family served as the locus of production. Whether from a ranching or mining family, daughters were expected to perform a round of arduous chores. The labor of female kin, regardless of age, proved instrumental in ensuring the family’s economic survival... A strict division of labor according to gender became blurred. Yet this seemingly egalitarian assignment of tasks in no way subverted the traditional notion of “woman’s place.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 111.

⁵⁶ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 24.

⁵⁷ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 24.

⁵⁸ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 24.

Mexican and Mexican American families needed the ‘labor of female kin’ to maintain ‘the family’s economic survival.’ Thus, the family would not be prosperous without the wives, mothers, and daughters. The family structure needed the work of women, because women completed mix gendered tasks. Families dictated the space and format of women’s contributions by controlling whether the value of their actions. The traditional notion of a “woman’s place” held them to household and social expectations.⁵⁹ The gender defined tasks translated into a gendered family structure. Chicanas inside the home found themselves responsible to complete physical work and conform to female social obedience. The family oligarchy controlled the physical and social bodies of early Chicanas.

Early Chicanas in the interwar period engaged in subtle methods of resistance to this regime. For example, they “rationalized, resisted, and evaded parental supervision.”⁶⁰ Parents regulated the “actions and attitudes” of young Chicanas, because “within families, young women, perhaps more than their brothers, were expected to uphold certain standards.”⁶¹ Parental control was a “unquestioned prerogative” that subjected daughters to obey patriarchal practices.⁶² Early Chicanas did not interpret the expectations as cruel and unusual, as they were part of the family structure. The cultural ideals Americans and Chicanos held about the family conflicted. Chicanas in higher education worked to critique and defend the Chicano family. They critiqued the internal patriarchal power dynamic that subjected them to be obedient to male voice. However, they also defended the Chicano family from America’s racialization.

⁵⁹ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 24.

⁶⁰ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 51.

⁶¹ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 54.

⁶² Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 54.

The University of Colorado Boulder Libraries, Special Collections, Archives and Preservation Department collected printed documents from the United Mexican American Students. The university held a printed publication of “El Movimiento y La Chicana” reprinted from La Raza. The publication directly addresses the experience of women within the family. The writing exposed Colorado Chicanas to new literary perspectives.

The writer established childhood as a defining moment in Chicana identity, and stated that “most Chicanas have been pre-conditioned (brainwashed) into the idea that they cannot speak up or be smarter than their men.” The dismissal of the Chicana’s academic accomplishments perpetuated a feeling that female education not valuable. The student immediately separates her critique of the family from white women’s liberation: “Now this may sound like an Anglo women’s liberation thing, but the Chicana has had it in her family not to talk against the father not to disagree with him on anything. The Chicanita while being raised is to never question the authority, rules, or actions of her father nor of her brothers.”⁶³ The student addressed the structure of expectations and control in the family. She is critiquing how young Chicanas grow up in a space of social obedience to “authority rules, or actions of her father nor of her brothers.” The repetitive exposure to a power dynamic holds male figures as an authoritative presence becomes normalized. The Chicana is “kept in a closed shell, protected from all the “evils” in the world by the men in her family.”⁶⁴ The protective rhetoric implied that Chicanas cannot defend herself from the “evils” and need the surveillance of males.

The student presented two ways of Chicanas who grew up in a male authoritative environment might approach the student movement. The first assumes that the Chicana “has

⁶³ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

⁶⁴ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

been so affected by male dominance that she is easily influenced by any man from there on... or she naively falls for the guys that radicalize her out of her pants.” The student diminished the experience of Chicanas that do not openly resist the family structure. They also shamed women that had sexual relationships by calling Chicanas “naïve.” The second approach spoke about the “well-protected hermana” that entered the “organization sincere in her heart to do something for her people.”⁶⁵ The hermana is “welcomed by a group of guys who try to get her into bed before she can ask ‘What is the Chicano movement all about?’”⁶⁶ Both scenarios situated a Chicana’s initial interaction with a student organization in a space that required them to confront a power dynamic among the men and women. The Chicana connected the normalized male dominance in the home transferred to the power dynamic among male and female students. This student openly deviated from the social norm of authoritative practices.

Colorado Chicana women defended the Chicano family from the United States Welfare System. Women fought the United States social structure that “misused, misinterpreted and misdirected” Chicano culture. They challenged the research of child abuse being used on their families because, “no research has ever been done on Chicano culture in the areas of child abuse.”⁶⁷ Patricia Estrada resisted the unjust welfare practices by “refusing to accept child care provided by the Welfare Department.”⁶⁸ She explained how she is “the only one who can provided child care to my child because of our culture.”⁶⁹ Estrada actions address the reality of United States child care, foster homes, and schools neglecting cultural identities. Colorado

⁶⁵ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

⁶⁶ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

⁶⁷ Carol Lease, “Chicanas Fight Welfare Injustices,” *Big Mama Rag*, July 1, 1974.

⁶⁸ Lease, “Chicanas Fight Welfare.”

⁶⁹ Lease, “Chicanas Fight Welfare.”

Chicanas called the attention and support of “all women’s groups to fight” for the rights of mothers.

The Chicana mothers dismantled a U.S. government structure that neglect their rights. Their activism is ignited as they stated that “we mother do this work because it has to be done. We’re doing it for the agencies that don’t do the job that they are supposed to be doing.”⁷⁰ Estrada’s wrote that she “would like to see a woman lawyer working with Chicana Welfare Rights.”⁷¹ Her statement contributed to the collective liberated Chicana imaginary, by supporting Chicanas to enter and succeed in higher education. Moreover, Colorado Chicanas resisted family oligarchy and patriarchal practices. “Through their writings, Chicanas problematized and challenged prescribed gender roles at home (familial oligarchy); at school (the home economics track); and at meetings (the clean-up committee).”⁷² Chicanas changed the cultural and political ideals the movement held about a women’s role. They used the tools within their arena to expand the imaginary of Chicana liberation. Chicanas used verbal and written forms of activism, and as the social climate altered and Chicana entered universities the ways in which they organized and resisted continued to develop.

⁷⁰ Lease, “Chicanas Fight Welfare.”

⁷¹ Lease, “Chicanas Fight Welfare.”

⁷² Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 108.

Chapter Two: United States Social System: Higher Education

Students of color in the United States education system have historically experienced a paradox between school rhetoric of ideals and systematic practices. Part of this results from the fact that educational systems in this country were originally established by and for white, elite men. The United States identity rested on the reputation of formal education symbolizing a well-rounded and structured society. Since the late nineteenth century, however, the United States used public institutions of higher education as a tool of democracy. The repeated democratic rhetoric promoted a public illusion that schools were a representative space.¹ However, students of color challenged the idealized rhetoric as they experienced systemic racism within the school structure.

Americans in positions of power designed higher education for white American males. Students of color and women had to fight to enter an institution embedded in racism and sexism. Barriers, such as university “requirements” for attendance, controlled the makeup of the student population. Chicanas on university campuses challenged the universities attempts to hinder their admissions, success, and graduation rate. Primary, secondary, and higher education subjugated Chicanas students through created and maintained gendered and racialized notions.

The Civil Rights of 1964 established the legal condemnation of racism in schools, however, investigation into Southwest found that school systems had “not adopted policies and programs to enable Mexican-American students to participate fully in the benefits of the educational process.”² The southwest regions included Arizona, California, Colorado, New

¹ Evelyn Aucutt, review of *For the Common Good: A New History of Higher Education in America*, by Charles Dorn, *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, January 19, 2019. doi:[10.1177/1521025118825106](https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025118825106).

² “Report Scores Chicano Education in Southwest,” *Golden Transcript*, May 2, 1972.

Mexico, and Texas. The state's public-school practices continued to function as an oppressive tool towards Chicana students. The U.S Commission on Civil Rights reported the "variety of exclusionary practices" used to "deny the Chicano student the use of his language, a pride in his heritage, and the support of his community."³ While condemning one set of exclusionary historical practices, by gendering the Chicana student as a male, the report sustained another one. The report neglected to recognize the presence of Chicana students that endured the same treatment from exclusionary practices and their right to education. The report may have focused on male pronouns as a generalized identifier of Chicana students, but the pattern of avoiding Chicana narratives and needs was much broader. In response, Chicanas from childhood to adulthood continuously defied the tools of oppression in schooling.

The United States incorporated Civil Rights legislation that presumably represented equal treatment under the law in education. However, Chicana/o students continued to endure inequality in school environments that maintained unjust practices. Scholar Angela Valenzuela argued that schools in the 1990s restricted the ability for Chicana/o students have to just educational experience, through a process she calls "subtractive schooling."

Valenzuela's 1990s in-depth study of a public high school in Houston, Texas found that "rather than functioning as a conduit for the attainment of the American dream, this large, overcrowded, and underfunded urban school reproduces Mexican youth as a monolingual, English-speaking, ethnic minority, neither identified with Mexico nor equipped to function competently in America's mainstream."⁴ Valenzuela listed the external and internal factors that discredit America's rhetoric of schools being a pathway to the American dream. Also, she touched on the

³ "Report Scores."

⁴ Angela Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1999), 3.

development of students' racial identity. She argued that "schooling is a *subtractive* process" as "it divests these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure."⁵ Her argument echoed the concerns Chicanas regularly voiced with in the movement.

Valenzuela's research and analysis pertain to the culture of secondary schools after the Chicano movement. However, her academic theories of "subtractive schooling" as an immersive practice applied similarly to Chicanas prior to her researched time frame. She obtained the theory from approaching the systematic issues in the United States southwest public schools. Despite schools installing the educational reforms demanded by social movements the core systemic structure of education remained within a new appearance.

Based on Valenzuela's argument state policies subjugated Chicane students to Americanization through institutionalized "subtractive schooling" practices. The act of 'schooling' students subtracted the "identifications" of a "student's cultural and linguistic knowledge and heritage" which harms their socially and academically.⁶ The schools inherited acts created an environment that presupposed that Chicane students consented to American assimilation. Educational programs such as, English as a Second Language (ESL) represented the school's intent for student Americanization. This form of 'schooling' silences the student's Spanish-speaking identity as they are expected to speak, communicate, and learn English. Valenzuela analyzed ESL programs as one confirmation of the practice of subtractive schooling and harmful implications on the student's identity.

A Chicana's Early Encounter with School Structured Racism

⁵ Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling*, 3.

⁶ Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling*, 25.

The 1965 Denver, Colorado court case of “*Keyes v. School District no.1*” considered evidence of de facto segregation, a year after the Commission on Civil Rights report on the Southwest school structures. In response to the court case, the *UCCS Weekly* editor arranged anecdotal reflections from Denver students of color. A printed reflection on Colorado public schools, written by an unnamed Chicana, on the bottom of the formal piece, depicted the school’s abuse towards women students of color.

In her writing, the anonymous Chicana recalled an instance where a teacher purposely demeaned a student in front of the classroom. “In class, the teacher never called on you when you knew the answers but only when you didn’t. I remember being in 7th grade and a friend of mine couldn’t read, and the teacher making her stand up and read, then told her the reason she couldn’t was because she was lazy.”⁷ The first sentence of her anecdote confirmed that teachers intentionally and repeatedly humiliated students. The teacher’s abuse of power diminished the student’s academic confidence and created a hostile environment. The teacher also verbally attacked the student. They blamed the student for failing and said that “she was lazy.” The teachers openly bullied the students. The student’s experience draws attention the structural flaws in schools that allow teachers with power to bully students.

The unnamed Chicana writer further unpacked how the educational system attacked her integrity, gender, and race:

I remember teachers not believing that I did my homework myself. I remember finally felling beat and nothing inside but hate. Once a teacher pointed out what a model student I was because I never opened my mouth. Was that a laugh. Most of all I remember asking for help and being told school wasn’t important for my kind that I would end up getting married anyway. Funny but this hasn’t stopped, and my little brother is going through the same thing. Only I know he isn’t taking the same shit I did.⁸

⁷ “Minority Affairs,” *UCCS Weekly- UCCS*, April 24, 1973.

⁸ “Minority.”

She noted the instances where teachers accused her of cheating in disbelief of her academic abilities. In the teacher's definition, a "model student" "never opened my [their] mouth," which encouraged submissive behaviors. The following quote represented the double standard Chicanas encountered in education: "asking for help and being told school wasn't important for my kind and that I would end up getting married anyway."⁹ The comment spoke to how the educational system discouraged Chicanas in academics. The system racialized and gendered her as a "kind" that did not need education, because she would be a wife. Racialized and gendered notions in schools restricted the student's right to academic help. This writer resisted the corrupted educational system by sharing and confronting her story through writing. Her testimony challenged the actions of her little brother's current teachers, while drawing attention to the gendered difference in treatment.

Young Chicanas knew that primary and secondary schooling unfairly racialized and gendered them as inferior students. Thus, Chicanas who arrived in higher education were already trained in resisting racial and sexual oppression in educational structures.

Colorado Chicana Activism in the Denver Public High Schools

Chicana students contributed immense value to the student movement, however their stories were rarely mentioned. Until recently, most historical narratives of the Denver High School walkouts made them primarily masculine events. A few years after the 1964 Civil Rights Report, students in Denver, Colorado protested racism within their high school. The initial outburst of student protest took place on March 20, 1969 at West High School. From there, the protest spread, and eventually "resulted in solidarity walkouts in every secondary school in

⁹ "Minority."

Denver's barrios."¹⁰ The students' actions dramatized the emerging Chicano social justice movement, since "walkouts became city wide, leading to the bloodiest school protests in Denver's history."¹¹ Vigil argued that the Denver High School walkouts "radicalized a generation of Denver's Chicano youth."¹² The walkouts played a significant role in the formation of solidarity among Colorado students and boosted students' confidence to report experience of racism within a school structure.

As Vigil referenced, though less publicized at the time, two young women, Jeanie Perez and Priscilla Martinez, were the "catalyst" of the high school walkouts.¹³ Perez attended a youth summer program organized by the Crusade "called the 'freedom school,' where—to instill ethnic pride—youths were taught rudimentary 'Chicano' history, culture, and politics."¹⁴ She then applied her knowledge to her experiences in school as she "began to correct public school teachers who mispronounced her surname."¹⁵ Perez entered a deadlock with her teacher, Harry Schafer, as "she corrected him and asked that he pronounce her name correctly."¹⁶ Mr. Schafer's response "ridiculed Perez and [he] deliberately began to pronounce her surname as 'Paris.'"¹⁷ Teachers that intend to mispronounce the surnames of Chicanx students' blatantly disrespected the students' identity and family. While Perez endured ridicule from an adult in power, she persisted to challenge Mr. Schafer's racist classroom environment.

¹⁰ Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 81.

¹¹ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 81.

¹² Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 81.

¹³ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 81.

¹⁴ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 81.

¹⁵ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 81.

¹⁶ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 82.

¹⁷ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 82.

Perez directly challenged a position of power in schools as “she contradicted him about history, citing what she had learned during the freedom school.”¹⁸ When Mr. Schafer “challenged her to bring Crusade members to speak in his class,” she did.¹⁹ The conversation between members and students occurred, because of Perez, and inspired students to report incidents of racism to the Crusade. Students began to organize, and adults started to endorse the student’s demands for change.²⁰

Vigil described Perez as a “catalyst,” but based on the index he only listed her twice.²¹ The focus, in his and many other narratives, came to rest on the dramatic action of the walkout and the subsequent clashes with Denver Police – which featured male students much more prominently. These narratives diminished the importance for students, scholars, and the public to learn about how Perez deviated from the social education structure and or to credit her as a founder of the student movement. Perez experienced, what Valenzuela coined as “subtractive schooling,” in West High School in Denver, Colorado, and she challenged it. Perez utilized the tools within her arena to confront and resist the school’s structure of power. This was more than just a catalyst. Push back against aggressive assimilation marked a key form of identity formation within the movement.

Chicanas and Liberation in Colorado

The 1969 Denver Youth Liberation Conference occurred shortly after the Denver High School walkouts. Chicanas at the conference experienced the intersection of racialized and gendered space. These women navigated between multiple identities – race, gender, sexuality,

¹⁸ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 82.

¹⁹ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 82.

²⁰ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 83.

²¹ Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, 478.

and politics. The culture and environment at the 1969 Denver Conference influenced the foundation of the Colorado Chicana identity, significantly affecting the level of liberation Chicanas envisioned in higher education. In short, the imaginary of what Chicanas viewed as a liberated woman changed as they interacted with personal, educational, and societal factors.

The *Golden Daily Transcript* quoted “Enriqueta Vasquez of San Cristobal, N.M., who led a discussion on the role of women and children in the Hispano movement during the conference, said women and youngsters would have to better educate themselves.”²² On the one hand, Vasquez’s statement placed women into an academic settings to advance their education. On the other hand, however, she grouped the intelligence of “women and youngsters” together. Vasquez stated that “until we have liberated men, we cannot think of a women’s liberation.”²³ The ability to think about a liberated woman depended on the liberation of men. Vasquez’s argument demonstrated the gendered expectations for women to support the man until he is liberated. Maylei Blackwell mentioned that the following statement circulated after the conference.

The representative of the caucus, when it was time to present the workshop report to the full conference, stated, “It was the consensus of the group that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated.” Some activists who were at the caucus meeting were shocked to hear this proclamation at the final plenary, because, contrary to the statement, at the meeting of the women’s caucus strategies for gaining fuller participation for women within the movement were widely discussed.²⁴

The internal discussion about Chicanas “gaining fuller participation” contradicted the statement reported at the “final plenary.” Blackwell argued that the Chicana statement “illustrates the contested and contestatory nature of Chicana feminism and the difficulty of articulating a new

²² “Chicanos Plan Creation of Independent Nation,” *Golden Transcript*, March 31, 1970.

²³ “Chicanos Plan.”

²⁴ Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 139.

kind of Chicana political subject within the confine of an emergent, masculinist nationalism.”²⁵

Blackwell identified the practice of “gender insurgencies” which she defined as an action

where subversive spaces were constituted in the movement’s organizational structures, largely through women’s caucuses, which kept the focus on the question of inequality of women. When direct confrontation on women’s issues was not tactically possible and not politically strategic, many demands were negotiated below the surface of public movement spaces.²⁶

Blackwell usage of “gender insurgencies” referenced a mode of resistance that Chicanas unknowingly participated in. The act of confrontation inside the movement represented liberation, because the movement situated women caucuses in “subversive spaces” with the intention to sweep their concerns underneath the “public” platform.

Chicanas Entering Higher Education

The United States developed the structure of higher education, but the purpose of higher education depends on the public’s social usage and rhetoric of the institution. Charles Dorn argued that higher education plays a role in shaping the United States prevailing social ethos.²⁷ During periods of war women often enter the work force in greater numbers, but the return of men from war then tend to decrease their employment opportunities.²⁸ A similar pattern exists in higher education. During World War II, universities had an influx of women, however, after the G.I. Bill men returning home entered higher education in large numbers. The demographic of students shifted to be predominately male. Universities adapted to the United States social

²⁵ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 139.

²⁶ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 139.

²⁷ Aucutt, review of *For the Common Good*.

²⁸ “Women, Marriage, Education, and Occupation in the United States from 1940-2000,” Dartmouth College, History 90.01: Topics in Digital History, U.S. History Through Census Data, last modified November 3, 2016, <https://journeys.dartmouth.edu/censushistory/2016/11/03/women-marriage-and-education-in-the-united-states-from-1940-2000/>.

climate and during the 1950s post-war era social norms emphasized “homemaking as women’s primary role.” Still the legacies of the war gave some women the desire for greater education or a career, both of which “destabilized” the traditional caregiver expectations. But explicit sexism in university admissions and on campus challenged the attendance of women. Women entered higher education often to pursue a career, because it offered “a path in which individuals build on their experiences to create a holistic story,” instead of a “temporary” or supplemental job.²⁹

The post war era altered the resources and opportunities for the Chicano family. The Mexican American youth grew up with the “gains of the civil rights movement and the increased access to higher education provided by the G.I. Bill.”³⁰ Blackwell argued that the culture surrounding higher education appealed to some veterans who, “sought the security and improvement of life chances for their families by sending their children to college, due to the G.I. Bills of 1944, 1952, and 1966, in their search for the ever elusive American dream.”³¹ Universities began to expand the number of students in the 1960s to 1980s to accommodate the influx of baby boomers attending higher education.

Social and cultural reforms increased the attendance of women in higher education during 1960s to 1970s.³² The women’s movement “demanded equal rights in education on the basis of equality for all in education and under the law should include women of all races as well, not just men of all races.”³³ The movement for equality in education challenged sexism, however, women of color continued to experience sexism and racism in their attempts to succeed in college.

²⁹ Dartmouth College, “Women, Marriage, Education, and Occupation.”

³⁰ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 45.

³¹ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 45-46.

³² Dartmouth College, “Women, Marriage, Education, and Occupation.”

³³ Dartmouth College, “Women, Marriage, Education, and Occupation.”

Admittance of students of color increased in the mid-to late 1960s as “Mexican American youth went to college in unprecedented numbers, they found campus environments that were a radical departure from what anyone in their families or communities had experienced.”³⁴ Among those women who were able to enter during this time, Chicanas constantly had to prove their right to education to the university’s faculty and white students, as well as to their fellow Chicano students. The racialized and gendered perspectives of Chicanas relentlessly challenged the admissions, presence on campus, and success Chicanas in higher education.

Women of color demanded educational equity and received formal action from the United States government in the 1960s. Modern legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Higher Education Act of 1965 and the enforcement of Affirmative Action order 11246 in 1965 altered the University campuses. They entered an environment that granted “new social freedom for some Chicanas: ‘Education gave them freedom. They didn’t have to cook for the entire family or brothers. They could devote their whole lives to study and work.’”³⁵ They moved into what they may have imagined as a liberated Chicana. The new space offered new opportunities for women to explore identities, academics, organizations, and relationships.

However, Blackwell argued that of the small number of admitted Chicana students many like Anna NietoGomez felt “isolation, homesickness, and invisibility” that would “led to depression.”³⁶ The communities of love and support Chicanas left pushed them to begin finding new ones. NietoGomez found “others like her on campus,” which “helped her survive, and the movement provided a haven.”³⁷ To survive in a new environment people need social interactions, communities and friendships. These basic needs are not unique to the Chicana

³⁴ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 54-55.

³⁵ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 55.

³⁶ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 58.

³⁷ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 58.

experience, however, the limited number of other Chicanas on campus finding a sense of belonging difficult. Chicanas in higher education negotiated relationships and alliances with other students of color within the white student population.

Colorado Universities and Educational Opportunity Programs

In the 1970s Colorado Chicanas found a sense of community in “UMAS [United Mexican American Students], MAP [Migrant Action Program], Farm Labor Task Force, La Raza Unida.”³⁸ The climate in college campuses shifted to accept and promote cultural diversity through school recruiting programs and student organizations. Changes in government legislation promoted these sudden shifts. The era of Civil Rights policies in universities needs to be situated in the context of the Cold War and the United States’ exaggerated fear of political ideologies. The United States used the facade of graciously spreading democracy to enter new uncolonized countries. The notions of democracy covered the United States imperialist agenda, but countries abroad viewed their message as hypocritical because of de jure and de facto racism in the country. Professor Seema Sohi argued that civil rights movements need to be analyzed in the context the United States international policies.³⁹ The impact of the Cold War era on the internal treatment and representation of the Chicano community should be explored by other researchers. For the purpose of this thesis the global context impacted the acceptance and promotion of race and gender. University campuses did not change racialized and gendered policies out of the blue but acted with intention to appear as the democratic nation they promoted internationally.

³⁸ John L. Espinosa, “Chicano Students Should be United,” *El Diario de la Gente*, October 26, 1973.

³⁹ Seema Sohi, lecture on “Cold War Images and Realities,” *Asian/Pacific American Communities: Race, Empire, and Migration*, March 5, 2020.

The University of Colorado Boulder had two substantial Educational Opportunity Programs that they installed to promote democracy and diversity on campus: the 1972 United Mexican-American Students- Education Opportunity Program (UMAS-EOP) and the 1973 Migrant Action Program (MAP). The university administrators added MAP a means to silence and disrupt the unity from the original UMAS-EOP. Thus, administrators used different marketing strategies. The UMAS-EOP advertisement titled “Chicano Students Wanted” sold the opportunity of higher education to all Chicano students:

Have you considered continuing your education in the best academic environment in the state of Colorado? Are you an ambitious Mexican American, Spanish-surnamed, Chicano or Hispano individual or G.E.D. students, married or single, rich or poor? Then you may qualify for admission into the University of Colorado through the United Mexican-American Student- Education Opportunity Program (UMAS-EOP).⁴⁰

The advertisement’s title and phrases encouraged all Chicanos to apply regardless of their racial identity, romantic relationships, socioeconomic class or credential. The rapid-fire questions, one after another, evoked a feeling of urgency in the message. The push to admit Chicano students in higher education followed the 1972 to 1973 *Keyes v. School District No.2, Denver* court case that claimed de factor segregation in Colorado’s school system. The reaction was not a coincidence but strategic act to increase the representation of students of color. The university used the appearance of racial inclusion to symbolize democracy on the home front.

The advertisement only mentioned the Chicano student and focused on recruiting males. The phrase “Are you an ambitious Mexican American,” produced a dismissive attitude towards students of color, implying that most Mexcian Americans were not ambitious. The advertisement’s application process required the student to be a high school graduate or possess a GED diploma, while MAP advertised four qualifications applicants needed: “1.) He must be a

⁴⁰ “Chicano Students Wanted,” *El Diario de la Gente*, November 3, 1972.

migrant or seasonal agricultural worker or the son or daughter of a migrant or seasonal agricultural worker 2.) He must possess a GED Certificate or high school diploma 3.) He must be in need of financial aid 4.) He must have a sincere desire to obtain a college education.”

The program included Chicanas as daughters of migrant workers but continued the dismissive attitude in the descriptive list that “he must have a sincere desire.” Compared to the 1972 advertisement this 1973 “Migrant Action Program” printed details about the intention of the program, who reviews the applications, and student services provide. “The MAP is also designed to provide a small community within the complex structure of the University so that a student can relate to people who have similar backgrounds. This assures that students will not feel lost at the University.”⁴¹ The statement implied that student’s in the UMAS-EOP did not have a “small community,” or established student relationships. The advertisement evoked sympathy towards students that “feel lost at the University.”

However, John L. Espinosa, a Chicano student at the University of Colorado Boulder argued that before the UMAS-EOP and MAP on campus “it was a time when the name- United Mexican American Students—meant exactly what the name implied – ‘united.’”⁴² Espinosa paid tribute to “unity of the first Chicano students” that fought for Educational Opportunity Programs and the *movimiento*.⁴³ The concern about “losing that unity” came from the loss of “togetherness” in terms of Chicanos that “ate together, partied together, marched together and occasionally, cried together.”⁴⁴ However, he gendered the lost “togetherness” as a “feeling of *carnalismo* [brotherhood]” that early Chicano students had partly as a “defense against the

⁴¹ “Migrant Action Program,” *El Diario de la Gente*, March 6, 1973.

⁴² Espinosa, “Chicano Students Should be United.”

⁴³ Espinosa, “Chicano Students Should be United.”

⁴⁴ Espinosa, “Chicano Students Should be United.”

unknowns- both real and imagined- of the university.”⁴⁵ Espinosa wanted the togetherness of Chicano brothers against the institution. His description of “togetherness” was a “small community” that university administrators stated was lost. Espinosa directly stated that “much of the confusion lies in that there are two EOP programs thru [sic] which most Chicanos come to school.”⁴⁶ The separated and focused recruitment strategy for Mexican American students and migrant students was not the issue, but the university’s tactics of separating students was, for Espinosa, problematic.

Colorado Chicana Priscilla Falcon reiterated the power in attending universities and being “able to come together with other people that looked like us.”⁴⁷ President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society program influenced the University of Colorado Boulder MAP which recruited Falcon to attend. She mentioned that “the MAP students... were told, don’t talk to the UMAS organization, because those are the radical folks. Those are the people that are going to get you in trouble. Those are the people that are doing the protesting.”⁴⁸ The university created two separate educational opportunity programs a year after each other, because the first UMAS-EOP had organized and resisted the structural oppression on campuses. The university could not stop UMAS-EOP from protesting and participating in the Chicano movement. So, they created a second program with the intent to advertise, influence, and separate Chicana students. They used a program that appeared liberal to weaken the unity among UMAS-EOP, because they associated “protesting” with “radical,” and “trouble.” Falcon deviated from the universities’ scare tactics of

⁴⁵ Espinosa, “Chicano Students Should be United.”

⁴⁶ Espinosa, “Chicano Students Should be United.”

⁴⁷ *Symbols of Resistance: A Tribute to the Martyrs of the Chicano Movement*, directed by Brenda Montalfo and Freedom Archives (Firm)(Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2017), 32:05-32:14.

⁴⁸ *Symbols of Resistance*, 33:11- 33:23.

marketing UMAS as trouble and MAP as model students. She did not allow the university to dictate her behavior and began participating in the organization.⁴⁹

The two Educational Opportunity Programs advertisements were not intended to recruit Chicanas. If institutions of higher education did not recruit Chicanas and secondary schools encourage students in academia, then who did? Who recruited Chicanas to attend universities?

Attending University – and Dropping Out

Chicanas already in higher education recruited other young women to their universities. Blackwell noted that California Chicanas actively participated in recruiting high school student. However, “only one-third of new college recruits were women, and over half of those women dropped out before their junior year.”⁵⁰ In Boulder Colorado, Priscilla Falcon was “appointed to recruit from high schools in the San Lui, Valley” and recalled how “women led a lot of the fundraising events,” and were “involved in the political organizing part of it.”⁵¹ Falcon held multiple roles in helping different areas of the movement. She found helping to be “empowering” and recognized the “young Chicanas involved in those processes of building the organization.”⁵² Chicanas advocated for larger leadership roles, however, it is important not to discredit the hard work of recruiting and fundraising because those acts built. Falcon’s ability to be multifaceted was an asset to the student movement, because she advanced several areas. Thus, Chicanas approached being shut out of leadership roles by infiltrating and building the movement.

⁴⁹ *Symbols of Resistance*, 33:30- 33:36.

⁵⁰ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 62.

⁵¹ *Symbols of Resistance*, 34:05- 34:18.

⁵² *Symbols of Resistance*, 34:46- 34:52.

Blackwell's research looked into a women's support group "Las Mujeres" that investigated the disproportionate ratio of Chicanas to Chicanos attending a university and rate of dropping-out:

They discovered two important facts related to the dropout rate of Chicanas on college campus. First, Chicanas did not fail because of academic deficiencies; in fact, Chicanas reflected higher grade point average overall. Second, nebulous support from faculty, peer group, and counselors, as well as from the family, provided little psychological reinforcement for the Chicana to stay in college.⁵³

Chicanas performed academically higher than Chicanos. However, they indirectly experienced family and social control that did not limit the freedom of Chicanos.

Colorado Chicana, Joyce Valdez published a summary of the 1974 "Chicana in Education" colloquium. The discussions from the conference recommended the following,

1.) Encourage Chicanas to attend institutions of education (423 of the 941 SCSC Chicano Students to females) 2.) Reduce the drop-out rate among Chicana students (according to Sutton, the highest among any SCSC student group) 3. Hire more SCSC Chicana counselors, instructors and tutors 4.) Develop a sense of sisterhood among Chicanas and possible organize a Chicana organization 5.) Develop an awareness among college and public school officials of the needs and goals of Chicana students.⁵⁴

The recommendations focused on recruiting and retaining Chicana students through faculty representation and building a "sisterhood." La Mujeres investigation in California echo similar issues.

Blackwell conceptualized the control of family expectations on a Chicana's emotion, as some felt internal guilt towards "not contributing to the household income of their families and social pressures to get married."⁵⁵ Chicanas attending universities and pursuing careers was a form of emancipation, because they resisted a gendered norm. As women, many Chicanas faced a "contradiction" man did not experience, which was between "new freedoms and expectations

⁵³ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 62.

⁵⁴ Joyce Valdez, "HISTORICAL EVENT Chicana Problems Noted," *Arrow- CSU Pueblo*, February 28, 1974.

⁵⁵ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 62.

and continued gender inequality and the same sexual double standard.”⁵⁶ The issue was not about what women wanted to do, but their freedom and power to decide for themselves. This contradiction forced young Chicanas to quickly make big life decisions. Many of them chose to weaponize their own education to destroy the oppressive female role.

Chicana students took measures to reduce the drop-out rate, but formal institutions, like the University of Southern Colorado, did not tackle the issue until the 1980s. Chicanas on campus and the Women’s Caucus pushed for a “one-year study to identify and help resolve problems causing a high Chicana dropout rate at USC.”⁵⁷ Other studies on Chicanas identified problems such as “lack of role models to identify with, financial disadvantages, and lack of good advertisement.”⁵⁸ Before the formal study, students “pioneered an on-campus community service-oriented sorority to attempt to retain Chicanas.”⁵⁹ Colorado students formed the Tarascan Center that “intended to provide academic and personal support for minority woman, specifically the Chicana.”⁶⁰ The communities and centers Chicanas formed is evidence of their continuous work to resist the direct and indirect pressure in higher education.

Chicanas’ Perspectives on Higher Education

Colorado Chicana Evelyn Martinez argued that the “relevance of an education for the Chicana should not be questioned.”⁶¹ Chicanas held a firm stance on the importance of education, but how Chicanas should use their education depended on the individual. Chicanas in higher education learned “technical and professional skills, aside from those domestic skills of

⁵⁶ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 62.

⁵⁷ Pat Santos, “Chicana Dropout Probed,” *Arrow- CSU Pueblo*, January 31, 1980.

⁵⁸ Santos, “Chicana Dropout Probed.”

⁵⁹ Santos, “Chicana Dropout Probed.”

⁶⁰ Joe Rodriguez, “Tarascan Center supports Chicanas,” *Arrow- CSU Pueblo*, November 17, 1977.

⁶¹ Evelyn Martinez, “What Strength in La Chicana!,” *El Diario de la Gente*, July 13, 1973.

maintaining her role in the home.”⁶² Martinez referenced that Chicanas that attended college qualified for “better job opportunities in highly skilled professions and community services for la raza.”⁶³ Her statement illustrated that Chicanas wanted professional skills, but ironically it is interesting that Chicanas need to pursue higher education for better opportunities in La Raza. Higher education becomes a symbol for competence, which circles into the idea that Chicanas need to constantly prove their abilities.

Martinez argued that Chicanas should be educated to “adequately provide their family with care, nutrition, education of the children, parental/child relationships, etc.”⁶⁴ She imagined educated motherhood as the future for educated Chicanas. For Martinez, a women’s education allowed her to “supplement her husband’s low income, or often, as a result of her husband’s



Figure 2: Illustration of “La Chicana.” Courtesy of “La Chicana,” *El Diario de la Gente*, July 13, 1973. Retrieved from the online Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection.

⁶² Martinez, “What Strength.”

⁶³ Martinez, “What Strength.”

⁶⁴ Martinez, “What Strength.”

sudden illness or death, she is dependent on for the sole support of her family.”⁶⁵ Martinez’s imaginary of a liberated women was one that had the ability to financial support the family with or without the father.

The editor of *El Diario* arranged the drawing of “La Chicana” (Figure 2) underneath Martinez’s article “What strength in La Chicana!”⁶⁶ The paper did not list the student’s name, but the placement the image underneath Martinez’s words evoked a visualized conception of La Chicana. The student’s drawing featured a woman carrying a sleeping infant and rifle on her back. The student’s work followed similar themes portrayed in chapter one’s “La Chicana de Aztlan” portrait. The titles represented how the artist envisioned the different women and what readers internalized as what represented a La Chicana. Although the images represent two different identities, they all focus on three symbols: the women with a serious face, a rifle on her back ready to fight, and innocent child.

The artist, similar to chapter one, drew a serious facial expression that was softened by the gentle lines in her face and hair. The women’s stance and direct eye contact express bravery. Unlike chapter one, the artist included the face of the sleeping infant, which could symbolize the eventful waking of future generations after the mother fights on behalf of for a better future. This image embodied the strength of La Chicana to carry both the life of a child and death of a weapon on her back. The child and rifle side by side represent a dichotomy between innocence and weaponized intention.

The artist drew the rifle closer to the mother and in front of the child, which could reference the women’s priorities. An interpretation of the visual as La Chicana first using the weapon in the Chicano movement to protect the sleeping child.

⁶⁵ Martinez, “What Strength.”

⁶⁶ “La Chicana,” *El Diario de la Gente*, July 13, 1973.

The artist portrayed the strength and confidence in La Chicanas in complex ways. On the one hand, it suggests determination to protect of the family and role of a mother but on the other, the visualization resisted the need of a husband or father and directly focused on an independent educated La Chicana capable of providing for her family. The drawing of “La Chicana” represented Martínez’s imaginary of a liberated Chicana. The woman’s clothing visually supported Aztlán but by herself she symbolized a woman capable of carrying both the movement and family independently. The primary and higher education system gendered and racialized Chicanas, however, their forms of resistance dismantled oppressive expectations within the educational space.

Chapter Three: Chicanas Inside the Chicano Movement

Becky Marrujo, a University of Colorado Boulder student and Chicana activist found both empowerment and frustration within the emerging Chicano movement. In 1973, she described a domino effect of ignorance that produced and reinforced confining stereotypes about Chicanas, even among male counterparts in the movement. She argued that the “traditional ways of looking at La Chicana, without taking into account the role changes the Chicana is undergoing today” caused ignorance that resulted in simplistic generalizations that prevented women from full participation in the movement.¹ These traditional view stemmed from the foundation of Aztlán and nationalism in the movement. Moreover, some scholars have perpetuated these generalizations, obscuring Chicanas’ significant activism and maintaining static and simplified perceptions of traditional role which has in turn influenced the public’s perceptions of Chicanas.

The Chicano movement’s internal structure maintained a hierarchy which itself depended on generalized notions of leaders and followers, which were typically gendered. As a Chicana in La Raza wrote, “when a carnala [sister] was given a title, a definite position, it was mostly a head secretarial position. There is no denying that many organizations need an office to run smoothly and if a woman can do it, orale, but this is where most women have remained.”² Chicanos justified the restricted Chicana mobility by repeatedly saying ““But, you’re a better worker, more together and revolutionary than the other lame ducks.””³ The constant generalization of the Chicana subjugated her to a stagnant position. Chicanas

¹ Becky Marrujo, “La Chicana- ‘Barefoot and Pregnant?’” *El Diario de la Gente*, March 20, 1973.

² United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana (reprinted from La Raza, Vol.1 no.6,” [n.d.], retrieved from United Mexican American Students (UMAS) papers, University of Colorado Boulder Libraries, Special Collections, Archives and Preservation Department.

³ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

“provided the organizational backbone to campus and community organizations while simultaneously forming the first groups on behalf of themselves as Chicanas. Racial hostility, sexual politics, and a lack of reproductive health care and guidance were just some of the issues... as they tried to find their own voice and perspective on campuses and in the Chicano movement.”⁴

The pattern of males in positions of power and women in inferior jobs revealed a systemic trait of the movement. Colorado Chicanas sought to expose these generalizations of Chicanas as producing a superior and inferior dynamic.

Consciously or not, many scholars have incorporated this gendered hierarchy into how they have studied and written about the Chicano movement. Marrujo criticized how “most authors who have commented on the Mexican American woman to date have been men.”⁵ She noted assumptions an author produced about a Mexican American mother, and how readers “tend to generalize that statement to include all Mexican American women.”⁶ Readers apply the generalizations that traveled through male authors that used outdated traditional roles to all Mexican American women. She argued that readers justified the connotations because “most of us [women] are viewed, by Chicanos and others, in two roles, **mother** and **future mother**.”⁷ She identified how “generalizations prompted by the written word are the basis for verbal and written stereotypic notions of La Chicana.”⁸ Printed sources produced stereotypes, but they are maintained through readers’ engagement.

Marrujo called attention to the power of generalization in the public and easily accessible United Mexican American Student newspaper *El Diario de la Gente*. She condemned the student

⁴ Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 43.

⁵ Marrujo, “Barefoot and Pregnant?!”

⁶ Marrujo, “Barefoot and Pregnant?!”

⁷ Marrujo, “Barefoot and Pregnant?!”

⁸ Marrujo, “Barefoot and Pregnant?!”

newspaper for reproducing “stereotypic labels” that “have been used by the oppressor to convince both observers and the oppressed of their general worthlessness.”⁹ She explained labeling as a form of oppression which requires an unequal distribution of power among two groups. Marrujo analyzed systematic gender oppression in the context of the rise of racial liberation: “Today the Chicano has shed and denied the validity of most stereotypic labels ascribed to them by Anglo authors, which served to oppress them. However, La Chicana is still subject to stereotypic labels ascribed by Anglo, Mexican and Mexican American authors.”¹⁰ Marrujo listed the various authors that used a misinterpretation of tradition to ascribed labels on the Chicana. She located the root of the problems of generalizations at the misuse of traditional notions.

The movement applied traditional folklore to broader generalizations towards Chicana women. The story of La Llorona served as a cautionary tale for women’s sexual heteronormative behavior. The narrative is “primarily used both for social control of children’s behavior while at the same time socializing girls and boys into a gendered hierarchical world” as that is “how it is deployed in the everyday world of Chicanx communities.”¹¹ The narrative was a form of ‘social control’ that established ‘socialized’ gendered norms. Chicanx children transitioned from a gendered Chicanx community environment to a racialized and gendered environment in higher education. Students connected women that did not comply to sexual norms to queer notions, which created a homophobic environment. Chicanas resisted the sexual and gender expectations of La Llorona. The remanence of the La Malinche folklore impacted the credibility of Chicanas within the movement. They worked within the established structure to form resistance against

⁹ Marrujo, “‘Barefoot and Pregnant?’.”

¹⁰ Marrujo, “‘Barefoot and Pregnant?’.”

¹¹ Enrique Sepúlveda, written feedback comments to author, April 3, 2020.

oppressive forces and advocated for the liberated Chicana. The impact of generalizations on intersectionality situated Chicanas within the movement.

Student Movements and Traditional Folklore

The 1969 Denver Conference influenced the student Chicano movement organizational structure in multiple ways, but not least by incorporating a particular view of tradition. For example, four years after the 1969 Denver Conference and the commitment to *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, Southern Colorado State College reorganized the Movimiento Estudiantial Chicano de Aztlán (MECHA) to align with the “opinions” expressed on campus about the “direction the organization should take.”¹² Students focused on maintaining the MECHA rules and the “unwritten philosophy” of their ancestors.¹³ They want to preserve the “dying” customs and language of their ancestors, because students wanted future generations to be aware of their “true culture, enrich it and if offers a more humanistic alternative, share it with everyone.”¹⁴ This desire for connection to ancestors was a source of pride, but the traditional role and representation of women in Aztlán was more complex.

The Chicano movement used Aztlán folklores, centered around figures and tales such as La Llorona and La Malinche. Scholar Domino Renee Pérez argued that folklores represented a template of “mutable values and conditions under which cultural currency is exchanged.”¹⁵ A general tale of La Llorona proceeds,

“Fue una mujer [It was a woman], who married a man con tres niños chiquillos [sic.][with three small children]. Now the man loved his children very much, pero esta viaja fue muy celosa [but this travel was very jealous]. She was vien [sic.][alone] jealous

¹² Toby Madrid, “Moment MECHA: Don’t Let the Torch Burn Out,” *Arrow- CSU Pueblo*, January 25, 1973.

¹³ Madrid, “Moment MECHA.”

¹⁴ Madrid, “Moment MECHA.”

¹⁵ Domino Renee Pérez, “Caminando Con La Llorona: Traditional and Contemporary Narratives,” in *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change*, ed. Cantú and Nájera-Ramírez (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 102.

of those kids because he showed them with love every day. She told him how she felt, but nothing changed. One day, she had had enough and told him, “Oyes, hombre. Un día vas a perder lo que quieres mas en este mundo [*Hey, man. One day you will lose what you want most in this world*].” Well, one day he was working late or *cual cosa* [*which thing*], but he was late getting home. So, she took those kids down to the *río* [*river*] and drowned them, thinking that with them out of the way, she would be able to get more of his attention, *Después cuando el señor regresó a la casa* [*later when the lord returned to the house*] and found those kids gone, he knew immediately what had happened. The *loca* [*crazy*] had killed them. He was heartbroken. *Pues* [*Well*], he left her and she died of loneliness. *Y cuando ella murió y fue al cielo* [*And when she died and went to heaven*], God told her, “You cannot enter the kingdom until you find the lost souls of the children.” Because she didn’t know where they were, she wanders the earth to this day looking for them.”¹⁶

The diction and style used to retell variations of a tale is a reflection of the culture climate.¹⁷ The apparent beliefs and values of the culture are perceived through the narrator’s retelling usage of judgement words and “offering a moral or emphasizing certain elements” of the woman’s and man’s actions.¹⁸

The critical abstractions from La Llorona behavior come from individuals in positions of power, such as Chicano males and family oligarchy. Pérez provided a 1981 revision of La Llorona told by Chicano F.M in Arizona that emphasized themes of her “selfish-ness and the refusal of maternal obligations.”¹⁹ He viewed her challenging the maternal roles as a negative selfish act. Chicanas were also threatening traditional roles and F.M expressed his hostility through a retelling of La Llorona.

Moreover, the legend of La Llorona served as a fable to shame sexual interactions. The retelling shaped view of “women as temptresses, embodiments of a malevolent sexuality that could cause them to lose their souls... girls are taught that sexuality, when acted on, can lead to

¹⁶ Pérez, “La Llorona,” 100.

¹⁷ Pérez, “La Llorona,” 100.

¹⁸ Pérez, “La Llorona,” 102.

¹⁹ Pérez, “La Llorona,” 102.

isolation and damnation.”²⁰ Each teaching blamed the girl for being the “temptress” or threatened her actions with “isolation.” The family fable subjugated the women as the problem, responsible for both of the negative consequences.

Chicanas resisted the male dominated interpretation and act of generalizing the traditional story onto contemporary women. José Límon as a female interpreted La Llorona’s actions as “female resistance, subversion of negative female sexuality, and reclamation of lost Chicano identity and territory.”²¹ Límon, for example, offered a new interpretation of La Llorona’s infanticide, that viewed her decision “resistance to patriarchal norms.”²² She also argued that La Llorona “does not prescribe a negative sexuality for women ” and that the story did not close off the possibility that she “can recover her lost children.” In that sense, “a traditional element of the tale” becomes “symbolic of rebirth or reclamation.”²³ Tey Diana Rebolledo held a similar interpretation and asserted that in this way La Llorona can be seen instead as a “icon of the feminine ideal.” Her version imagined La Llorona as “a woman who traditionally serves as a cultural allegory, instructing people, primarily women, how to live, act, and function within specific established social mores.”²⁴ Límon and Rebolledo complicated the male-reading of La Llorona “within the parameters of the traditional narrative.”²⁵ They both deviated from the male-interpretation by using their own-readings as a weapon to alter the mythical themes that portrayed women negatively.

²⁰ Pérez, “La Llorona,” 104.

²¹ Pérez, “La Llorona,” 105.

²² Pérez, “La Llorona,” 105.

²³ Pérez, “La Llorona,” 105.

²⁴ Pérez, “La Llorona,” 101.

²⁵ Pérez, “La Llorona,” 105.

The oral and written legacy of “La Llorona emerges as a physical threat and a gender-coded allegory proscribing certain behaviors for women.”²⁶ The usage of La Llorona in the student movement was undeniable, especially since the movement was founded on the tradition of Aztlán, so Chicanas created forms of resistance within the established constraints. A similar dynamic emerged in discourse around the folklore of La Malinche, which followed the widespread retellings of La Llorona in the community-consciousness of women.

The story of La Malinche permeated the student movement because it usefully symbolized the events of colonialization activists decried. The movement called for the decolonization of Chicano homelands and this folklore created a narrative of the origins of the colonization, the root of the crime, itself. The essential elements of the La Malinche story included the following: “Born of Aztec nobility, La Malinche (Malintzin Tenépal) was sold by her mother into a state of slavery at the age of eight. Six year later, she was given to Hernán Cortés who soon made use of her linguistic and diplomatic skills. La Malinche remains ‘the Mexican Eve’.... Today in Mexico the term Malinchismo means selling out to foreigners.”²⁷ Given that La Malinche allowed her “linguistic and diplomatic skills” to serve the conqueror, rather than her own people, Ruiz argued that the story of La Malinche could “hardly be construed as an empowering symbol of Chicanas.”²⁸ Romero’s research identified the duality in the story, between the “pure, young, and chaste Malinche” and the traitor she became. With this dualism, “contemporary Mexican masculine elites attribute (La Malinche with) the selling out of indigenous culture.”²⁹ His statement uncovered the extreme perspectives of Chicanas as either

²⁶ Pérez, “La Llorona,” 109.

²⁷ Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 106.

²⁸ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 106.

²⁹ Brenda M. Romero, “The Indita Genre of New Mexico: Gender and Cultural Identification,” in *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change*, ed. Cantú and Nájera-Ramírez (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 70.

“chaste” or a “sell out.” The interpretation pressured women to be perfectly pure or be labeled as a trader, because there was no middle ground for women.

Chicana feminists worked on “revising the image of La Malinche.”³⁰ Vicki Ruiz printed the Chicana’s reinterpretations in *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*. Adelaida Del Castillo, for example, rebranded La Malinche as a “young linguist who lived on the margins and made decisions within the borders of her world.”³¹ Other Chicanas such as Carmen Tafolla cast La Malinche “as a woman who dared to dream.”³² These reinterpretations appeared in Vicki Ruiz’s research in. Chicanas took back the traditional narrative that subjugated them to generalizations. The process of retelling, rewriting, and reversing traditional notions of female legends were signs of resistance within an oppressive environment.

The structure of MECHA subtly embodied traditional values and practices, which honored the home of Aztlán. In 1973, students added the rhetoric of Aztec folklores into college campuses as Toby Madrid wrote, “subsequent Chicano college organizations were necessarily: an outgrowth of malinchismo (term devised from the action of the Aztec Indian madian, Malinche, who aligned herself and collaborated with Cortes and the Spanish during the conquest of Mexico).”³³ Madrid’s rhetoric criticized students who ‘sold out’ to oppressive forces, and he attributed the conquest of Mexico to La Malinche.³⁴ He used the gendered tale to criticize racial oppression with a negative gender stereotype becomes embedded into the discourse of the movement. He accepted the narrative that La Malinche sold out the Mexican identity to

³⁰ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 106.

³¹ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 107.

³² Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 107.

³³ Madrid, “Moment MECHA.”

³⁴ Madrid, “Moment MECHA.”

foreigners. Madrid described the term ‘malinchismo’ as a woman who freely ‘aligned herself’ and intentionally wanted to ‘collaborate’ with her captors to conquest Mexico. He does not mention that she was a slave and used her capability to survive slavery. Madrid automatically assumed that La Malinche wanted and intended to help the conquest of Mexico. He reinforced the narrative that La Malinche cheated the Aztec people by “selling out” and that she betrayed her people. The folklore gendered the conquest of Mexico to a women’s actions.

In these ways, MEChA and other student organizations built gendered cultural icons from Aztlán and thus generalizations of Chicanas into their foundational discourse. The retellings of La Llorona commented on, and tried to control, women’s appropriate gender roles and sexual behavior. Simultaneously, the symbolic uses of the story of La Malinche generalized the actions of Chicanas as traitors to the Chicano community. Chicanas across the Southwest “contested how cultural icons- la Malinche, La Virgen, la Adelita- served as conservative prescriptions for women’s behavior that enforced dominant patriarchal gender ideology.”³⁵ The duality and the tension persisted.

Towards Multiple Perspectives and Imaginaries of Liberation

Student writer Evelyn Martinez in *El Diario de la Gente* traced Chicana involvement in activism not to traditional folklore, but instead to the “Mexican Revolution when wives of revolutionaries fought alongside their husbands.”³⁶ Chicanas in fact often used woman’s participation in the war as a symbol throughout the printed imagery in public Colorado newspapers, as referenced in chapter one and two. Recalling the presence of women in past wars signified Chicanas in the movement who “are fighting alongside their men in our struggles

³⁵ Blackwell, *iChicana Power!*, 101.

³⁶ Evelyn Martinez, “La Chicana: ‘Establishing a Positive Self-Image’,” *El Diario de la Gente*, February 20, 1973.

against the oppressive forces and injustice being imposed on Chicanos.”³⁷ The visual representation reminded readers that women fought in historically and currently for, and with, the Chicano men. Chicanos needed to be reminded of the sacrifices Chicanas made for them, because the traditional story associated women to malinchismo. The symbol of the female warrior-maintained prominence, but the printed image of the Chicana began to shift from heavy historical references to include a variety of references.

This 1977 portrait (Figure 3) was printed along with a notice about a “Chicana Conference upcoming,” whose stated “purpose” was to give Chicanas exposure and experience in communications, and an opportunity to meet collectively to share their interests.”³⁸ During this conference, which would be held at... PLACE, Chicanas organized separate spaces to host workshops about “1) Emerging Chicana, 2) Chicana political system, 3) The Older Chicana, 4)



Figure 3: Courtesy of “Chicana Conference Upcoming,” *El Diario de la Gente*, February 9, 1977. Retrieved from the online Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection.

³⁷ Martinez, “Positive Self-Image.”

³⁸ “Chicana Conference Upcoming,” *El Diario de la Gente*, February 9, 1977.

Chicana and Religion, and 5) Education.”³⁹ The Conference’s workshop titles confirmed that women created this Conference towards the end of the 1970s as they focused on the ‘emerging’ and ‘older’ generations. Thus, the portrait symbolized the combination of the old, present, and emerging Chicana.

In contrast to the portraits in chapter one and two, the artist only drew the Chicana’s headshot, but contained within it are multiple aspects of a woman’s life and roles. All the portraits featured the seriousness in the woman’s face and direct eye contact towards the reader. Here, the facial expression similarly represented dignity, intelligence, confidence, and determination, though it is a somewhat softer, more feminine take than the others. The absence of objects and infants on her back might suggest the freedom of carrying obligations, and a focus more on individual identity. However, the images embedded in her flowing hair depicted aspects of a narrative deeply connected to social obligation.

One could interpret her hair as a growing part of her that revealed future experiences or themes that the Conference will discuss. One of the largest drawing in her hair depicts a woman carrying a child. The woman’s bandana and clothing reference a labor focused job. The mother continued a nurturing role. The working woman shielded the child’s eye from danger, which implied she sacrificed herself for the child. The marriage drawn in her hair referenced a new beginning and a conversation about heteronormative relationships. The figure at the bottom right may echo the Revolutionary figure, with the ammunition belt slung across her shoulder. The other female figures in her hair are looking in different directions. The various directions women looked towards perhaps symbolize how Chicanas held multiple perspectives towards liberation, and could embody multiple roles: warrior, mother, worker, partner.

³⁹ “Chicana Conference Upcoming.”

University of Colorado Boulder student Evelyn Martinez wrote about gender roles in a 1971 article in *El Diario de la Gente*, “La Chicana: ‘establishing a positive self-image.’” She started by noting that “La Chicana has been viewed within our culture as housewives and mothers, devoted to the strengthening of la familia.”⁴⁰ Martinez pointed out how the movement used such cultural expectations towards women as a backhand compliment. The viewpoint complimented women for being a wife and mother as she ‘strengthened’ the entire family. However, she also revealed how this perspective restricted women’s participation into two distinct roles.

Martinez criticized the movement for failing to recognize the value of Chicana contributions and participation. She claimed instead, that “Chicanas constitute a big role in retracing the history of our Chicano culture, and have been most influential in broadening the horizons for Chicanos.”⁴¹ She connected women to “retracing the history of our Chicano,” which positioned them as crucial for the Indigenous narrative. As for the relegation of women to gendered, often menial, tasks, Martinez stated that “La Chicana has proven that she can contribute more to el movimiento than the ordinary womanly domestic duties.”⁴² Such gender segregated participation limited both women and the movement. The word ‘proven’ implied that women’s contribution was not a given, but needed to be successful and proven. Martinez’s word choice suggested that their male partners subjugated Chicanas, and she sought to prove them wrong.

Martinez went on to unpack the generalization of women as wives and mothers. She argued that Chicanas “have been brought up by tradition to accept the Chicano concept of la

⁴⁰ Martinez, “Positive Self-Image.”

⁴¹ Martinez, “Positive Self-Image.”

⁴² Martinez, “Positive Self-Image.”

familia and machismo. They have been taught their role in the home, the role of the mother who concentrates only on matters pertaining directly to la familia but keeps her mouth shut on matters of decision making.”⁴³ Here, Martinez spoke to women’s restricted political involvement and expected obligation to the family. Martinez argued that the generalized defined ‘role’ erased women’s political engagement.

In addition to critiquing the male dominated structures, Martinez also promoted a hopeful imaginary of women as “liberated towards the home and in el movimiento and will be fighting for Chicana values.”⁴⁴ Martinez’s imaginary focused on how “the liberated Chicana seeks liberation not only for herself but for her people as well.”⁴⁵ Martinez’s imaginary of liberation required freedom from the generalized female roles. She intentionally does not villainize modern Chicanos for continuing harmful generalization but directs the problem as a traditional one. Martinez addressed the problem of female generalization through a historical lens.

Divergent Choices: Gender Roles, Feminism, and Sexual Orientation

As the possibility for multiple perspectives developed, forms of Chicana activism and identity multiplied as well. Colorado Chicana, Becky Marrujo, had argued that Chicanas had the power to choose the “acceptance of the labels or denial of the labels” that gendered them as inferior.⁴⁶ The decision divided the beliefs and values of Chicanas. The difference in personal identities clashed, but as Ruiz stated, “conflicts over gender or race, personal liberation or family first, did not stop the development of Chicana feminism.”⁴⁷ They had the power to accept or

⁴³ Martinez, “Positive Self-Image.”

⁴⁴ Martinez, “Positive Self-Image.”

⁴⁵ Martinez, “Positive Self-Image.”

⁴⁶ Marrujo, “‘Barefoot and Pregnant?’.”

⁴⁷ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 111.

deny the traditional gender roles. Thus, while they separated from one another and grouped with likeminded individuals, they also established multiple pathways toward Chicana liberation.

Chicanas created at least two distinct identities of a liberated Chicana from these separated groups: “feminists and loyalists.”⁴⁸ While making divergent choices around gender roles, the multiple identities strengthen the movement, because each identity reached a different section of the Chicana population. Although, they held different imaginaries of liberation the women on both sides combined together had power in numbers. Each group resisted oppression in their own forms, but regardless they all showed resistance. The various imaginaries allowed all Chicanas weather they felt timid or fully ready for liberation to choose their level of resistance.

Many Chicanos in the movement openly ridiculed Chicana feminists and labeled them as “Women’s Libbers” or “*aggringadas*”(which means to act or behave like a gringa or foreigner).⁴⁹ The movement viewed feminism as a betrayal to the movement’s united front. Chicano movement leaders often humiliated Chicana feminists, which often generated a social “fear of being labeled [as a feminists] or rejected by men.”⁵⁰ Ruiz commented that feminists “frequently found themselves isolated as individuals.”⁵¹ Chicanas noted a shared experience within student organizations that women who wanted “to be recognized as an individual who has brains and the ability to use them” became targets of criticism.

This particular type of women is separated from all the other Chicanas and Chicanos immediately. She does not want to be used as a sexual object but does want to be involved in all aspects of the movement. This the guys don’t like. They distort her actions and make foolish accusations of strong women being dikes just because a Chicana will

⁴⁸ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 111.

⁴⁹ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 108.

⁵⁰ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 108.

⁵¹ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 108.

not go to bed with him, while they mock her by stating that she tries to dominate over everything.⁵²

Chicanos formed a negative link between feminism and ‘dikes’ that raised fears of women dominating the movement. The word ‘dominating’ portrayed women as aggressive and unfeminine. The movement used sexuality as a means of controlling Chicana behaviors, because homophobic sentiment underlined the movement. Chicanas knew the discrimination and isolation they would endure by being open or labeled as gay. The negative connotations towards lesbians evoked fear in Chicanas, and established power in sexuality. However, they knew that Chicanos feared ‘strong women’ that did not want to be ‘used as a sexual object.’

The movement categorized women based on their sexual relationships. A Chicana in La Raza described how Chicanos “right away” viewed women educated about sex as someone who “must have gone through the mill.”⁵³ Chicanos shamed women for knowing about sex and asserted their ideas of her being promiscuous. The movement held Chicanas to the religious image of the Virgin Mary. Chicanos expected Chicanas “to be a virgin before marriage and remain active about sex through her entire married life.”⁵⁴ The expectation maintained female sexual activity as a negative notion that needed to be controlled.

Chicanos accordingly tended to act as a machismo parental figure. If a Chicana did not “go with any particular guys in the organization, the guys all become her older brother.”⁵⁵ Chicanos thus applied a similar dualism to Chicanas, as they did to La Malinche, either viewing women as sexually promiscuous or as an innocent sister. Chicanos “now look out for the Chicana

⁵² United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

⁵³ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

⁵⁴ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

⁵⁵ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

like her father would,” which subjugated Chicanas to patriarchal norms outside the family.⁵⁶ In a similar situation Chicanas in the student movement had to “argue that she has rational mind and that she has the capacity to judge a person, and doesn’t need anyone telling her who to or who not to go out with.”⁵⁷ The Chicana had to resist the control of patriarchal practices in the family and movement setting. Men viewed their selves as entitled to control the sexual activity of Chicanas. Feminists resisted negative connotation towards sexuality by speaking out against the Chicano “machismo” attitude.

Chicana Irene Blea-Gutierrez from Pueblo, Colorado argued that “the term machismo has come to carry connotations of hyper-masculinity, sexual promiscuity, and overly enlarged genitalia for men; especially Spanish speaking men.”⁵⁸ Blea-Gutierrez criticized the general public’s exaggeration and misrepresentation of machismo. She does not deny the sexism connected to machismo, but how the term became “vulgar term and used as a racist stereotype of the Chicanos.”⁵⁹ As a form of re-definition against a term that oppressed women she argued to reclaim and revise machismo “rather than go along with the negation of term. I propose that we, persons concerned with Chicana issues, incorporate the image of the strong woman as being as equally driving strength within the cultural nucleus by utilizing the term ‘machisma’ so that the term symbolizes and emphasizes the masculine-feminine balance of life.”⁶⁰ Blea-Gutierrez rewrote machismo to symbolize the presence and values of Chicanas. She attacked the Chicanos’ justification for sexism within the movement and intentionally used the general public’s negative

⁵⁶ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

⁵⁷ United Mexican American Students, “El Movimiento y La Chicana.”

⁵⁸ Irene Blea-Gutierrez, “Machismo Needs Redefining,” *La Cucaracha*, July 4, 1977.

⁵⁹ Blea-Gutierrez, “Machismo.”

⁶⁰ Blea-Gutierrez, “Machismo.”

conceptions of machismo to justify its redefinition. Blea-Gutierrez thus strategically placed strong women in the ‘cultural nucleus’ as part of the new machisma concept.

On the other side of the spectrum, Ruiz described Chicana loyalists as women who favored Chicano liberation, but “believed that one should ‘stand by your man’ and ‘have babies por la causa.’ They argued that Chicanas who needed ‘an identity’ were ‘vendidas’ or ‘falsas.’”⁶¹ Chicanas wanted the male to know that they did not sell out the Chicano movement for female liberation. In this vein, some Colorado Chicanas also worked within the Chicano narrative to prove their loyalty and advance the movement.

Martinez wrote in February of 1973 that “Chicanas are not striving for superiority over the macho; they are only asking equality in recognition for their vital contributions in el movimiento.”⁶² Chicanas wanted their acts to be acknowledged by the men to prove they worked with them in liberation. They repeatedly rejected the comparisons between Chicanas and white women’s liberation, often labeling Chicana feminists as aggringadas. They did not want Chicanos to view their actions as a ‘white women’s behavior,’ because Chicanos held resentment towards La Malinche who they viewed as a cultural traitor behaving as a white colonist.

Martinez also acknowledged that “Although the Chicana and the White Anglo woman share some similar values, the goals of the Chicana cannot always be paralleled with those of the Anglo.”⁶³ She admitted that women both races faced societal oppression, but Martinez described how “the Anglo woman is stressing equality with the male; whereas the Chicana has emerged from her ‘hiddenness’ to stand alongside her macho to help in the fight for total Chicano liberation from an oppressed system.”⁶⁴ Chicanas across Colorado universities adamantly

⁶¹ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 111.

⁶² Martinez, “Positive Self-Image.”

⁶³ Evelyn Martinez, “What Strength in La Chicana!,” *El Diario de la Gente*, July 13, 1973.

⁶⁴ Martinez, “What Strength.”

separated themselves from the primarily white women's liberation movement. Joyce Valdez began her article in the *Arrow-CSU Pueblo* with "the Chicana movement is not a white female liberation movement, but a movement intent on working in conjunction with Chicano males."⁶⁵ From a Chicano point of view, white women were as often the oppressors in racial terms as they were the oppressed in a gender dynamic. The danger of appearing to make common cause with white oppressors rather than demonstrating loyalty to la raza raised the stakes.

Chicanas did not want to appear as a threat and discussed "the importance of alleviating the fears Chicano males have about competition from Chicano women."⁶⁶ The constant reassurance benefited Chicana loyalists, because they established themselves as a positive force. The positive association allowed women to embed their political agenda into the movement. Positioning themselves within the male-dominated movement, these women renegotiated tradition in more subtle ways. Rather than proposing the concept of "machismo," they argued, "although the Chicana seeks new desires, she will never totally break away from her responsibility to her familia. Her strength and unity completely hold her to the tradition bound concept of her responsibility to her familia first, la raza secondly."⁶⁷ They negotiated between traditional roles and modern advocacy. Amending the political agenda and practices to include women required Chicanas to strategically place themselves as loyal partners.

The listed priorities of "her familia first, la raza secondly" signified the separated environments. Some Chicanas viewed the separation between family and politics as oppressive. A Colorado Chicana wrote that, "many Chicanas complain that the Movement is breaking up their family... this is not how it should be. The Movement is La Familia and that is another point

⁶⁵ Joyce Valdez, "HISTORICAL EVENT Chicana Problems Noted," *Arrow-CSU Pueblo*, February 28, 1974.

⁶⁶ Valdez, "Chicana Problems Noted."

⁶⁷ Martinez, "What Strength."

that the Chicana must stress to get her sisters involved. If she can know the Movement like her husband, there can be more understanding in La Familia.”⁶⁸ Chicana loyalists intended to modify the movement to benefit men and women in a new version of La Familia, and all the relationships that entailed: husband and wife, brother and sister. This both incorporated tradition and called for women’s recognition and participation. Also, she was able to call to action that involvement of other sisters. The message was catered to involve more “sisters” and increase the presence of women in the Movement. They tailored their message of feminism and traditionalism to the audience they appealed to. Chicanas resisted the student movement’s internalized oppression by weaponized forms of public and private activism against expected notions.

The Aztlán rhetoric of the movement in Colorado subtly embedded traditional folklore into the foundation. The generalizations about Mexca women from stories of La Llorona and La Malinche transferred into oppressive stigmas within the student movement. Chicanas resisted traditional stories that situated their sexual, gender, and racial identity as inferior. Colorado Chicanas dismantled the stigma of being a feminist by producing multiple pathways for women to imagine a liberated Chicana.

⁶⁸ United Mexican American Students, “Wake Up Chicanas,” *United Mexican American Students (Student Publication)*, No Date, No Page Number.

Conclusion

The Chicano Movement rapidly spread across the southwestern United States in the 1960s and 70s and represented a powerful revolution against systemic oppression. Founding activist drew strength and inspiration from the vision of Aztlán, which placed Mexica traditional and Indigenous cultural elements of Mexica culture at the center of activist strategies. Coloradans were uniquely connected to the Aztlán rhetoric, as Denver-based Corky Gonzales promoted its values as symbolic of ideal Chicano activism across the region. The movement's nationalism, organizational structure, and traditional female folklores, however, also created an environment that subjugated women to sexual, gender, and racial stigmas that suppressed imaginaries of liberated Chicanas. For their part, many women resisted this oppression within the family structure, the educational system, and the movement's organization, as each of this study's chapters have detailed. Chicanas developed both subtle and direct methods of resistance through social behavior, print culture, artistic representations, and reclaimed narratives. These various actions challenging oppression produced multiple imaginaries of the liberated Chicana.

Colorado Chicanas used the tools within the movement to resist the oppressive historical narratives. *El Diario de la Gente* printed an anonymous poem titled "Quien Soy [who I am]" in the "Poemas" section of the August 1, 1977 paper. The poet wrote about the cultural legends and modern experiences that constructed the Chicana identity. The poem was originally printed in Spanish and translated into English:

Soy Malinche [I am Malinche].

Sufri las desgracias del conquistador [I suffered the tragedies of the conquistador].

Soy la Virgen Maria [I am the Virgin Mary].

Sufri los dolores del castigador [I suffered the pains of the punisher].

Soy la Adelita [I am the Adelita].

Sufri las batallas de la revolucion [I suffered the battles of the revolution].
 Soy la Llorona [I am The Llorona].
 Sufri la venganza de la supersticion [I suffered the vengeance of the superstition].

Soy la mujer mexicana [I am the Mexican woman].
 A veces, la mujer chingada [the raped woman].
 Soy la mujer Chicana [I am the Chicana woman].
 A veces la mujer olvidada [Sometimes the forgotten woman].

Soy la mera sangre [I am the mere blood].
 y cultura de mi raza [and culture of my race].
 Soy el espiritu— [I am the spirit--]
 El sufrimiento del mestizo [The suffering of the mestizo].

Soy la historia mexicana! [I am Mexican history!]
 Soy la historia meshicana! [I am Mexican (the Mesoamerican “Mexica”) history!]
 Soy la historia americana! [I am American history!]

Mirame bien [Look at me closely].
 Escuchame bien [Listen to me closely].
 Yo soy la mujer mexicana [I am the Mexican woman].¹

The poet encapsulated the fronts Chicanas fought against to be recognized as partners in the movement: folklore, sexuality, identity. The poem reclaimed the history of Mexican women by taking ownership of the stories and historical narrative and asserting the centrality of women to La Raza. The writer situated the Mexican woman in the very center of multiple histories, called out the oppression women had suffered over generations, and demanded they be heard.

The pride in Chicana history and actions coalesced into a new forms of identity. For example, a young Chicana in a San Jose, California high school, described her self-conception in the 1983 *El Diario de la Gente*: “When I go to college and law school I am going in as a Chicana and as Gina Maestas. When I come out I will still be a Chicana and still be Gina Maestas. But when I come out I will be fighting for my Raza. I will not allow anyone to put me down or my people. I need an education because I am a proud Brown Woman!”² The relentless activism

¹ “Poemas (Quien Soy),” *El Diario de la Gente*, August 1, 1977. English translation provided by Daniel Walzer.

² Gina Maestas, “VIVA CHICANAS Why I Need an Education!,” *El Diario de la Gente*, April 1, 1983.

from the generation that preceded her left its mark, allowing her to articulate pride in being Chicana. As a high school student, Gina Maestas imagined earning a degree in higher education and going on to law school. This both defied any traditional notions of women's subservience within la familia and resisted the notion that such goals would make her aggringada. She plainly asserted her belief that she could fight for la raza as a powerful, professional, proud Chicana. Maestas' imaginary would not have been possible two decades before, as it built explicitly upon, and advanced the beliefs and values that Chicanas in the earlier stages of the movement, women like Neva Romero, had developed, held, and advocated. Former homecoming queen Romero became a student leader and ardent Chicana activist through weaponizing forms of resistance that reclaimed female histories, narratives, and produce imaginaries of Chicana liberation.

As Maylei Blackwell wrote, the "genealogy of Chicana feminism articulated through community making, collective mobilization, and creative reimagining" made such aspirations possible for future generations.³ Maestas diction prioritized herself as she first listed "I will not allow anyone to put me down or my people." The shifted language represented the success of Chicanas in weaponizing forms of public and private activism against oppressive forces for the betterment of an imaginary liberated Chicana.

³ Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 9.

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