

SILENCED HISTORIES: *Chicanas in El Movimiento* and Their Contributions to the

Field of Education

A THESIS

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Southwest Studies

Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

By

Flor Vargas

May 2023

Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the involvement of *Chicanas* in the Chicano movement and their contributions to the field of education. This research paper covers the history of four women who were incredibly active within their communities and sought to fight for social justice, educational reform, and fight against police brutality. Through this research, I hope to shed some light on the contributions of these women and how their involvement was vital to the movement. This research was inspired by an interdisciplinary *Chicana* feminist praxis that includes methods of archival studies, ethnic studies, history, ethnography, and education. This project was done in partnership with *Chicana Por Mi Raza*, an organization dedicated to documenting the presence and active involvement of *Chicanas* throughout history.

Introduction

This thesis project seeks to uncover the silenced histories of the Chicano movement that happened during the nineteen-sixties and seventies, with a particular focus on the role of women's involvement within the movement. This research consists of interviews done with women who were politically active during this time period and pays homage to their contributions. Their contributions were oftentimes erased by those in charge of writing history and they were not given enough credit due to the sexism that plagued the movement during this time. This thesis includes the stories of Deborah Espinosa, Shirley Otero, Carmen Arteaga, and Polly Baca, four brave women from Colorado who contributed their time, sweat, and tears during a tumultuous time, and yet did not receive enough credit for their contributions because of their gender. This thesis also explores the way that education impacted the lives of these women and how it gave them the vocabulary to talk about their experiences as women of color. Collecting these *testimonios* not only provides a clearer picture of the Chicano movement, but it also

inspires social change, challenges patriarchal and homophobic culture, redefines traditional gender roles and it even influences the outcome of the future.

Background/Context

In order to understand the stories of these women, first, there must be an understanding of why the Chicano movement took place. During the fifties, sixties, and seventies, Chicanos participated in the national quest for civil rights, built coalitions, and mobilized the Chicano people so they could fight for social justice. This became known as the Chicano movement or *El Movimiento*, which will be used interchangeably. This was a turbulent time due to the “Vietnam War, urban riots, the antiwar movement, and Watergate.”¹ These times of restlessness led to many protests and launched many people into political activism with the purpose of receiving better treatment for Chicanos. The reason why the Chicano movement was so significant is that it was “a historical first attempt to shape a politics of unification on the basis of a nonwhite identity and culture and in the interests of the Mexican American working class.”² The Chicano movement had many layers with people of many backgrounds, classes, and ages joining the cause in order to make a difference. The youth in particular were very involved during the movement. They protested for the struggles of farmworkers, promoted educational reform, and took a stance against police brutality. Overall, the “Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s was important to Mexican-Americans’ struggle for political, economic, and social equality in American society.”³ The Chicano movement launched the Chicano people into the spotlight and highlighted the issues that Chicanos faced such as discrimination, racism, and xenophobia.

Despite the successes of the Chicano movement, not everyone received the credit they earned.

¹ Lopez, Fred A., and Carlos Munoz. Review of *Reflections on the Chicano Movement*, by Ignacio M. Garcia, Mario T. Garcia, and Juan Gomez-Quinones. *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 4 (1992): 79–86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2633846>.

² Lopez, “Reflections on the Chicano Movement,” 82.

³ Lopez, “Reflection on the Chicano Movement,” 85.

For example, women were oftentimes not included in the historical narrative of the Chicano movement, and their involvement was constrained because of their gender. Despite these setbacks, women contributed their time, effort, and ideas to the movement.

Chicana historian Maylei Blackwell tracked the involvement of Chicanas in the Chicano movement by studying members of *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*. *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* was a Chicana-run newspaper that was founded in 1971, and covered issues specific to Chicanas. She concluded that women not only participated in the Chicano movement at high rates but collecting their stories also contests “the mode in which the history of this era has been told and challenges us to transform existing paradigms of historical knowledge.”⁴ Women during the Chicano movement struggled to make their voices heard, especially if they identified as feminists. Both men and women within the movement were too afraid that women who claimed they were feminists were too aligned with the white women movement. Furthermore, whenever they were given roles within the movement it was very much based on their genders, they were given roles such as secretaries, cooks, and babysitters. While these roles were vital to keeping the movement alive, this by no means diminishes their importance, however, Chicanas did not even have the option to seek leadership positions within the movement because of the blatant sexism that plagued the movement. By collecting their stories, we are not only honoring their involvement but we begin to see the past a bit more clearly since “we cannot understand our feminist futures without a better understanding of the multiple origins of our feminist pasts.”⁵ Collecting and sharing Chicanas’ oral histories provides a more holistic picture of what occurred during the Chicano movement.

⁴ Blackwell, Maylei, 1969-, *Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 2011.

⁵ Blackwell, “Chicano Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement,” 16.

Chicanas during the fifties, sixties, and seventies built coalitions all across the nation in response to the political activism that was occurring due to the Chicano movement. One of the many examples included the city of San José, California where Chicanas “resisted institutional discrimination, fought against perennial police brutality, challenged the city government that ignored their civil rights, and demanded gender equality.”⁶ Despite their contributions, “women, for the most part, were the “behind the scenes” organizers responsible for effective mass mobilization, communications, and the day-to-day tasks of movement building... They performed duties of secretaries, cooks, and other tasks that women normally performed in their families.”⁷ Despite these setbacks, Chicanas enacted change by organizing at a local level and being willing to share their stories. They managed to organize the community in order to combat things such as educational discrimination and get real reform in the education system. Women were also making their voices heard by actively voicing their opinions about matters such as the Vietnam war. For example, Delia Alvarez⁸ was very vocal about her sentiments about the war, especially since her brother was a prisoner of war. By being a vocal advocate, Alvarez was able to voice her opinion all around the world to stop the war. Her bravery and defiance empowered Alvarez to speak out and defy rigid patriarchal notions of Chicana behavior.⁹ Even though Chicanas were given a rigid role, their perseverance, and boldness contributed to the success of the Chicano movement. Despite being written out of history, Chicanas across the nation mobilized for a common cause: Chicana/o equality and civil rights, which aligned with the foals

⁶ Regua, Nannette, “WOMEN IN THE CHICANO MOVEMENT: Grassroots Activism in San José.” *Chicana/Latina Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2012, pp. 114–52,

⁷ Lopez, “Reflections on the Chicano Movement,” 7.

⁸ Regua, “WOMEN IN THE CHICANO MOVEMENT: Grassroots Activism in San José,” 127. Delia Alvarez was an active Chicana anti-war activist in San José, California. She was a member of a Chicana organization called Mujeres de Aztlán, and she was very outspoken about the Vietnam War. This was due to the fact that her brother was a prisoner of war, and had suffered violence at the hands of the military-industrial complex.

⁹ Regua, “WOMEN IN THE CHICANO MOVEMENT: Grassroots Activism in San José,” 127.

of the Black Power and American Indian Movements. Chicanas, like other women of color, also wanted to ensure that oppressive gender roles and sexism were acknowledged as part of the issues that needed to be addressed within the movement.

Perhaps one of the most silenced voices within the movement includes those who are a part of the queer community. Writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa contributed to the cause by participating in political activism, raising Chicano consciousness, and theorizing about feminist thought. Despite her major contributions to queer Chicana feminism, Anzaldúa talks about the fear of being rejected by her own community because of her sexuality. She talks about how in order to “avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadow.”¹⁰ The treatment of those who are a part of the queer community gives a glimpse into the underlying issues that the movement dealt with such as sexism and homophobia. Anzaldúa demanded that men acknowledge the fact that “they wound us, violate us, are afraid of us and of our power.”¹¹ Her powerful stance against sexism made Anzaldúa a controversial figure to Chicano men and women with more traditional and conservative views as they viewed them as anti-men. Anzaldúa fought for the rights of all women and believed they deserved recognition for all their efforts made during the movement. Anzaldúa also talks about the limited roles that women have, not only within the movement but outside of that as well. In the Chicano culture, “there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother.”¹² These sentiments have been hard to get rid of and they still linger in Chicano culture to this day. This way of thinking is exemplified in the roles that Chicanas were given during the movement.

¹⁰ Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands = La Frontera : The New Mestiza*. San Francisco, Spinster/Aunt Lute, 1987.

¹¹ Anzaldúa, Gloria, “Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza,” 84.

¹² Anzaldúa, Gloria, “Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza,” 17.

Positionality Statement

These interviews led me to question my own positionality within the whole project. I did not simply want to be the extractor of information but wanted the whole experience to feel like a mutual exchange of knowledge. The women that participated in this project exerted their “agency in both the political fronts, in previously male-dominated political and academic spaces, and by re-imagining their spiritual practices and functions of religion in their lives, they have pushed the limits of societal expectations of women in both the spiritual and political realms.”¹³ The interactions that I had with Deborah Espinosa, Shirley Otero, Carmen Arteaga, and Polly Baca made me question power relations, personal misconceptions about the field of Chicana studies, and seek out Chicana feminist praxis that would adequately tell their story. I want to honor the connection that these women and I made through the exchange of stories. Since these women have contributed to the betterment of society in a plethora of ways, there is a responsibility to capture their stories in an ethical and meaningful way.

Theoretical Framework

The research I conducted is grounded in an interdisciplinary Chicana feminist praxis that includes methods and frameworks in archival studies, ethnic studies, history, ethnography, and education. For the first part of the project, I conducted interviews that collected the stories of women who participated in political activism during the fifties, sixties, and seventies. I assessed the experiences of these women through a methodological framework that feminist Anthropologist Brenda Sendejo calls “*mujerista* ethnography, which draws on oral history and research methods employed by anthropologists and feminist, indigenous, and Chicana and

¹³ Sendejo, Brenda, “The Face of God Has Changed: Tejana Cultural Production and the Politics of Spirituality in the Borderlands,” 82.

Chicano Studies scholars.”¹⁴ Not only do *mujerista* ethnographies examine the lived experiences of Latina women in their communities, but they also “draw on autoethnography, oral history, *testimonio*, feminist research methods, and indigenous methodologies to understand how individuals have changed their life circumstances through transformations of the mind, body, and spirit.”¹⁵ I collaborated with Chicana Por Mi Raza (CPMR), a Chicana-led digital memory project and archive co-founded by Drs. María E. Cotera and Linda Garcia Merchant, whose goal is to collect hundreds of oral histories and encourage further research on subjects that have historically been understudied such as stories told by women of color. Furthermore, this organization wants to make history more accurate and make these stories more accessible to the general public. Chicana Por Mi Raza largely relies on the work of volunteers and students to document these oral histories to add to their digital archives. Currently, CPMR has approximately ten thousand archival items readily available for public use. This organization inspired this research as they take inspiration from the Chicana feminist praxis of reinventing what is considered the “archive.”

The CPMR digital project was inspired by Maria Cotera’s mother, one of the earliest Chicana feminists, Marta Cotera. In her article, *Unpacking Our Mothers’ Libraries: Practices of Chicana Memory before and after the Digital Turn*, Cotera discusses the importance of the collections kept by our mothers that document the presence of Chicanas throughout history. Despite their organization and disorderliness, these “collections are something more than the detritus of life in a struggle – they constitute the evidence of Chicana presence.”¹⁶ Even though

¹⁴ Sendejo, Brenda, “The Face of God Has Changed: Tejana Cultural Production and the Politics of Spirituality in the Borderlands,” PhD diss., (University of Texas-Austin, 2010).

¹⁵ Sendejo, Brenda, “The Face of God Has Changed: Tejana Cultural Production and the Politics of Spirituality in the Borderlands,” 2.

¹⁶ Cotera, María, "Unpacking Our Mothers’ Libraries: Practices of Chicana Memory before and after the Digital Turn, " *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the*

the acts of collecting and remembrance are central features of Chicana feminist thought, women's contributions, particularly in social movements, remain largely unexplored. Whenever the archive gets formed, the working class, women, ethnic, and sexual minorities are often excluded from the narrative. Their absence in the archive is very intentional as it makes these populations feel like they are not part of historical meaning-making. A big part of this erasure is due to the colonial and patriarchal structures that place colonizer values as superior.

Cotera also discusses the praxis of collecting and re-collecting, of membering and re-membering, and how these processes involve an active *encuentro* with the past that helps us create new knowledge that engages with the present in more critical ways. Inspired by her mother and other Chicana feminist writers and because of the absence of archives dedicated to histories often elided by the dominant culture, Cotera, alongside CPMR co-founder Linda Garcia Merchant, embarked on the journey of creating CPMR digital memory project. This project led her to reimagine “the archive as both noun and verb, as a process of *encuentro* and a path to *conocimiento*.”¹⁷ This project caused Cotera to question the idea of memory, knowledge production, and historical meaning-making. Her hope, as is mine through my work, is to challenge Western paradigms related to history and recording, to disrupt the archive, decolonize it, and challenge the power relations that exist between scholars and the communities they choose to study. This reframing of the archive and our practice of recording history would recreate the archive as a *sitio* of *encuentro* and *conocimiento* rather than just a repository.

In addition to Cotera and Garcia Merchant, the Latina Feminist Group has brought attention to the significance of archives created by women of color. The Latina Feminist Group is

Movement Era, edited by Dionne Espinoza, María Eugenia Cotera and Maylei Blackwell, New York, USA: University of Texas Press, 2021, pp. 299-316. <https://doi.org/10.7560/315583-019>

¹⁷ Cotera, María, "Unpacking Our Mothers' Libraries: Practices of Chicana Memory before and after the Digital Turn, " 305.

composed of women from “the Southwest, East, and Midwest, Latinas of multiple national and ethnic origins.”¹⁸ They illuminate the value of *testimonio* as a theory and praxis through their emphasis on *papelitos guardados* what they describe as “protected documents, guarded roles, stored papers, conserved roles, safe papers, secret roles, hidden paper, safe roles, preserved documents, protected roles”¹⁹ that hold stories about people’s lived experiences. They are intimate stories that talk about the complexity of the identity and lived experiences of Latinas. *Papelitos guardados* evoke “the process by which we contemplate thoughts and feelings, often in isolation and through difficult times.”²⁰ These *papelitos guardados* give Latinas the chance to share their *testimonios* with the world about the struggles they have faced. This gives us the chance to engage with *testimonios* in a different manne because *testimonios* give you an opportunity to engage in real dialogue with someone who directly experienced an event, they also decenter colonial bias. The traditional academic approach towards a *testimonio* tends to “simplify, aggregate, and reduce experience to variables.”²¹ *Testimonios* are critical in the empowerment of Latina voices because they highlight the complexities of Latina identities in the United States. These *testimonios* reside in the *papelitos guardados* that women hold close to their hearts.

This thesis draws from Chicana feminist historian Emma Perez’s postmodern approach to Chicana history, which states that “[n]othing is taken for granted. Nothing is accepted at face

¹⁸ Alarcón, Norma, et al, “*Papelitos Guardados: Theorizing Latinidades Through Terstimonio*,” Duke University Press 2001.

¹⁹ Alarcón, Norma, et al, “*Papelitos Guardados: Theorizing Latinidades Through Terstimonio*,” 1.

²⁰ Alarcón, Norma, et al, “*Papelitos Guardados: Theorizing Latinidades Through Terstimonio*,” 1.

²¹ Alarcón, Norma, et al, “*Papelitos Guardados: Theorizing Latinidades Through Terstimonio*,” 2.

value. Nothing is real. All is imagined and therefore disputable.”²² In her essay, Perez calls for a reinvention of what we consider history, particularly because history is written by those in power such as colonizers and conquerors. For example, women are oftentimes “spoken about, spoken for, and ultimately encoded as whining, hysterical, irrational or passive women who cannot know what is good for them, who cannot know how to express or authorize”²³ their own narratives. In addition, women are usually included in the narrative only as a backdrop to men’s social and political activities and “as exploited workers alongside men.”²⁴ For this reason, oral histories are a way of survival for those who do not have access to the written word which tends to be privileged. However, Perez states that “there is no pure authentic, original history. There are only stories - many stories.”²⁵ This statement helps us understand the way that history is produced and challenges the idea that history is objective. If all historians believe their work is objective, they can fall into the problem of ignoring the colonial relations that exist within history. Perez also refuses to accept the linear timeline of history that follows the traditional beginning, middle, and end frame. This Western framework traps historians and limits their ability to tell the full picture. Oral histories disrupt this timeline because the stories do not have to follow a specific order as they are mostly recited from memory. Oral histories are a way to pass down stories, cultures, and traditions. Oral histories provide a platform for historically marginalized people to make their stories heard, thus, providing more clarity into what happened in the past.

The stories that were collected from Deborah Espinosa, Shirley Otero, Carmen Arteaga, and Polly Baca reside in what Perez calls “the decolonial imaginary.”²⁶ The decolonial imaginary

²² Perez, Emma, *“The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History,”* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, Print.

²³ Perez, Emma, *“The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History,”* XV.

²⁴ Perez, Emma, *“The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History,”* 10.

²⁵ Perez, Emma, *“The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History,”* XV.

²⁶ Perez, Emma, *“The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History,”* XVI.

is a tool that is used for discovering the hidden voices of Chicanas that have historically been silenced. Perez believes that the decolonial imaginary has the potential to reconceptualize history as it gives voices to historically marginalized groups. She describes the decolonial imaginary as a rupturing space or “the alternative to that which is written in history.”²⁷ The stories of people who are othered reside in the decolonial imaginary. Through oral history telling and *testimonios*, these stories can be brought to light. Furthermore, Perez discusses how Chicana history has been an effort to challenge Eurocentricity, shift meaning, and read against the grain. In order to access these stories, one must be able to access the interstitial gaps that exist in history where all these unheard stories, the unthought, and the unspoken reside. This interstitial space can also be considered a time lag. Perez believes that “the time lag between the colonial and postcolonial can be conceptualized as the decolonial imaginary.”²⁸ This time lag is where Chicana history resides today between the colonial and postcolonial. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang state in their article, *Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor*, “we are doing this work alongside many others who - somewhat relentlessly, in writings, meetings, courses, and activism, don’t allow the real and symbolic violence of settler colonialism to be overlooked.”²⁹ The *testimonios* provided by these four women extend beyond the imaginary to make visible and to honor Chicanas’ lived experiences and realities.

In her research, Chicana feminist and Education scholar Dolores Delgado Bernal explains how cultural knowledge impacts educational achievement and policy formation. For example, if a teacher actively works to understand the community she is serving, she has a higher chance of making an impact in the students’ lives. The educators in this thesis include, Deborah

²⁷ Perez, Emma, “*The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*,” 6.

²⁸ Perez, Emma, “*The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*,” 6.

²⁹ Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (September 8, 2012).
http://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/19298692/v01i0001/nfp_dinam.xml.

Espinosa, Shirley Otero, and Carmen Arteaga. Their commitment to educational equity embodies what it means to serve your community. Bernal employs a qualitative research methodology called *trenzas y mestizaje*, which “proposes a technique for advancing cross-disciplinary study, as well as reforming disciplinary canons – one that scholars can look to for illuminating cultural knowledge, its meanings, images, and practices.”³⁰ When education and cultural knowledge are woven together, the way that these women have done so through their curriculum, they have the possibility to completely transform a student’s educational career. Much like the women I interviewed, Bernal, was inspired and guided by her Chicana worldview, her experiences in the *barrio*, and motherhood. Furthermore, she realized that the students she interviewed viewed *consejos* and *educación* on the same level of importance even though *consejos* traditionally come from outside of academia. This highlights the importance of including other sources of knowledge such as parents, grandparents, and other family members because they carry a lot of stories and wisdom about our past.

Research Methods

I wanted the interviews to feel like conversations between two friends rather than the typical interview format. I followed Dolores Delgado Bernal and Cindy Fierros idea of a *platica*. *Platicas* allow you to exchange memories, experiences, and stories that pertain to the personal, familial, and cultural history. The advantage of a *platica* is that it allows “us to engage the personal in the classroom while continuing to engage the academic in our more intimate spaces away from school.”³¹ *Platicas* reinvent traditional ways of extracting information from someone because it allows its participants to be co-constructors of their own knowledge and gives them agency over their story. Unlike a traditional interview where the interviewer is extracting

³⁰ Delgado Bernal, Dolores, “*Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life*,” 28.

³¹ Bernal, Dolores, “*Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life*,” 99.

knowledge from the participants, a *platica* is a two-way conversation. *Platicas* have a certain rhythm to them. They start off with *la entrada*, which consists of acquainting yourself with the interviewee. Maria, Linda, and I had email correspondence with our participants prior to conducting the interviews, so we were greeted with smiles and snacks at the doors of their homes. After that, the process continues with an *amistad* interview, which is made up of a proper interview and informal conversation. By including the informal conversation in the interview, there is less pressure on the interviewee and this gives them time to think about what they are going to say. Finally, the process concludes with *la despedida* which is a show of appreciation by both parties. After our interview was over, Maria, Linda, and I would usually take the participant out to dinner afterward where the conversation would continue and we learned much more about them. If performed correctly, not only does a *platica* methodology build an everlasting relationship between participants, but it also has the potential to provide a space for healing. *Platicas* are healing because they “allow us to witness shared memories, experiences, stories, ambiguities, and interpretations that impart us with a knowledge connected to personal, familial, and cultural history.”³² When dealing with marginalized populations, “*la plática* serves as a more appropriate culturally synoptic model because of its employment of staff members familiar to the participants and their cultural background.”³³

This research also includes historiography and draws on the research of Chicana historians in particular. Much like Chicana feminist and borderlands historian Emma Perez’s notion of history not being objective, the archive is also a collection of stories where objectivity cannot exist. The current “archive” does not include voices from women of color, therefore, the space must be made for them. Oral histories provide the space to make these voices heard.

³² Delgado Bernal, Dolores, “*Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life*,” 99.

³³ Delgado Bernal, Dolores, “*Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life*,” 104.

Collecting these stories is a way of survival for these populations. This research highlights marginalized voices, particularly women of color, in order to create a more inclusive and accurate history. The interviews took place in the homes of the women, some of whom resided in Pueblo, Boulder, the San Luis Valley, and Denver. There is still a vibrant community of Chicanos who reside in these areas whose stories have never been recorded, which indicates that there is plenty of rich history still left to document.

Interviews

The following includes the stories of Deborah Espinosa, Shirley Otero, Carmen Arteaga, and Polly Baca. These women all live in different parts of Colorado but their stories and lives are connected by their shared lived experiences. Many Chicanas helped shaped Colorado, particularly in the field of education, however, their efforts were never highlighted in history. The work between Chicana Por Mi Raza, Colorado College, and Colorado University-Boulder is groundbreaking because it captures and documents the accomplishments of these women. It is also important to note that the Chicano movement in Colorado was initiated in Denver, and it was students who were at the forefront of the protests. By capturing the stories of these women, we can begin to expand the archive of Chicanas in the movement. These four women have created a shared a certain *comadreo* which is “the Latin American/Latina tradition of kinship, reciprocity, and commitment.”³⁴ They have been able to build everlasting friendships through their work and commitment to social justice. They are part of the same social circles and continue to work for the betterment of their communities. These women embody the true meaning of sisterhood as they support, care for, and love each other whenever needed.

Deborah Espinosa

³⁴ Alarcón, Norma, et al, “*Papelitos Guardados: Theorizing Latinidades Through Testimonio*,” 15

Deborah Espinosa was born in Gunnison, Colorado in 1951, to a family that consisted of three brothers and three sisters. She comes from a very traditional family of Mexican Catholics. As Espinosa was growing up, her mom worked cleaning houses for the wealthier people in town while her dad went into the railroad industry. At the age of six, Espinosa's family was relocated to Grand Junction, Colorado. She describes how her hometown "remains pretty much an exclusive city and I don't mean in wealth not necessarily, I am talking about how they excluded people."³⁵ The excluded people she was referring to were the town's Spanish, Chicano, and Mestizo populations. Through her parent's hard work and their ability to achieve middle-class income status, Espinosa was able to attend a Catholic school in her formative years. Through her Catholic school experience, Espinosa was able to learn how be meticulous and thorough with her work which helped shape the way she approached projects she worked on later in life. Despite loving Catholic school, Espinosa felt like there was no representation or diversity of people from different backgrounds and socioeconomic classes. This lack of representation led her to have feelings of detachment and isolation throughout her Catholic education experience. Despite loving Catholic school, Espinosa wanted to be in a space where there were more people like her, so in middle school, she decided to attend the public middle school in her town. She expressed, "I wanted to be with kids that were a lot like me."³⁶ Because of her choice to attend a public school, the principal of her Catholic school told Espinosa, "You know you will end up in *el pozo*,"³⁷ which translates to "the hole" and refers to low-income neighborhoods.

Espinosa's dad passed away when she was twelve years old so she was raised by a single mother. This forced her to become aware of the class struggle at a relatively young age. For example, she noticed that her friends had bigger houses and the fact that her friend's mom could

³⁵ Deborah Espinosa, interview by Maria Cotera, Pueblo, Colorado, July 19, 2022.

³⁶ Espinosa, interview.

³⁷ Espinosa, interview.

afford to be a stay-at-home parent while her mom had to work to provide for her family. Espinosa attended high school in the mid-1960s, and she recalls the main issues with her experience such as how people made fun of the food she brought and how the school was predominately white. She also recalled how “in high school, we were not encouraged or supported.”³⁸ The fact that kids of color were not being supported or encouraged in any way made skipping class relatively easy for them. Espinosa also went on to say, “I can’t say I was really encouraged by one teacher. I would have to think really hard about that.”³⁹ This really highlights how students of color are left to navigate educational settings by themselves without any support. Espinosa’s college experience was not any better. Upon attending Mesa College in Grand Junction, Colorado, she experienced culture shock which caused her to drop out. The college campus was predominately white and once again she felt isolated. This particular experience combined with the assassination of prominent civil rights leaders President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. would impact the way she navigated the world. At the age of twenty, she decided to pick up her things and move out of Grand Junction. This would catapult her into developing her political consciousness.

Undeterred by her experience at Mesa College, Espinosa saw the importance of obtaining a higher education so she enrolled at the University of Colorado Boulder in 1971. Even though this institution was predominately white, Espinosa encountered less culture shock. She attended the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) group meetings, which is the Chicax and Latinx student group on Boulder’s campus. Through this organization, she was able to experience more unity and community with her Mexican culture. She described how this made her feel, “I was accepted, loved, and flourished there with my *familia*.”⁴⁰ She was able to find her

³⁸ Espinosa, interview.

³⁹ Espinosa, interview.

⁴⁰ Espinosa, interview.

passion for school again and decided to pursue a major in History. At Boulder, she was able to get involved in student government, various feminist movements, and the Black Alliance. These organizations and the people who participated in them shaped her political consciousness and encouraged her to be an unapologetic activist. She noticed that the students who were a part of these organizations were more mobile, in terms of the ways that they protested inequality on their college campus, and community oriented. For the first time in her life, she was able to express pride in her Mexican culture and was not afraid to express her anger towards cultural theft of identity. This pushback from the students did not go unacknowledged by the school as they faced trouble with the administration. Espinosa also mentioned how within her community there were people who were “sell-outs” meaning they had been seduced by the system and its commodities such as access to jobs and even cars.

Her time at Boulder allowed her to develop her own philosophy of going back to the *barrio* to recruit kids of color to pursue higher education at Boulder. She recalls how she encouraged herself and her friends by saying, “You go back to the *barrio* and you make change.”⁴¹ Espinosa acknowledged her privilege of being able to attend college and this encouraged her to pursue her passion for educational equity. During the height of her political involvement at CU Boulder, fellow students would occupy school buildings as a way to protest. Unfortunately, morale started to falter as they received little to no attention, phones were disconnected as a way to prevent students from communicating with each other, and the worst of all, a bomb went off that claimed the life of two activists and students, Neva Romero and Reyes Martinez. The protest came to a screeching halt when a second explosion went off making everyone worry about their safety. The second explosion claimed the lives of Florencio Granado,

⁴¹ Espinosa, interview.

Herberto Teran, and Francisco Dougherty. In order to honor their contributions to the movement, these students became known as *Los Seis de Boulder*.⁴²

Espinosa was also heavily influenced by her husband, Juan Espinosa, whom she met at Mesa College. They tied the knot after nine months and have been happily married for fifty years. Her husband was a Vietnam veteran who documented the Chicano movement with his photography skills. Espinosa talked about her husband's career and said, "He has a stellar career documenting the Chicano movement."⁴³ Her husband heavily opposed the war and Espinosa talked about his involvement in the "hippie movement."⁴⁴ Espinosa was able to learn through her husband which helped raise her political conscience. Espinosa and her husband, along with David Martinez and Pablo Mora, started their own newspaper, *La Cucaracha*, as a way to document the inequality and inequity they observed in the world. Unfortunately, the newspaper only lasted eight years and could not continue going after an employee incident. Espinosa also talked about how her and her husband were able to work alongside Corky Gonzales, a prominent Chicano movement leader in Denver, Colorado. Gonzales's ideologies and beliefs were very instrumental in raising Espinosa's political conscience because he had first-hand experience with the horrors of the Vietnam War and what was happening with the Chicano movement.

In her later years, Espinosa moved to Pueblo to be closer to her family. In Pueblo, Espinosa held on to the traditional values she learned earlier in life like cooking for her family.

⁴² Herbst, M.

Herbst, Michaela. 2021. "Los Seis De Boulder: Gone But Never Forgotten - The Bold CU". The Bold CU - CU Student Media.

<https://theboldcu.com/2021/11/los-seis-de-boulder-gone-but-never-forgotten/>.

Los Seis de Boulder refers to the students and alumni that were killed in two car bombings near the college. The people who lost their lives include Una Jaakola, Reyes Martínez, Neva Romero, Florencio Granado, Francisco Dougherty and Heriberto Terán. Even though the people responsible for this tragedy were never found, many people from the Boulder community believe that the university was responsible.

⁴³ Espinosa, interview.

⁴⁴ Espinosa, interview.

Espinosa had three kids with her husband, and after the third, she went back to school. Espinosa graduated from Colorado State University-Pueblo after her third baby. After graduating, she held down a part-time job and would also help the newspaper on the weekends. Espinosa did not want to work directly with the newspaper but she would help them process files and research materials. Her part-time job consisted of her being a tour guide for a museum, and that led her to apply to a museum to develop their Mexican program later on. The experience she obtained through this job would set her up to be a community organizer for the next three years. She advocated for wives at home but ultimately failed in her pursuits. Espinosa also noted that “when we look at history, we lost our rights after the United States stole the Southwest.”⁴⁵ For example, before the colonization of the Southwest women could divorce their husbands without stigma and even partake in city councils. Despite being a ferocious fighter for women's rights, Espinosa did not consider herself a feminist because she lacked the materials and resources to describe her experience. Even though Espinosa had been an active activist in her earlier years, she did not love community organizing. She believed that there were multiple ways to contribute to the movement such as taking space up in courtrooms and classrooms.

Espinosa continues to raise awareness regarding educational equity through *La Cucaracha* newspaper. Most recently, *La Cucaracha* published an article about transformative justice in the classroom. In the article, they talked about the school-to-prison pipeline and how it disproportionately affects Chicano students. Through her research, it was discovered that “school resource officers, or SROs, have replaced guidance with punishment, resulting in more Latino students receiving charges and tickets by officers.”⁴⁶ The consequences that follow the punishment include: “disrupting education, fines, stress and stigma for students and families that

⁴⁵ Espinosa, interview.

⁴⁶ Herburger, Emily, “SRO’s: Friends or Foes?” *La Cucaracha*, February 2023: 13.

become entangled in the justice system amongst many others.”⁴⁷ Once a student becomes entangled in the justice system for these minor offenses, they are more likely to end up in prison. By disrupting their educational experience in the classroom, Latino/Chicano students are more likely to drop out. Espinosa believes that in order to combat this vicious cycle, we must develop community reinvestment initiatives, increase accountability, transparency, and community engagement, and expand humanistic approaches to prevent this from happening.

Shirley Otero

Shirley Otero was born in 1955 and was raised by a single mom. She was the oldest female in her family. Otero lived in a small tight-knit community where everyone knew each other. She described how in her town, “Growing up it was a safe place to be. Any adult in the community could protect me.”⁴⁸ In addition to this, Otero did not grow up in a house where traditional gender roles were exhibited and this impacted the way she viewed the world later in life. Her mom inculcated the value of education in her and would often say, “*Toma ventaja de tu educación.*”⁴⁹ This roughly translates to “take advantage of your education.” Shirley’s mom instilled in her a strong sense of work ethic, and Shirley’s first job was growing and hoeing vegetables. Shirley’s mom was a lunchroom cook who wanted Shirley to take advantage of as many resources as possible. However, since it was a small rural community, they did not have enough resources to provide any sort of guidance for the college process. Shirley’s mom was very protective of her kids as she realized that alcoholism ran in her family due to PTSD from the Vietnam War so she tried to educate them as much as possible.

In high school, Otero got involved in the student council, became a cheerleader, and even organized a protest against the sexist dress code in her school. Since she was always so

⁴⁷ Herburger, “SRO’s: Friends or Foes?” 13.

⁴⁸ Shirley Otero, interview by Maria Cotera, San Luis, Colorado, July 20, 2022.

⁴⁹ Otero, interview.

outspoken about her beliefs, Otero recalls how “looking back I remember being called a bitch. I remember being called a *bocona*.”⁵⁰ This however did not deter her from expressing her ideas, in fact, it only encouraged her because she stated that being called a bitch was a display of her leadership qualities. This particular incident also highlights how women of color are seen as pushy and bossy whenever they express their opinions. After high school, Otero was the only one in her family to attend college. She recounts how “I did not want to stay back and become a young mother.”⁵¹ By this time, she was encouraged by her school counselor and English teacher to pursue higher education. Since she had come from a small town, Otero was not aware of the injustices of the world until she got to Adams State University in Alamosa, Colorado, where her mind was opened by taking Chicano studies classes. During our interview, Otero told us how “learning about who I was and my history and my place in this community, and the state, in the world just really changed the lens to which I saw the world ... and that came from learning my history.”⁵² She continued on to say, “I got this appetite to learn more about what was going on.”⁵³ This launched her interest in social justice and she decided to pursue a political science degree.

Despite having obtained this new knowledge about her identity, Otero decided to drop out of school during her senior year of college. She learned how to be an organizer through her husband, Ray Otero. For example, Otero encouraged Chicanos all over the country to travel to San Luis to advocate against the usufructuary rights of land in San Luis. Otero was also very influenced by Cesar Chavez and Los Seis de Boulder. Cesar Chavez was significant to Mexican-American history because he was the president of the United Farm Workers of America. This organization was “one of the most important and dynamic labor unions, being

⁵⁰ Otero, interview.

⁵¹ Otero, interview.

⁵² Otero, interview.

⁵³ Otero, interview.

composed of primarily Mexican Americans and Blacks.”⁵⁴ The combination of these things made Shirley want to participate in the movement but she started to notice some faults in it such as the lack of women leadership in the movement.

In the seventies, Shirley embarked on her political and organizing career. After raising her kids, Otero decided to finish her schooling at Mesa State College. Throughout the seventies, she got to meet the “four horsemen” in the Chicano movement. These figures included Cesar Chavez⁵⁵, Corky Gonzales⁵⁶, Reies Lopez Tijerina⁵⁷, and Jose Angel Gutierrez⁵⁸. Otero was seeking a place where she could turn all her anger into something productive. She recalls how as a young mother she knew, “I had to find a channel in which I could direct this anger.”⁵⁹ She

⁵⁴ Chavez, Cesar. “The California Farm Workers’ Struggle.” *The Black Scholar* 7, no. 9 (1976): 16–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41066045>.

⁵⁵ The Story of Cesar Chavez

"The Story Of Cesar Chavez". 2023. UFW. <https://ufw.org/research/history/story-cesar-chavez/>. Cesar Chavez was the founder of the National Farm Workers Association later known as the United Farm Workers. He wanted to bring attention to farm workers struggles, and championed for better pay and safer working conditions for farmers.

⁵⁶ Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales | Articles | Colorado Encyclopedia

"Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales | Articles | Colorado Encyclopedia". 2023.

Coloradoencyclopedia.Org.

<https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/rodolfo-%E2%80%99Corky%E2%80%99D-gonzales#De-ath-and-Legacy>.

Rodolfo Gonzales was a prominent leader in the Chicano movement in Denver. He was the founder of the Crusade for Justice which advocated for economic justice, and better treatment of Chicano people. He worked closely with Cesar Chavez.

⁵⁷ Reies Tijerina | Biography & Facts

"Reies Tijerina | Biography & Facts". 2023. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Reies-Lopez-Tijerina>.

Reies Tijerina was a civil rights activist who played a large role in the land-grant movement in Northern New Mexico. He organized hundreds of Chicanos to demand land repatriation from the US government who had given the land to Anglo surveyors.

⁵⁸ Gutierrez, Jose Angel, - Social Networks and Archival Context

"Gutierrez, Jose Angel, - Social Networks And Archival Context". 2023. Snaccooperative.Org. <https://snaccooperative.org/view/63161905>.

Jose Angel Gutierrez was also leading Chicano activist in Texas. He co-founded La Raza Unida politica party which helped him raise awareness of Chicano civil rights issues.

⁵⁹ Otero, interview.

began to get involved at *La Cucaracha*⁶⁰, the newspaper founded by Juan Espinosa in Pueblo, Colorado. The topics that *La Cucaracha* covered pertained to “police brutality, education, land rights, healthcare, local and national news.”⁶¹ Around this time as well, Otero was heavily influenced by Madeline Navarro, who was an activist and a single mom who would expose the sexism and traditional gender roles imposed on women at the height of the Chicano movement. She wanted to highlight how vital women were to the movement as they cooked and organized many of the meetings, yet, she saw these efforts often go unrecognized as sexism was very prevalent within the movement. Shirley also got involved in the land grant movement⁶², and observed similar patterns from the Chicano movement, specifically how the movement was mainly male-dominated. These setbacks did not discourage Otero and she continued to make big changes within both of these movements. Otero expressed how she felt really proud of her accomplishments, particularly how, “As an adult, I have certainly busted the myth about the roles of I as a brown, outspoken, short Chicana should fit into.”⁶³

⁶⁰ La Cucaracha Newspaper | Archives and Special Collections | CSU-Pueblo

"La Cucaracha Newspaper | Archives And Special Collections | CSU-Pueblo ". 2023. Csupueblo.Edu. <https://www.csupueblo.edu/archives-and-special-collections/la-cucaracha.html>.

⁶¹ La Cucaracha Newspaper | Archives and Special Collections | CSU-Pueblo" La Cucaracha Newspaper | Archives And Special Collections | CSU-Pueblo ", Csupueblo.Edu, 2022, <https://www.csupueblo.edu/archives-and-special-collections/la-cucaracha.html>, Accessed 27 Oct 2022.

⁶² The New Mexican Land Grant Struggle and the Birth of Chicano Identity and Nationalism (by Madelyn Perez)

"The New Mexican Land Grant Struggle And The Birth Of Chicano Identity And Nationalism (By Madelyn Perez)". 2014. "All POWER TO THE PEOPLE!".

<https://allpower.wordpress.com/teaching/teaching-activities-2014/the-new-mexican-land-grant-struggle-and-the-birth-of-chicano-identity-and-nationalism-by-madelyn-perez/#:~:text=The%20New%20Mexican%20Land%20Grant%20Struggle%20was%20a%20focused%20movement,of%20Chicano%20identity%20and%20nationalism>.

The Land Grant Movement refers to the movement that protested the land that had been taken by the U.S. government following the Mexican American War. Even though the movement faced little success, it contributed to ideas of Chicano identity and nationalism.

⁶³ Otero, interview.

The movement produced many teachers who were labeled as “movement teachers” since they were politicized. Otero herself became an educator in the Grand Junction area where she implemented all the knowledge she learned from the movement into her teaching. She drew her inspiration from her family, particularly her nieces, nephews, and daughters. She spent thirty-one years here teaching and making a change, however, she encountered many obstacles as Grand Junction is a predominantly small, white, right-wing community. Through her observations as a teacher, Otera started to become more socially aware. She was particularly concerned with the drop-out rate among Chicano children from school. She realized that the kids' needs weren't being met, however, she quickly understood that there was a reason behind this. Otero talked about how “I was very aware at a young age that we this school to prison pipeline.”⁶⁴ Otero realized that it was more expensive for tax-payers to warehouse kids in the prison system. This realization, combined with her passion for social justice, led her to find ways of combating the school-to-prison pipeline⁶⁵ which disproportionately affects kids of color and punishes them for small infractions which leads them to end up in prison.

Otero continued to be active at school by leading professional training for teachers regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion. She began teaching parent education at a Title I school which was mainly comprised of low-income families. Otero believed that a child's educational experience could be transformed if teachers and parents worked in tandem. She believes that “the

⁶⁴ Otero, interview.

⁶⁵ Lewis, C.

Lewis, Carlton. 2019. "The School To Prison Pipeline - RED - Stop Recidivism". RED - Stop Recidivism.

https://stoprecidivism.org/blog/the-school-to-prison-pipeline/?gclid=CjwKCAjwo7iiBhAEEiwAsIxQEeUwOOve0dHI9JzniyhZUPeCseCNjrkk3v6IQKqJQ-uHrAlWZi9fQBoC8xIQAvD_BwE.

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the way that children of color are introduced into the criminal justice system for minor offenses. This creates the cycle that funnels students of color out of school and into the streets, eventually landing them in the juvenile correction system.

greatest determinant for a student's success is parental involvement."⁶⁶ She also implemented a Folklorico group at her school. She believed dance was an important aspect of learning one's culture. Otero was particularly inspired to keep working hard because she wanted to reduce the number of Chicanos dropping out of school. Otero believed that her role in the movement was to change kids' lives by teaching them their own history, which is why she began teaching Ethnic, Chicano, and Indigenous studies. For example, she wanted the kids to see the importance of celebrating Mexican Independence instead of the fourth of July. Otero fell in love with teaching and believed that that was the way she was contributing to the Chicano movement. She explained to us the importance of cultural identity and told us that "that's what cultural identity does, it empowers you."⁶⁷ She believed working as an educator was her way of fighting the system that kept so many Chicano kids oppressed. Furthermore, she saw the importance of investing in the youth because ultimately they would be the next movement leaders and activists. Otero was a powerful advocate of multicultural education. In the years she spent at Grand Junction High School, she pushed for a more inclusive curriculum.

Even though Shirley was contributing to various social movements at the same time, she would not consider herself a Chicana feminist. She discussed how feminism came from the white women's movement, therefore, she never felt connected to it. In its purest form, she said, "I believe that Chicana feminism is about empowering women, and uplifting women of all ages."⁶⁸ Furthermore, feminism must include the voices of Black, Indigenous, and Brown women. Historically, feminism has also failed to include people from the LGBTQ+ community. Much like Gloria Anzaldúa, she believes LGBTQ+ people have been relegated to the outskirts of society. Until these people are invited to the table, Shirley believes she cannot consider herself a

⁶⁶ Otero, interview.

⁶⁷ Otero, interview.

⁶⁸ Otero, interview.

feminist. Instead, she chooses to focus on taking things day by day and center her relationships with her *compadres* and *comadres*.

Carmen Arteaga

Carmen Arteaga is a Pueblo native born on November 9, 1949. She comes from a very tight-knit family, and growing up her family resided in a *colonia* which was a predominantly Mexican community. Arteaga, the oldest of her family, was raised strictly, and traditional family roles were filled by the members of her family. Because she was around people that looked like her, Arteaga was never aware of her status as a low-income woman of color. She discussed with us how “We never knew we were poor.”⁶⁹ This changed when she entered Junior High, as more people from the neighboring towns were included in her school district. However, upon having this experience she did not have the vocabulary to express what she was feeling. Arteaga began to observe the faults within the school system, particularly she observed and told us how “I was one of very few Mexicans on this higher track.”⁷⁰ As she grew up, Arteaga slowly became more politicized. Her dad was a member of *La Alianza Federal de Mercedes*, also known as Federal Alliance of Land Grants, which is an organization that advocated for the land rights of Hispano New Mexicans. According to Arteaga, her dad was politically “very progressive”⁷¹ which shaped her thinking. She began digesting knowledge from sources such as *El Grito del Norte*, which heavily influenced the way she perceived the world. *El Grito* was a newspaper co-founded by the activist Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez and the attorney Beverly Axelrod in 1968 that was based in Española, New Mexico, and was dedicated to publishing scholarly and creative work by Mexican Americans from all over the United States. Her parents ingrained in her a strong work ethic and Arteaga's first job was at the age of fifteen. This made her more aware of her

⁶⁹ Carmen Arteaga, interview by Maria Cotera, Pueblo, Colorado, July 22, 2022.

⁷⁰ Arteaga, interview.

⁷¹ Arteaga, interview.

socioeconomic status. Towards the end of her K-12 education, Arteaga was recruited to attend college through the Upward Bound Program. She described that “The Upward Bound program was a program designed to take students from so-called disadvantaged areas and provide them with experiences that would make them successful in college.”⁷² She received support from the director of the program, who encouraged her to pursue higher education. She spent two years at Colorado State University-Pueblo and two years at Adams State University.

Arteaga’s hard work landed her in the field of education. She began teaching at District 60 Parkview Valley. Back in school, in the role of an educator, she began to see the faults within the system again. Even though her school was seventy percent, Chicano students, there was a dire need for Chicano teachers. For example, Arteaga recalls that “when I started teaching there were less than 4% Chicano teachers.”⁷³ Arteaga wrote curriculum for third graders and was heavily inspired by the book *Chicanos: Past, Present, Future* written by the author Julian Nava. This book was influential because it traces the history of Mexicans in the United States. Furthermore, the book describes the social, political, and cultural contributions that Mexicans made to the United States. The knowledge acquired in this book helped Arteaga center her curriculum on the importance of a multicultural education. Most importantly, Arteaga described how “I wanted to make sure my students learned about their culture and history.”⁷⁴ Most importantly, Arteaga saw the need to keep Chicano students out of prison. She became aware of the school-to-prison pipeline and fiercely fought against it by emphasizing the importance of education to her students. Despite being a powerful advocate for students’ education, Arteaga received pushback from some parents in the community. She was specifically targeted for teaching kids about their own history instead of the eurocentric Western history. Even with the

⁷² Arteaga, interview.

⁷³ Arteaga, interview.

⁷⁴ Arteaga, interview.

pushback, this did not stop Arteaga from teaching Chicano students about their culture and history. She believes this was made only made possible because her “principal was very supportive of everything”⁷⁵ she did. On top of being an educator, Arteaga also started tutorial programs at Casa Verde, which led to the development of a Chicano school.

During our interview, Arteaga also discussed the way that feminism was viewed in the Chicano movement. Contrary to popular belief, Arteaga discussed how “women played a very important role in the Chicano movement.”⁷⁶ For example, they were fierce advocates for school changes and started programs for the Chicano youth such as Casa Verde. Even though women were contributing to the movement in various ways, according to Arteaga most did not label themselves Chicana feminists. Arteaga illustrated this by telling us, “Back in the day, a Chicana could not say she was a feminist. They were looked at like a traitor. They thought we had aligned ourselves with the white women’s movement.”⁷⁷ Since *machismo* was prevalent in the Chicano movement, the women exhibited feminist ideals in a way that did not throw it in the men’s faces. Arteaga shared the same sentiments as Otero, she reiterated that women were too scared to label themselves as Chicana feminists because they did not want to be aligned with the white women’s movement. Arteaga discussed how, feminism evolved eventually within the movement. Arteaga, herself, was unapologetic about her opinions and even assumed leadership positions within the movement. Arteaga believed that assuming leadership positions as a woman was important, but roles such as cooking should not be diminished because they also propelled the movement forward.

In the 1970s, Arteaga was a fierce activist for the Chicano movement. She continued to protest the Vietnam war, seek educational reform, and fight for women’s rights. As an active

⁷⁵ Arteaga, interview.

⁷⁶ Arteaga, interview.

⁷⁷ Arteaga, interview.

protestor, Arteaga experienced police violence. She recalled her experience at the Chicano Moratorium⁷⁸ which comprised of a peaceful protest consisting of planned speeches, music, and food in the park. The Chicano people in East Los Angeles were protesting the disproportionate number of casualties among Mexican-American soldiers serving in the Vietnam War. Everything took a wrong turn once the police arrived. She described in great detail how violent the police were towards the Chicanos present at the event. They completely disrupted the event by throwing tear gas and shooting at people. She then went on to say, “The next day [the police] tried to make it seem like it was the fault of the Chicanos.”⁷⁹

The combination of her lived experiences and the knowledge she digested from books made her aware of the double standard that existed within the Chicano movement. Arteaga began to identify with the term *Xicana*. She discussed the importance of the “X”, “I would explain not only to the women but to the men, the “X” means we are all colonized, oppressed people.”⁸⁰ Even though Arteaga expanded her knowledge through books, she emphasized the importance of non-traditional education, particularly knowledge that has been passed on by grandmothers, artists, and painters. Formal education is oftentimes privileged, but Espinosa recognized the fact that not everyone has access to these institutions. This really highlights the importance of *platicas*, especially among women. *Platicas* are spaces where women can seek support and

⁷⁸ Research Guides: A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States: 1970: National Chicano Moratorium

"Research Guides: A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases And Events In The United States: 1970: National Chicano Moratorium". 2023. Guides.Loc.Gov.

<https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/national-chicano-moratorium>.

The Chicano Moratorium was one of the largest Mexican-American anti-war demonstrations. They expressed their concern about the disproportionate amount of Mexican American troops drafted, injured, or killed in the Vietnam War. Even though it started off as a peaceful march, Chicanos were met with police violence from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. Many Chicanos were injured, and three were killed.

⁷⁹ Arteaga, interview.

⁸⁰ Arteaga, interview.

advice from their elders without feeling any judgement. Histories, stories, and life advice are some of the few things that are passed down through *platicas*. They create an unbreakable bond of *comadrisimo* among women.

Throughout the 1980s, Arteaga threw herself into work by participating in Ome Chicana. Arteaga was heavily influenced by the deity Ometecuhtli who was the lord of duality which is where the word Ome comes from. Through this organization, she developed *comadrisimo* among the women who attended the meetings. She really cherished these relationships and went on to say, “We were not afraid to surround ourselves with strong women.”⁸¹ The work that she did through Ome Chicana consisted of identity workshops and art exhibitions. Through this work, she observed the importance of including grassroots work in movements. She continued to do culture work by getting involved in Folklorico groups that emphasized the importance of culture. She discussed that, “The reason I liked Folklorico is because it taught us about our Indigenous heritage.”⁸² Through Folklorico dances, she believed she could teach the importance of the Indigenous roots that bring Mexicans and Chicanos together.

One of the most important lessons that Arteaga articulated during our interview was the significance of multiculturalism specifically pertaining to education. She continues to be a fighter for students who don't come from eurocentric backgrounds. She emphasized the importance of multiculturalism and said, “I think it's very important to have multiculturalism available for students, especially when you come from a culture that is not eurocentric.”⁸³ In order to improve conditions in schools for students, she believes that schools should get rid of “tracking” which is a standard educational practice that divides students based on their performance. This is a problem for Chicanos because it homogenizes them and puts them all in

⁸¹ Arteaga, interview.

⁸² Arteaga, interview.

⁸³ Arteaga, interview.

one class. She believes schools should center around inclusivity and teaching students about many different cultures. In addition to that, schools should have sensitivity training regarding the communities they serve. In order to best serve these communities, teachers should be getting to know them. She also pointed out that, “We need more Chicano teachers, Chicano administrators, and Chicano principals.”⁸⁴ Arteaga articulated how we must consistently fight against the systems that oppress us, and we should learn how to embrace the struggle because it’s a continuous fight.

Currently, Arteaga is working on two mural projects that pertain to the Chicano movement. One of the projects works with the Brown Berets. The Brown Berets were significant to the movement because they fought for educational reform, farmworkers’ rights, police brutality, and against the Vietnam War. The other project consists of an online archive that tells the story of twelve Chicano murals in Pueblo.

Polly Baca

Former Colorado State Senator Polly Baca was born on February 13, 1941, in Greeley, Colorado. She grew up around her three sisters. In our interview, Baca discussed how her ancestors lived through the colonization of Spain, Mexico, and the United States. Baca believes she grew up in a bigoted community and had to emphasize her Spanish side rather than her Indigenous or Mexican side. Baca was heavily influenced by her mom, particularly her mom’s desire to continue pursuing her education. Her mom encouraged her to acquire an education before getting married. Despite her mom’s influence, Baca never felt pressured to perform a certain way. Baca was an exceptional student and was able to attain the Joint Honors scholarship. This type of scholarship is awarded to students who are excelling academically and have displayed leadership abilities. This scholarship helped her navigate academic spaces. Her

⁸⁴ Arteaga, interview.

Catholic upbringing also shaped the way she navigated the world and one of her first experiences with racism was in the church. She also experienced racism in theaters and in the job opportunities that were available to her.

During her college years at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado, Baca got involved with campaign organizing and student body government. She discussed how influential student protests were to her and she observed how the student body mobilized for a good cause. Despite being heavily involved in student government, Baca never felt accepted because of her Mexican-American identity, especially since there were very few minorities on her college campus. In spite of these barriers, she felt encouraged and supported by her friends, family, and professors. At the beginning of her college career, Baca thought she wanted to major in physics, however, she ended up with a honors degree in political science with a math minor. This gave her the opportunity to work for the John F. Kennedy campaign Colorado Viva Kennedy through an internship. Even with her internship experience and good grades, Baca had trouble finding a job after college.

In 1962, Baca was offered a job in Washington D.C. She felt the need to take this job because she felt a responsibility to help her community. This job led her to be involved in the Black Movement and work as a labor union activist. Around this time, Baca also joined the young Democratic party. Baca began to realize the pay inequity between men and women as she was given a GS13 salary at her job, while men were being paid more. In spite of this, she was encouraged to stay at the White House because of the difficulties with the Raza Unida party. The reason why the Raza Unida Party was so controversial was because it was entirely racially based. Baca was then given the opportunity to work for the Bobby Kennedy campaign doing secretary work. Bobby Kennedy was a successful political who took a stance against organized crime,

helped African Americans win the right to vote, and was a key player in promoting racial justice. Even though the Kennedy campaign was slightly more progressive there was still a pay inequality between men and women. She took a pay cut during this time but was still the highest-paid employee in the campaign. Because of her years of experience working in politics, Baca got the chance to work with Cesar Chavez in California. She was part of his field staff. This experience, along with her travels to Latin America, influenced the type of politician she wanted to be. In addition, she was treated very well because she had a connection to Bobby Kennedy.

At the beginning of 1968, Baca joined the Southwest Council of *La Raza*. This organization was established in the hopes of reducing poverty, discrimination, and improving life opportunities for Mexican Americans. Unfortunately, she had to quit because she was pregnant and decided to get married. She was declared politically dead by her community because of this so this led her to move back in with her parents with her newborn child. Undeterred by this, she saw the opportunity to run for state legislature after a vacancy needed to be filled. There was pushback from her community for running for state legislature as she was a woman and identified as Mexican-American. Latino men in particular were not supportive at all as *machismo* runs very rampant in the Chicano community. Baca realized that very few Hispanic men would consider themselves feminists. Regardless of this, Bobby Kennedy helped her secure this position. Through this work, she learned the importance of doing groundwork and realized that you must hit systems of oppression from all directions in order to make long-lasting change. Through her work, Baca emphasized the importance of the inclusion of marginalized communities and coalition building. Baca's identity as a Mexican-American impacted the legislature she introduced during her time in office. She is most proud of the legislation that improved living conditions for her community, but she also describes it as the most painful

legislation. For example, she introduced legislation that helped farmers get bathrooms for when they are working in the fields. Since she was in the spotlight, the Republican party attempted to bribe her during the Nixon era but refused to take any of their money.

After our interview, I reached out to Polly to ask some follow-up questions regarding some issues we face in education today. In this correspondence, she discussed the importance of providing equal opportunities to all students in education. As a politician, she concluded that, “Our democracy depends upon an educated population that understands the issues important to our country. All young people, especially young people of color, need to receive an education to participate fully in our democracy.”⁸⁵ We also discussed how modern day segregation looks in schools today. Segregation today is often the result of money and the availability of resources. For example, students that come from low-income areas do not have the same educational resources as those in higher-income areas. This can be exemplified by those who have the resources to hire additional tutors, access to updated textbooks, and more technology. Baca discussed that in order to combat this, students, teachers, and parents need to advocate to the state legislatures and Congress in order to receive more funding. Finally, Baca concluded that in order to make more allies join the fight for educational equity we must center “stories of students of color from low-income areas who have succeeded despite the odds need to be told/shared with community and business leaders. These leaders need to be challenged to support programs that provide opportunities for low-income students of color.”⁸⁶ Even though Baca did not pursue a career in education, there is no denying that education played an important role in her life. Education was a tool of liberation for her.

Conclusion

⁸⁵ In email correspondence with Polly Baca, February 29, 2023.

⁸⁶ Baca, email correspondence.

During the interviews, a recurring theme that surfaced was the importance of education, and the way it impacted the lives of these four women. Chicanas across the nation mobilized in order to raise awareness about the educational inequity that Chicano children faced. For example, they advocated for bicultural and bilingual programs. In addition, they fought fiercely to hire more Chicano educators. Every one of the women we interviewed mentioned their educational experience and how education changed the trajectory of their lives. They each saw education as a tool of liberation from systems of oppression. Important concepts relating to education, that were born out of Chicana/Latina lives and articulated in Chicana feminisms, include “*educación* (holistic and moral education), *la facultad* (knowing through experience and intuition), *pensadoras* (creative thinkers), *consejos* (narrative storytelling) *testimonios* (testimonials), borderlands (the literal geographic but also symbolic spaces between countries and differences), *sobrevivir* (survival and beyond), *convivir* (the praxis of living together in community), and finally *valerse por si misma* (to be self reliant).”⁸⁷ These terms encompass education in a more holistic way that is connected with all aspect of life, including the spirit, mind and body, and center the unique experiences that Chicanos face in education. These sentiments were also expressed during the interviews, and the women saw the importance of a holistic education in order to make well-rounded individuals. This is a complete reinvention of the way that formal education is conceptualized in the Western frame of thinking. Western ways of framing education center around just expanding the mind while ignoring other important aspects. By employing these concepts, there is the potential to completely change what education means in terms of transforming classrooms and education programs.

⁸⁷ Bernal, Dolores, “*Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life*,” State University of New York Press, 2006, Print.

The *testimonios* we collected from Deborah Espinosa, Otero, Carmen Arteaga, and Polly Baca could not begin to scratch the surface of the many complex Latina identities in the United States. However, by acquainting ourselves with their stories we begin to see how women impacted the Chicano movement and took up space where they were not necessarily wanted. Even after the movement slowed down, these women continued to contribute to their communities in many ways, including fighting for educational equity. Through their *papelitos guardados*, *testimonios*, and extensive archive collections we begin to see a clearer picture of the past. Their stories contribute to the archive, historical meaning-making, and provide a source of inspiration for other women. My hope is that we will continue to uncover more and more marginalized histories in order to get a more holistic version of history.

Works Cited

- Alarcón, Norma, et al, “*Papelitos Guardados: Theorizing Latinidades Through Testimonio*,” Duke University Press 2001.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands = La Frontera : The New Mestiza*. San Francisco, Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.
- Bernal, Dolores, “*Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life*,” State University of New York Press, 2006, Print.
- Blackwell, Maylei, 1969-, *Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 2011.
- Chavez, Cesar. “The California Farm Workers’ Struggle.” *The Black Scholar* 7, no. 9 (1976): 16–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41066045>.
- Cotera, María, "Unpacking Our Mothers' Libraries: Practices of Chicana Memory before and after the Digital Turn, " *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era*, edited by Dionne Espinoza, María Eugenia Cotera and Maylei Blackwell, New York, USA: University of Texas Press, 2021, pp. 299-316. <https://doi.org/10.7560/315583-019>
- Fierros, Cindy O., and Delgado Bernal, Dolores. “VAMOS A PLATICAR: The Contours of Pláticas as Chicana/Latina Feminist Methodology.” *Chicana/Latina Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2016, pp. 98–121. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43941617>. Accessed 1 Nov. 2022.
- Gutierrez, Jose Angel, - Social Networks and Archival Context
- "Gutierrez, Jose Angel, - Social Networks And Archival Context". 2023. Snaccooperative.Org. <https://snaccooperative.org/view/63161905>.

Herbst, M.

Herbst, Michaela. 2021. "Los Seis De Boulder: Gone But Never Forgotten - The Bold CU". The Bold CU - CU Student Media.

<https://theboldcu.com/2021/11/los-seis-de-boulder-gone-but-never-forgotten/>.

Herburger, Emily, "SRO's: Friends or Foes?" La Cucaracha, February 2023: 13.

Lewis, C.

Lewis, Carlton. 2019. "The School To Prison Pipeline - RED - Stop Recidivism". RED - Stop Recidivism.

https://stoprecidivism.org/blog/the-school-to-prison-pipeline/?gclid=CjwKCAjwo7iiBhAEEiwAsIxQEcuWQOve0dHI9JznihZUPcCscCNjrkk3v6IQKqJQ-uHrAlWZi9fQBoC8xIQAvD_BwE.

La Cucaracha Newspaper | Archives and Special Collections | CSU-Pueblo" La Cucaracha

Newspaper | Archives And Special Collections | CSU-Pueblo ", Csupueblo.Edu, 2022,

<https://www.csupueblo.edu/archives-and-special-collections/la-cucaracha.html>, Accessed 27 Oct 2022.

Lopez, Fred A., and Carlos Munoz. Review of *Reflections on the Chicano Movement*, by Ignacio

M. Garcia, Mario T. Garcia, and Juan Gomez-Quinones. *Latin American Perspectives* 19,

no. 4 (1992): 79–86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2633846>.

Perez, Emma, "*The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*," Bloomington:

Indiana University Press, 1999, Print.

Regua, Nannette, "WOMEN IN THE CHICANO MOVEMENT: Grassroots Activism in San

José." *Chicana/Latina Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2012, pp. 114–52,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23345421>. Accessed 5 Apr. 2022.

Reies Tijerina | Biography & Facts

"Reies Tijerina | Biography & Facts". 2023. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Reies-Lopez-Tijerina>.

Research Guides: A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States:

1970: National Chicano Moratorium

"Research Guides: A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases And Events In The United

States: 1970: National Chicano Moratorium". 2023. Guides.Loc.Gov.

<https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/national-chicano-moratorium>.

Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales | Articles | Colorado Encyclopedia

"Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales | Articles | Colorado Encyclopedia". 2023.

Coloradoencyclopedia.Org.

<https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/rodolfo-%E2%80%9C-corky%E2%80%9D-gonzales#Death-and-Legacy>.

Sendejo, Brenda, “The Face of God Has Changed: Tejana Cultural Production and the Politics of Spirituality in the Borderlands,” PhD diss., (University of Texas-Austin, 2010).

The New Mexican Land Grant Struggle and the Birth of Chicano Identity and Nationalism (by Madelyn Perez)

"The New Mexican Land Grant Struggle And The Birth Of Chicano Identity And Nationalism (By Madelyn Perez)". 2014. "All POWER TO THE PEOPLE!".

<https://allpower.wordpress.com/teaching/teaching-activities-2014/the-new-mexican-land-grant-struggle-and-the-birth-of-chicano-identity-and-nationalism-by-madelyn-perez/#:~:text=The%20New%20Mexican%20Land%20Grant%20Struggle%20was%20a%20focus,d%20movement,of%20Chicano%20identity%20and%20nationalism>.

The Story of Cesar Chavez

"The Story Of Cesar Chavez". 2023. UFW. <https://ufw.org/research/history/story-cesar-chavez/>.

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." Decolonization:

Indigeneity, Education & Society 1, no. 1 (September 8, 2012).

http://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/19298692/v01i0001/nfp_dinam.xml.