



## THE CHICANA FEMINIST MOVEMENT

What was The Chicana Feminist Movement? What challenges did they face and what was their impact on society?

"I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice; Indian, Spanish, White. I will have my serpent's tongue—my women's voice, my sexual voice, my poets voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence. –

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Roth, Benita. "A Dialogical View of the Emergence of Chicana Feminist Discourse1." *Critical Sociology*, 33.4 (2007): 709-730.

In this article, Benita Roth examines the creation as well as difficulties and struggles of the Chicana Feminist throughout the Chicano Movement. According to Benita Roth, Chicana Feminism arose from the part of the Chicano movement which was centered on the struggles on college campuses as well as urban community organizations. There were various reasons that lead many Mexican and Chicana women to create multiple women's groups and organizations however, the most common problem with women in the Chicano movement was the lack of leadership opportunities available to women. Unfortunately, many Mexicana and Mexican - American women felt neglected throughout the Chicano Movement because there was an evident emphasize on men. In addition, to feeling neglected and given inferior roles in the Chicano movement, their newly created Chicana Feminist Movement was approached negatively by many. In particular, Loyalist as they were called were anti-feminist and viewed the Chicana Feminist as being, "agabachada" meaning Americanized. As Roth explains this meant that, "Loyalists constructed feminism as something alien to the Chicano community, a charge seemingly bolstered by the simultaneous eruption of feminist organizing in the white and Black left, not to mention in the liberal mainstream" (Pg. 717). Loyalist as well as many other members of the Chicano movement didn't believe in the need for a Chicana Feminist Movement because they believed that this had no important goals or outcomes for the entire Chicano cause. Roth explains that at the Youth Liberation Conference, "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan" a workshop concerning women's issues was held however, with little to no success. Roth discusses that there were various statements made that stirred up mixed viewpoints however, many Chicana

feminists understood that the message of the conference was that Chicana feminism was unnecessary for the cause.

Garcia M. Alma. *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

In this book, Alma M. Garcia introduces various Chicana Feminist struggles and focuses on who they are and how they differ from the “white feminist.” Garcia explains in her writing that due to a significant difference in cultures Chicana feminist tend to receive far more discrimination because on top of fighting for women rights, the Chicana feminist must also fight against racial attitudes. The journal, *Encuentro Femenil* actually stated that, “there are racist practices against us which limit us politically, socially, and economically” (Pg. 45). Surprisingly, despite the fact that both White and Chicana feminist tend to advocate for the same rights they are significantly different. Garcia explains that Chicana feminist are fighting for issues such as welfare, education, birth control and much more, but in a culture where there is a strong sense of “machismo” and although they play a significant role in the Chicano struggle, for being women many times are overlooked. There is also a stereotypes in which many people believe that in majority Chicana feminist are not married and do not have children, but sadly this again comes from a stereotypical subconscious thinking that once a woman is married and with children she must be submissive to her husband. In fact, Garcia explains that all Chicana women married or not should be concerned with the issues of Chicana feminism because weather they want to except it or not Chicana women have and continue to be at a disadvantage in society. Despite, the disadvantage that Chicana women face it is a notable accomplishment that as time goes on more and more Chicana women are becoming involved in the causa regardless of age or marital

status. The involvement of Chicana women becomes essential in order to send out the message that Chicana women should be viewed as equal in the struggle.

Mirandés, Alfredo, and Enríquez, Evangelina. 1979. *La Chicana*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 12-13 Retrieved from:

[http://www.umich.edu/~ac213/student\\_projects05/cf/issuestheory.html](http://www.umich.edu/~ac213/student_projects05/cf/issuestheory.html)

This scholarly website continues to discuss the setbacks Chicana feminist women experience due to traditional customs in Chicano community. The theory that is discussed throughout this website is that there is an oppression of the Chicana by men. In their culture the man is viewed as dominate and is nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, it is explained that the typical role of the Chicana women was usually in the home and most often they were ignorant to the issues that occurred outside their home since this is where they spent all their time. In addition, it is often usual that Chicana women be used as sex object as many times their only duty was to procreate and have the ability to be able to care for the family while the male figure has the responsibility of expressing their manhood by providing for the family. Ideas and traditions such as the ones discussed bring up issues such “Restructuring Political Familyism” which concerns Chicana women and encourages them to advocate against the traditional family structure. Instead the Chicana intends to create a family structure in which she is an important and recognized family figure, a differing image from the one she is given in a traditional “machista” home. Other significant issues include employment and education, child care and abuse, reproductive, abortion, and Health Care. In addition, the idea of the New “Mestiza” refers to ideal Chicana women who is about embracing their multiple identities and as stated by Garcia, “She exists monolingual and bilingually. She exists in an indigenous, Mexican, and American

culture. It rejects the sections as race, class, and gender as separate identities and sees them intertwined, all connected to each other.”

PerezT, Laura E. "Decolonizing Sexuality and Spirituality in Chicana Feminist and Queer Art | Tikkun Magazine." *Tikkun Magazine*. Tikkun Daily. Retrieved from:

<http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/july2010perez>

In addition, to the powerfully influential Chicana literature created for the empowerment of Chicana feminist, Chicana feminist also focused much of their talent on art. Chicana Feminist art turned to art to express themselves in a similar way as writers turned to literature to express their voice on their oppression. Laura Perez discusses a significantly popular icon which Chicana Feminist artist turned to in order to express their opposition to their inferior role in the traditional Chicano community. Chicana feminist create various artistic depictions of the Virgin Mary with the goal of depicting the Virgin Mary as something other than just a submissive mother. Perez explains the dangerous it is among Chicana Feminist artists who turn a holy worshipped image of the Virgin Mary into an ordinary woman. This is because in the Chicano culture the Virgin Mary is viewed as holy and the mother of god and any distortion to this image such as those that Chicana Feminist artists are creating can come off as a great offense to many people. However, for the artist this is their opportunity to break the norms and move away from the sexism against

women which is still found in many iconic images today. Chicana feminist artist, Alma Lopez becomes a good example of the danger there is in changing the holy image of the Virgin Mary.



64 Alma Lopez, *Our Lady*, 1999.  
Digital print.

When Lopez created her work of art depicting the Virgin Mary full of sexuality and nudity with only flowers covering her. Lopez claims that both Chicano nationalist activists and Roman Catholic clergy demanded her work of art to be removed from the Cyber Arte show at the New Mexico where it was being displayed. To these attacks Lopez responded that typically the Chicana woman is regarded highly sexually and created this image to express the fact that the Virgin Mary was also a woman therefore, if following the sexism found in Chicano tradition the Virgin should

also have here sexuality. Lopez is able to express her own feeling of sexist oppression through depicting it on the Virgin Mary and many turn against it because she is holy, but fail to give the same respect to all Chicana women.

Martinez, Elizabeth Coonrod. "Crossing Gender Borders: Sexual Relations and Chicana Artistic Identity." *MELUS*, 27.1 (2002): 131-148.

Elizabeth Martinez bases her book on the rise of Chicana Literature that came from the Chicana feminist movement and beings to explain how Chicana women were escaping the norm of tradition through literature. Martinez focuses on Chicana, Sandra Cisneros's work, *The House*

on *Mango Street*, in order to explain the role of Chicana feminists in literature. The 1980s experienced a rise in Chicana feminist writers who had the goal of depicting strong female roles in their writing as opposed to previous patriarchal traditions in the Chicano community. Unfortunately, women were often regarded as inferior and second class citizens in the Chicano tradition and Chicana feminist believed that it was essential to create a better image of the Chicana women. Elizabeth goes on to explain how Sandra Cisneros depicts her female protagonist Esperanza as freely creating her own path as she does not aspire to follow in the footsteps of other women such as her grandmother and friends in her neighborhood. Martinez also explains how these Chicana writers took the opportunity to express through their writing the importance of free sexuality among women. In addition, Martinez states that, "Many Chicana novelist and short-story writers of the late 1980s and 1990s have characters not only acting on their own sexual desire, but also determining for themselves how or whether the sexual experience will affect their lives" (Pg.132). At the time this was a significant change in the typical traditional women's role however, has served to widen the horizons for women's actions and advocate that women should enjoy their sexuality as much as a man would without being viewed as lacking dignity, self-control, or respect.

Charleswell, Cherise. "*Latina Feminism: National and Transnational Perspectives I The Hampton Institute*. The Hampton Institute. Retrieved from: <http://www.hamptoninstitution.org/latina-feminism.html#.VyKXT4QrLIV>

Cherise Charleswell focuses this article on the struggles that numerous Latinas continue to face despite the numerous fights that Latina Feminists have fought throughout the years. In addition, Charleswell discusses how Latina Women have joined together with other women of color to fight their own fight after feeling neglected in the issues of white middle-class feminism.

Charleswell begins her article with a brief history of Chicana Feminism and comes across Chicana feminist Jovita Idar who formed La Ligua Femenil Mexicansita in 1911. It is surprising to see that the Chicana Feminist fight can be dated back to as early as 1911 in fact Charleswell states that it, “is now recognized as the first attempt in Mexican-American history to organize a feminist social movement.” This organization would be one of many social movements created for women’s rights throughout the coming years. Dolores Huerta has also become a significant feminist icon throughout the Chicana feminist Movement and has been committed to fighting for more than just women’s rights. Thanks to the determination and passion for justice of feminist activist Dolores Huerta today her contributions have allowed voters the right to vote in Spanish as well as take their driver’s license examination in their native language. In addition, she contributed to secure Aid for the unemployed, underemployed, and disability benefits for farmworkers. Huerta also continues to be an active member in the Feminist Majority Foundation. Unfortunately, the Latina women continues to be a minority in society and are still found facing struggles for acceptance today. Charleswell explains that till today Latina feminism continues to be rarely discussed and the media does not do an accurate job at depicting the Latina image. The reality is that Latina and Chicana women continue to receive inferior recognition in society and still have more obstacles to overcome however, without forgetting their long and successful trajectory. Charleswell finds it essential that Chicana Feminist continue to fight because, “Ultimately, Latina feminisms advocate for the recognition of the full humanity of women and girls, and the removal of sexism, racism, ableism, classism, and discrimination based on sexual orientation,” and unfortunately society isn’t completely there yet.