

# *Concientización*

*A Journal of Chican@ & Latin@  
Experience and Thought*



***Concientización:***  
***A Journal of Chican@ & Latin@ Experience and Thought***  
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*Concientización* is a student journal dedicated to promoting the study of Chican@ and Latin@ experience and thought. We are committed to creating alliances across boundaries of nation, race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality. In that spirit, we incorporate in our mission the study of Latin@s and Chican@s in diaspora; the study of racial, ethnic, class, sexual, and gender identities; and the study of community and nation building.

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# ***Concientización:***

## ***A Journal of Chican@ & Latin@***

### ***Experience and Thought***

Volume 2    Numbers 1 & 2    Winter/Spring 2005

#### **CONTENTS**

<b>Section One</b>	<b><i>The Power of Music and Dance: Salsa, Culture, &amp; Gender</i></b>	
Frances E. Marion	3	<i>Salsa: Examining the Movement through a Cultural Lens</i>
Alexandra de la Riva	7	More Than Music: The Role of <i>Salsa</i> in the United States
Rebecca Gedney	11	The Influence of Latin Music on Western Culture
Stephanie Pfaff	17	Female <i>Salsa</i> Performers in a Male-Dominated Music Industry
<b>Section Two</b>	<b><i>The Power of Labor Activism: Work, Play, &amp; Social Justice</i></b>	
Julia Keister	22	Documenting the Undocumented
Elizabeth Burke	29	Fighting for Rights and Recognition in Two Worlds
Michelle Behl	33	A Field Worker's Dream
Julie Covarrubias	38	Migrant Workers Struggles: Past and Present
Melissa Cartagena	42	Chicana Activism Through Literature
<b>Section Three</b>	<b><i>The Power of Ideas: Sexism, Misogyny, &amp; Fighting Back</i></b>	
Bryan Koronkiewicz	47	<i>La Malinche</i> : From Harlot to Heroine
Christine Kolowith	51	Origins of the Weaving Tradition: A Historical Journey
Claire Boylan	58	Chicanas and Latinas in Math and Science Fields
Lindsey Blank	68	Who is Prettier? Studying the Effects of Age, Gender, and Ethnicity on Perceptions of Female Physical Beauty
Yessenia Salazar	83	Latinas as Entrepreneurs
Xiomara Vargas Aponte	87	Latina Entrepreneurs: An Economic Force in the United States
<b>Contributors</b>	101	

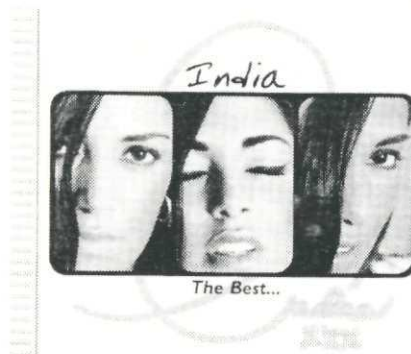




## Section One      *The Power of Music and Dance: Salsa, Culture, & Gender*

### *Salsa: Examining the Movement through a Cultural Lens*

Frances E. Marion



First, the sticks clap out a slow, even pulse. Next, the maracas enter, timidly at first. The keyboard comes in with a gentle, repetitious melody. Then, with the entrance of the hand drums, the tune erupts into a vibrant, colorful celebration. All of the instruments combine and, rather than blending, they fit together like pieces to a puzzle. This is *salsa*, the music, the dance, and the language of working-class Latinos of the urban East Coast of the United States. For the residents of urban *barrios*, *salsa* is much more than an art form. In *salsa* music, the oppressed, marginalized community hears its story in the lyrics, sees its tensions melt away in the bodies of the dancers, and feels a powerful connection to those who also see themselves reflected in the music. This intense emotional and political response cannot be seen in every form of music.

What is it that makes *salsa* so unique? By examining musicians, dancers, and audience members, we see the connection between the *clave* of the song and the beat of their own hearts. *Salsa* tells the story of the ordinary people, their daily toils, social status, cultural roots. In addition to providing entertainment, *salsa* has created a social space for the working Latino and his or her role in American society. Lyrics speak of relationships between men and women, rich and poor, old and young. To begin to understand the people, one must first understand the song, the beat, *la salsa*.



*Salsa* has always been music for the working classes. In Puerto Rico, musical forms called the *danza* and the *plena* have influenced its evolution. These two variations are heavy with racial and class significance. In Puerto Rico, *la plena* has been identified with the poor, working-class, black, and mixed-race Islanders. Traditionally the upper and middle classes have rejected it as an inferior form of art. The *danza* evolved from a European country dance and blended with Caribbean influences to form what became the national music of Puerto Rico.<sup>1</sup> This musical genre represents everything white, aristocratic, and proper. The *plena*, in contrast, is the music of *la gente*, the music of the working-class Puerto Rican. Afro-Puerto Rican dance and song has long been marginalized, however, because of the racism towards people of color on the Island. The *plena* and the *danza* have been pitted against each other in a black versus white, pure versus sinful comparison. The Eurocentric *danza* has been characterized as a "white lady" and the *plena* as the "black whore."<sup>2</sup>

As the urban areas of Puerto Rico grew, the *plena* became a strong cultural tie for the poorer communities. The *plena* narrates history from the point of view of *el pueblo*, the people. Songs serve as critiques of the inequality in the community, using humor, satire, and bold language to express social unrest. *Salsa* music historically has served as a tool for the working class to use against hegemony in their lives.

Music continued to hold important meaning for the urban classes as Puerto Ricans moved to cities in the United States. With influences from all types of Latin music, what we now call *salsa* emerged from the *barrios* of New York City in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> The *barrios* were home to *cubanos*, *dominicanos*, *venezolanos*, *chicanos*, and people from all over the Caribbean. Latinos bonded in the face of the oppression they felt as minorities. Though they faced discrimination outside, the *barrio* was a refuge, a place where they had power and control over their own lives. As Willie Colón told Leonardo Padura Fuentes in an interview, "*En los barrios se desarrolla una formación social que es la expresión de un pedacito de la patria de cada emigrado, y en ese medio se da un valor a lo latinoamericano como algo importante, sin lo que no se puede o no se quiere vivir*" (a social formation develops in the *barrios* that is the expression of a small piece of the homeland of each immigrant, and in this way Latin American culture is given value as something important, without which one could not or would not want to live.)<sup>4</sup>

Music was something immigrants could bring with them to the U.S. and thus own. Latinos resisted assimilating to many parts of American society, and most refused to abandon their music. With strong influences from Cuba, Colombia, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Panama, *salsa* provided the expression and the foundation of a new cultural identity. It has been shaped and molded by Cuban dances like the *guaracha* and the *rumba*, African musical folklore of Puerto Rico like the *bomba* and the *plena*, and also African American jazz.<sup>5</sup> With all of these various forms, *salsa* has served as a uniting force for a pan-Latin American music.<sup>6</sup> A

<sup>1</sup> Frances R. Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1998), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>4</sup> Leonardo Padura Fuentes, *Los Rostros de la Salsa: Entrevistas con las principales figuras musicales del Caribe* (Colonia del Valle, México, D.F.: Editorial Planeta Mexicana, 1999). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

<sup>5</sup> Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa*, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Marre, *Salsa: Latin Music of New York and Puerto Rico* (Newton, NJ: Harcourt Films, 1998).



key component to *salsa* as a unique musical experience is its constant loyalty to the working poor and the oppressed.

*Salsa* is a free and spontaneous art form that can function as an escape from the daily toils of life. An ordinary day in New York in the 1960s would witness a group of musicians jamming to the hottest *salsa* rhythms as the poor of the barrio gathered around and danced in the streets. Men and women, *niños* and *viejos* alike, would be out there moving their hips and shaking their bodies to the music. These impromptu gatherings brought the neighborhood together to take a break from residents' busy lives and allowed them to celebrate their culture. The performers improvised and played off of each other, making a song different each time it was played. The call-and-response used in many songs reflects *salsa*'s African roots. As the lead singer belts a refrain, the chorus and audience echo it back, making it a collective song.

Where there is live music, you can be sure to find lively dancing. A collection of photographs taken at the 2004 United States Dance Sport Championships in Miami illustrates the fire of Latin dancing. In some pictures the dancers' bodies are taut with precision, while in others they look as flexible as flan. The women's costumes flash bright reds, oranges, and blues. Dramatic eye makeup and deep shades of lipstick, sequined dresses and lofty heels, bronzed shoulders and toned legs—the dancers are simply captivating.<sup>7</sup>

The national competitions draw some of the most talented dancers in the country, but if you want to see authentic *salsa* dancing at its finest, an urban club can showcase similar skill. Pictures taken at The Times bar in Minneapolis give a glimpse into the nightclub dancing scene. A small band with a stunning female vocalist holds the stage while local partygoers fly across the floor, in couples and dancing solo. The faces of the musicians are covered in beads of sweat—a testament to their hard work and the energy they are expending. High heels and bright skirts swirl around men in collared shirts. You can almost feel the heat radiating off of their bodies and hear the scuffs of their shoes against the floor. They are doing more than just executing dance steps, they are embodying the spirit of *salsa*.<sup>8</sup>

Latin dance and Latin music are closely linked with sexuality. Much of this can be attributed to lyrics, many of which, as in other genres, are of love and desire. Unfortunately, the way these feelings are articulated in lyrics has historically objectified and over-sexualized women. Phallogentric language reduces the female characters to objects of desire for men; men look at and make "cat calls" to such women. Women are described in relation to their skin color, with black and mixed-race women frequently depicted as promiscuous *putas*. The descriptions of darker women as wild and savage date back to slavery images.<sup>9</sup> The intertwined racism and misogyny are twice as harmful to women of color.

In fact, one of *salsa*'s only true female stars was a Cuban woman of color named Celia Cruz, nicknamed the "Queen of *Salsa*." Willie Colón referred to Cruz as "*el modelo vivo de aquella grandeza que venía de Cuba*" (the living model of that greatness that came from Cuba).<sup>10</sup> Cruz sang of the African roots of *salsa* music, as well as of her idea of a respectful man.<sup>11</sup> In a male-dominated industry where women were not considered to be "star material,"

<sup>7</sup> Kathy Howell, Personal Collection, Miami, FL, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> De La Riva Family Collection, Minneapolis, MN, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa*, 149.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>11</sup> Marre, *Salsa: Latin Music of New York and Puerto Rico*.



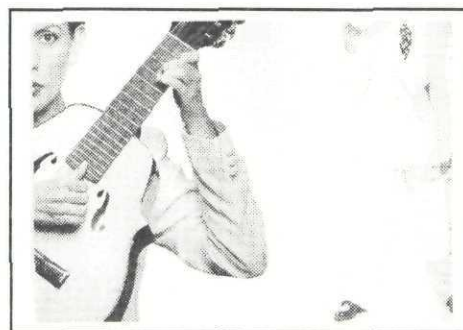
Cruz carved a space for herself among the other *salsa* royalty such as Tito Puente, Johnny Pacheco, and Rubén Blades.

Another successful female star was a young New York Puerto Rican woman known as La India. La India was a rising *salsa* star at the time that Cruz was reigning as Queen. Cruz became a mentor, giving her advice and eventually performing with her. Rumors spread that La India was going to replace Cruz as the Queen of *Salsa*, but Cruz is anything but replaceable, and La India had her own “flavor” to add to *salsa*.<sup>12</sup>

Sexual expression, cultural identity, musical innovation, dance—all contribute to *salsa*. But the question persists, what is *salsa*? When asked this very question, *salsa* hero Willie Colón replied, “*la salsa es una idea, un concepto, un resultado y un modo de asumir la música desde la perspectiva de la cultura latinoamericana*” (*salsa* is an idea, a concept, a result and a way to take on music from the perspective of Latin American culture).<sup>13</sup> Legend Johnny Pacheco calls it “*un movimiento musical caribeño*” (a Caribbean musical movement).<sup>14</sup> In her autobiography, Celia Cruz explains her opinion on how the term *salsa* came about. Cuban music was losing favor among young Hispanics as they assimilated and started listening to American pop and rock and roll music. Opinions differ on where the actual name “*salsa*” came from, but Cruz insists that it was from a radio program called *La Hora de la Salsa*. She places no importance on the term, saying that it was “just a marketing term applied to what originally was Cuban music.”<sup>15</sup> The marketing did the trick, and what came to be known as the birth of *salsa* was really just a revival of interest in Latin music.

What distinguishes *salsa* from other Latin music is its diversity—the diversity of cultural influences, performers, and personal interpretation. From the *barrios* of New York to Celia Cruz concerts in Japan, *salsa* has captured the hearts of millions. It is now enjoyed by audiences of all colors and classes; however, this was not always true. What was once rejected by the upper classes became a unifying force. *Salsa* in the United States has united performers of all Latin and Afro-Caribbean backgrounds. Second and third generation U.S. Latina/os are identifying with the same type of music as their elders. People of every ethnic group are either showing off their moves on the dance floor or wishing they could. *Salsa* has been a shot in the arm to Latin music in America.

The faces of *salsa* will always be remembered each in their own way. Celia Cruz, the “Queen of *Salsa*,” will live on through her collection of over eighty awards and honors.<sup>16</sup> Tito Puente will be regarded consistently as a brilliant *salsa* musician, regardless of his disdain for the term. More important, the *salseros* and *salseras* of the street and the music lovers from the working class will be credited for *salsa*’s success. For without the immigrants from Central and South America and the Caribbean who brought their passion for Latin music with them, there would be no such thing as *salsa*. More than just a genre of music, *salsa* is a way of walking, speaking and eating. *Salsa* is a dance, a song, and a lifestyle. *La salsa* is an imagined Latin world realized through music and dance.



<sup>12</sup> Cruz and Reymundo, *Celia: My Life* (New York: Rayo, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Fuentes, *Los Rostros de la Salsa*, 52.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>15</sup> Cruz and Reymundo, *Celia: My Life*, 172.

<sup>16</sup> Cruz and Reymundo, *Celia: My Life*, 252.



## More than Music: The Role of *Salsa* in the United States

Alexandra de la Riva

*Salsa* music is a mix of different rhythms. It is a contemporary, urban, complex development of diverse forms of music, especially early twentieth-century styles from Cuba. *Salsa* music affects everyone differently. My fascination began when I was five years old in Minneapolis, and I attended a Venezuelan party. The half turns, the twists, and the dips of *salsa* dancing mesmerized me. It was like magic filled with rhythms and beats that you just could not escape, and it demanded a physical response. But *salsa* is more than just elements derived from such beats as *rumba*, *mambo*, *cha-cha*, and other Latin styles and forms. These rhythms represent much more. Just what does *salsa* music symbolize for Latino/as living in the United States? And why is it so important? I believe that *salsa* is above all a symbol of resistance to the loss of national identity. When a group of youngsters gathers to listen to, sing, and dance *salsa*, they are celebrating and recreating the values, beliefs, and practices of their cultural heritage. First, I will explore the history of *salsa* music, and then examine the impact of *salsa* music on Latino/as living in the United States. Through an interview and a set of photographs, I will provide insights into the importance of *salsa* music here in the U.S.

The word *salsa* literally means sauce. Loosely translated, it means "spice." Culturally, *salsa* often refers to a Latin essence, much as the word "soul" has been used by black Americans.<sup>1</sup> The term may refer to the musical styles of Cuba, Puerto Rico, or the entire Spanish Caribbean; it has been extended to the music of any Latin country.<sup>2</sup>

Musical styles from various Latin countries influenced *salsa* music; however, many of *salsa*'s musical forms have roots in Cuba. The three major musical influences from Cuba are the *son*, the *clave*, and the *bomba*. The *son* originated in Cuba in the 1920s as a Caribbean form that used an array of African-derived characteristics. The *son* was typically performed by voices, a nine-stringed guitar called a *tres*, a bass instrument called the *marimbula*, as well as maracas and bongos. Soon afterward the trumpet was added to form the style known as *septeto*.<sup>3</sup> The *clave* is the single beat that anchors the different rhythms played by percussion instruments, giving the music its drive and orienting dancers. As such, the *clave* serves as the fundamental organizing arrangement and improvisational form for *salsa* music. *Clave* has a strong first part and an answering second part. The *bomba* was the dance of plantation sugarcane workers and was named after a wooden drum covered with goatskin. Finally, the *bomba* is a blending of both non-Hispanic and Spanish elements, the latter being evident in the rhythmic instruments.<sup>4</sup>

Although many argue that *salsa* originated in Cuba, Puerto Rico also played an enormous role in the history of *salsa* music. The Puerto Rican *plena* is a tropical sound accompanied by percussion, and it has many African elements. It is composed of an alternating, call-and-response scheme between the soloist and the chorus. Another Puerto

<sup>1</sup> Felix M. Padilla, "Salsa: Puerto Rican and Latino Music," *Journal of Popular Culture* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1990), 87.

<sup>2</sup> Jorge Duany, "Popular Music in Puerto Rico: Toward an Anthropology of Salsa" in *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City*, ed. Vernon Boggs (New York: Excelsior Music Publishing Company, 1992), 77.

<sup>3</sup> Padilla, "Salsa: Puerto Rican and Latino Music," 90.

<sup>4</sup> Duany, "Popular Music in Puerto Rico," 77.



Rican form is the *danza*. The *danza* is a particular dance style that evolved from the English and European country dance and became transculturated in the Caribbean. In addition to Puerto Rico, North America also influenced *salsa* music through jazz and soul.

As time progressed and immigration to the United States increased, *salsa* became a blend of many genres; hybrid that it is, it is embraced by *dominicanas*, *venezolanos*, Panamanians, *colombianas*, *cubanas*, and *puertorriqueños* as unique to their own individual countries. Not only is *salsa* celebrated throughout Latin America, but many second- and third generation immigrants in the United States claim it as their own, especially Puerto Ricans in New York.

Puerto Rican migrants have a special claim on *salsa*. Many arrived in New York City in the twentieth century, right after World War II. They left Puerto Rico to escape depressed economic conditions that left many unskilled and semi-skilled workers without jobs. Many of these migrants came from rural areas in Puerto Rico and took jobs in the U.S. as factory workers.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Puerto Rican emigration influenced not only the urbanization of rural migrants but also their "ghettoization" into segregated inner cities. Cuban immigrants, too, worked in factories in New York City—although their numbers decreased after the Cuban Revolution as a result of the hostile relationship that developed between Cuba and the U.S. as Cuban revolutionaries nationalized U.S.-owned companies, part of a larger project of providing all Cubans with a decent standard of living.<sup>6</sup> Cubans, nevertheless, continued to influence music throughout the U.S., especially in Miami. Here and in the New York *barrios*, *salsa* emerged as a bridge between native and adopted homeland—a bridge that could take them away as well as toward one or the other "home."

During the 1950s, *salsa* started to achieve worldwide popularity, attracting performers and audiences from all over the world, not just Latin America. New York City became the host to young performers who borrowed, innovated, and repackaged their music as *salsa*. Pioneers such as Willie Colon, Rubén Blades, Johnny Pacheco, Ray Barretto, and Eddie Palmieri led this movement. Their music made *salsa* the driving rhythm behind Latin pride in many parts of the world. During the 1960s and 1970s, this dominant force spread around the world. In the 1990s, a younger generation gave *salsa* a different style and form; *salsa romantica*, a smoother style of *salsa*, became very popular.

Bandleaders such as Eddie Santiago, Tito Nieves, and Marc Anthony were among those to formalize *salsa romantica*.<sup>7</sup> In the past fifteen years or so, *salsa*'s popularity has increased as a result of the enduring "Latin Craze." From Ricky Martin to Jennifer Lopez and even in the Hollywood studios that recently made a sequel to *Dirty Dancing* (titled *Dirty Dancing Havana Nights*), *salsa* continues to thrive. Its musical hybridity includes many rhythms and styles encompassing many nationalities. But what does *salsa* mean for Latino/as living in the United States? Through a set of photographs and an interview with a Cuban living in the United States, we see that *salsa* symbolizes a culture transformed through immigration.

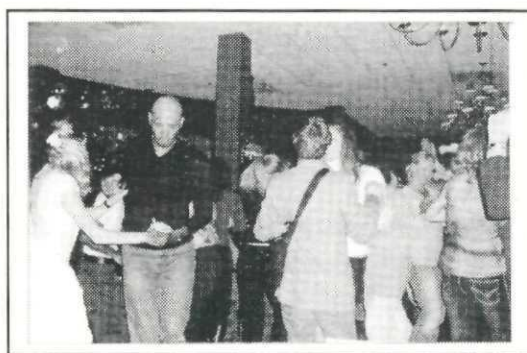
<sup>5</sup> Duany, "Popular Music in Puerto Rico," 79.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 79-80

<sup>7</sup> Jose Mastosantos, "Between the trumpet and the bongo: A Puerto Rican hybrid," *Massachusetts Review* 37, no. 3 (1996), 428.



By attending a club in Minneapolis, Minnesota, I began to investigate *salsa*'s impact on Latino/as in the United States. The bar and cafe is called The Times and has *salsa* night every Thursday, featuring a live band called *Salsa Del Soul*. I arrived at The Times around ten o'clock, and the club was full. The atmosphere was filled with Latin dance sounds and laughter. The live band consisted of a female singer from Cuba, a male singer from the Dominican Republic, a percussionist, a trumpeter, a guitarist, and a conga player. People from all over the Americas filled the dance floor. Evidently, *salsa* is dancing music. This blending of nationalities suggests that *salsa* music integrates songs, instruments, and dances from throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. My goal at this club was to capture the atmosphere through a series of photographs.<sup>8</sup>



These pictures reconstruct the environment at The Times and include shots of the singers and dancers. The photographs sparked a question: Why is *salsa* dancing so popular among immigrants? The pictures show that *salsa* dancing represents a social encounter. The music represents the urban-industrial working class. Given this, most *salsa* gigs are limited to the weekends, since the Latina/o community does not always have the luxury of engaging in entertainment activities during the week. Many people will say that *salsa* is street music. Some participants come from humble beginnings, from parents who came to the United States as immigrants, braving a whole new world.<sup>9</sup> In the United States, Latino/as are a minority for whom discrimination is a daily occurrence. Spaces of music and dance allow Latinas/os to represent, reproduce, and live their own culture.

*Salsa* is also an expression of the motherland for immigrants, and the music becomes a space of transculturation. Spaces of music belong to them and can be configured and reconfigured to tell their own individual national stories.<sup>10</sup> For immigrants, dancing symbolizes the recuperation of a national space that was lost during migration. Within the social frame of cultural displacement and migration, dancing represents a time and a space for reaffirming culture through reenactments of those elements lost to the dominant culture. The use of Spanish lyrics and the familiar sounds such as the bongos, *tumbadora*, and maracas take the audience back to their countries of

<sup>8</sup> Alexandra de la Riva, Collection of Photographs from The Times, Minneapolis, MN, October 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Padilla, "Salsa: Puerto Rican and Latino Music," 97.

<sup>10</sup> Marisol Miranda, "Con Sabor a Puerto Rico," in *Musical Migrations: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridity in Latin/o America*, ed. Frances Aparicio and Cándida Jáquez (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 51.



origin and to the sounds of past social celebrations and daily life.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the movements of *salsa* dancing imply a going out of oneself, the creation of an alternative space, a state of mind that may function as therapeutic.<sup>12</sup> In an interview, Fernando Díaz, a Cuban *salsa* dancer at The Times, explained what *salsa* music represents for him:

It represents my country's culture, Cuba, where *salsa* originated. When I hear *salsa*, there is a nationalist sense of pride. It also reflects my people's dreams and sorrows. When I am dancing *salsa*, it is a space I can claim (as) my own. It is a place where I can forget about everything, and forget my inhibitions. Most of all it is about the Passion.<sup>13</sup>



Díaz describes *salsa*'s importance to many Latino/as in the United States. For many, *salsa* is not about the music itself, but the soul within the music, the spirit that moves Latino/as to dance and sing and go on in spite of all obstacles.<sup>14</sup>

*Salsa* originated among working-class Latinas and Latinos who fused music from Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and other Latin American countries with African American jazz, Afro-Caribbean rhythms, and European dance music. *Salsa* style emerged in U.S. *barrios*, places filled with cultural traditions where the music, the dance, the movement, and the living cultural production truly became known as *salsa*. *Salsa* named and identified the music as quintessential *nuevayork* Latino/a music. *Salsa* provided working-class Latinas and Latinos and, ultimately all Latinos/as with a voice, a dance, an identity that was inclusive of all U.S. Latina/os, as well as those living in Caribbean nations, such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Venezuela. *Salsa*'s spicy beats and sexy moves rapidly achieved worldwide popularity. Yet for many Latino/a immigrants living in the United States, it is much more. For them, *salsa* music and dancing is above all a symbol of resistance to a loss of national identity. For many of these working Latinos and Latinas, going dancing on the weekend is not just about entertainment. It is about liberating their bodies, claiming public space for themselves, and overcoming the harsh realities of work and the social injustices of everyday life. The dancing and music together allow them to recuperate and celebrate their bodies and their Latin identity through *salsa*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Frances Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1998), 100.

<sup>12</sup> Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa*, 103.

<sup>13</sup> Fernando Díaz, interview by author, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 13 October 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Padilla, "Salsa: Puerto Rican and Latino Music," 97-98.

<sup>15</sup> Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa*, 102.



## The Influence of Latin Music on Western Culture

Rebecca Gedney

Music has been a part of this world for thousands of years. It is seen in all parts of the world and is, for many, a universal language. People use it to communicate between cultures, but they seldom stop to think about how other cultures affect their own music. Among those whose contributions are often ignored are Latinos. People from outside Latino cultures do not always see how "their" music could come from a Latin or African style (African music is one source for Latin rhythms), thus depriving Latin and African cultures of their musical contributions. Latin rhythms have always been part of the music world, and these beats are the roots of many musical genres, spanning from classical to contemporary, from jazz to hip-hop and pop. Today's booming music industry is full of Latino influence, thanks to the women and men who have paved the way.

All forms of music have roots, many of which come from Africa. When slaves were brought to the New World, most brought with them only what was in their minds. Chanting and percussion were used among many African peoples as a form of spirituality and praise.<sup>1</sup> When Africans were brought to the Americas, they used chants as a way to escape from reality and converse with their gods. It was one of the few things they had, and it continued to be an enormous part of their daily lives.

Another root of many styles of music is that of the peoples who were originally located in the Americas.<sup>2</sup> The members of these peoples were also captured and forced into slavery. Chanting and percussion were also used for praising their gods. Their chants had the same effect on their lives when they were forced into slavery as chants had for the slaves brought from Africa.

These disparate cultures were brought together when both were enslaved, and eventually the cultures began to mesh. Along with the mixing of the cultures came the mixing of their languages and their music. No one can tell when the mixing of musical styles began; however, it is easier to identify some of the later recognized styles. One of the first styles that can be seen is the *rumba*.<sup>3</sup>

The *rumba* is a style of percussion that eventually grew to incorporate voice and more instruments. The original instruments used were drums made from crates used for importing goods.<sup>4</sup> These crates were usually reassembled so that they would give different sounds and tones. The *rumba* began in Havana and around the sugar mills in Cuba. This was the densest area of the slave population, and sometimes slaves were given permission to congregate and play their music.

There are three common forms of the *rumba*. They are the *Colombia*, the *Yambú*, and the *Guaguanco*.<sup>5</sup> The *Colombia* is typically for men only. It is a way for them to

<sup>1</sup> Vernon W. Boggs, *Salsology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Sweeney, *The Rough Guide to Cuban Music: The History, The Arts, The Best CDs* (London: Rough Guides Ltd., 2001), 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.



show off their masculinity. This form of dance can be seen in voguing, and is a way of fighting where no one gets hurt. However, it was not uncommon for men to wear knives and sharp objects around their ankles and wrists so as to claim their space. The *Yambú* is a slower dance for couples but is not often performed. The nickname for the *Yambú* is the "old person's dance," and the dance is not very entertaining for most people. The third form, the *Guaguancó*, is the most common. It is also a couple's dance, but this form tends to be more upbeat and vibrant. The music always starts with a solo voice singing what is called the *Diana*. The *Diana* usually consists of made up syllables, and slowly more voices and instruments are added, leading to a full-blown sound. The *Diana* can also turn into a call-and-response style, which comes from the earlier African and tribal roots.

The *rumba* continued to be popular with Latino and Afro-Cuban cultures, but in the 1950s, it became more professional. The first group in the music industry that focused on the *rumba* was Los Muñequitos de Matanzas.<sup>6</sup> They were considered the kings of the *rumba*, but the "Queen of Guaguancó" was known just as well as Los Muñequitos. Celeste Mendoza was born in 1903 in Santiago, Cuba. In 1943, she moved to Havana in order to pursue a career in radio. Not long after that, she began to dance professionally, but in 1956 she went back to her music and began recording. Her career was quite successful until the end of the 1960s. Mendoza went out of the spotlight as rumors of her alcoholism and the murder of her lover spread. In the 1980s she made a comeback, and in the 1990s she began to record again. While recording an album in 1998, she passed away.<sup>7</sup> Celeste Mendoza was one of the few women who truly performed the *rumba*, and she has been recognized for this.

Another talented woman known for her contributions to *rumba* was Rita Montaner. She was born in 1900 to a white father and an Afro-Cuban mother. When she was young, she went to school to study European opera, and she continued to perform, but later in her career she began to focus on the *rumba*. She was known for mixing an operatic style with the smoothness of *rumba*. Her career boomed in Paris in the late 1920s, and in the 1930s, it continued to boom in New York. Her music moved her into radio in the 1940s, making her well known in the home, and then onto television in the 1950s. She died in 1958 from larynx cancer.<sup>8</sup> She was a woman who pushed the music into other cultures and helped begin the wider impact of Latin music.

The *rumba* was the mother of many styles. The next style that came along was the *son*. *Son* was started by the Guajiros in the mid-1800s. The Guajiros were mulatto peasant farmers who worked near the sugar mills.<sup>9</sup> This style branched off of *rumba* but had a Spanish song and verse form, which involved more improvisation and more of the call-and-response theme. Like the *rumba*, the *son* involved a lot of percussion. The main instruments were the claves, the maracas, the guiros, and the bongos. The earlier versions of these instruments were often made from household items and hollow

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 46.



gourds.<sup>10</sup> The stylistic similarities to *rumba* are very apparent, and the evolution of the music began here.

In the early 1900s, *son* moved from the sugar mills and farms to the heart of Havana. It was changing from small groups to *sextetos* and *septetos*, and then to much larger groups known as *conjuntos*.<sup>11</sup> It became standard for *son* to be performed in *conjuntos* and to involve horns and bass. One of the first and most famous *conjuntos* was *La Familia Valera Miranda*. *La Familia Valera Miranda* was unique in the early 1900s because it was led by a woman; Catalina Cutino was the central member until her death at age 100. She was succeeded by Carmen Miranda Valera, the wife of the band's leader.<sup>12</sup> The idea of a female lead continues with this *conjunto*, and this started a trend.

Another female who sang with family and who led was Celina González. She was born in 1928, and when she got older, she moved to Havana to pursue her career in radio. She was known for singing *Cadena Suaritos*. Her career on the radio led her to begin composing. She and her husband, Reutilio Domínguez, sang together for many years, but after they split up, she continued to sing as a solo artist. Years later she began to sing with her son, Lázaro Reutilio Domínguez.<sup>13</sup> Her strong career gave her the title "Queen of Cuban Country Music," which she continues to hold.

*Bolero* is another "child" of *rumba*, but this style went in a very different direction compared to *son*. This style is based on French romantic music, Italian opera, and African percussion. The percussion style is very much like that of *rumba*, but because of the various sources, it has a unique sound. *Bolero* began in the late 1800s, but in the 1920s and 1930s, it went in two directions. The two styles are a lyrical piano accompaniment focus, and a mixture of *bolero* and *son* that was much more upbeat. *Bolero-son* would develop into *bolero-mambo* and the *cha-cha* in the 1950s. The piano style of *bolero* was very popular in the 1930s and would give off the style called *bolero-romance*, or *filin*. *Filin* was a very popular style because of its romantic and smooth sound.<sup>14</sup>

Elena Burke was another woman whose music was well known. She was born in 1928 to an upper-class Spanish mother and a father who was an Afro-Cuban baseball player. She started her career by working in radio in the 1940s but began to work with smaller groups in the 1950s. After she got some attention, she went solo. Her career bloomed in Cuba; however, she was not well known outside of the country. Her daughter, Malena Burke, did grow up to be a singer, and she is very well known in Cuba and in Miami.<sup>15</sup> One reason for Elena's career being so hidden is that she was overshadowed by Omara Portuondo.

Omara Portuondo was born in 1930 in Havana, Cuba. She started her career as a dancer. While at school, she hung out with a lot of musicians. They were all very interested in jazz, and this sparked an interest in her. Omara went on to sing jazz with her sister Haydee. The sisters' music had a mixture of jazz and Afro-Cuban styles. Her unique style of sultry sounds earned her the nickname "*La Novia del Filin*." In 1967,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 139.



Omara went solo and went on to become the headline act at The Tropicana, one of Havana's hottest spots. Her career continued to prosper, and in 1995 she went on tour in Spain.<sup>16</sup> There was a rebirth of Cuban music in the 1990s, and Omara helped encourage this trend.

*Bolero* was a popular style that spread from Cuba to Miami, New York, and Puerto Rico. It also contributed to other styles of music, especially *salsa*. There were two movements in *salsa*, and each has its own qualities. The first style was New York *salsa*.

New York *salsa* began in the 1950s but became popular in the early 1960s. The lyrics revolved around life in the barrio and reflected the musical styles that were part of *salsa*. *Son*, *plena*, boogaloo, and *guaguancó* were all key factors in New York *salsa*. *Son* contributed to the storytelling, *plena* to the lower-class lifestyles, boogaloo to the vivacity of life, and *guaguancó* to the history. Fania Records did a lot to push *salsa*. Their clients, such as Celia Cruz and Tito Puente, helped involve the whole community, and their attractiveness pulled in a lot of support from the U.S. and Puerto Rico, and spread the trend to Colombia and Venezuela. Even though *salsa* had a strong Cuban relation, it was never really accepted there. *Salsa* had quite a few offspring, such as *merengue*, *salsa romantica*, and *salsa erotica*. All of these styles survived except *salsa erotica*. It was a popular style in the 1980s but became too suggestive and died out in the mid-1990s. The trend of creating new styles continued as Latin hip-hop, jungle, and house music became very popular, particularly with the younger generations.<sup>17</sup> While New York *salsa* was becoming very popular, Miami *salsa* was just coming around.

Miami *salsa* became popular after the revolution in Cuba, but it really hit it big in the mid-1970s. The trend started when Little Havana began to celebrate Carnival. Every year, Carnival in Little Havana became more and more popular, taking the eye off of Cuba. The first wave of musicians were typically anti-Castroists. The music had that old Cuban flair and style but was modified with rock. This style was reinforced when the Miami Latin Boys, later to be the Miami Sound Machine, emerged. When Gloria Estefan joined the Miami Sound Machine, they excelled in the music business. The group produced many hits that pleased the Miami public, but they also dispersed their music throughout the whole U.S. The Estefans started the Crescent Moon Group, which helped jumpstart the careers of Jon Secada, Israel Lopez, and Albita Rodriguez.<sup>18</sup> These artists helped start the crossover trend and appealed to the younger generations. This generation also had the hope that the bond between Cuba and Florida could be reinstated, thus allowing the music to reach everybody.

Celia Cruz helped spread the music. She was born in 1924 in Havana, where she later went to school to become a teacher. When she entered a radio contest to sing a tango song called *Nostalgia* and won, she was given the opportunity to attend the Havana Conservatory for Music. After finishing school, she went on to work at The Tropicana, but left in 1950 to be the lead singer for Sonora Matancera. She made her recording debut in 1951, and from then on she excelled. When



<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 190.



she traveled to Mexico in 1959, she and Sonora Matancera never returned to Cuba. She later moved to New York and worked with Tito Puente. In the 1980s she joined Fania Records, and in 2000 she went to Miami to record for Sony under Emilio Estefan.<sup>19</sup> Her presence is known around the world today.

Gloria Estefan was one of the many artists who began to reach the younger generation. While the younger generation had been exposed to *salsa*, Estefan's contributions made it more relevant to their lives. When she started with the Miami Sound Machine, the music they produced reached not only Cuban Americans, but also the American public in general. In 1993, Estefan released her CD *Mi Tierra*, which all ages enjoyed. It had the traditional Cuban rhythms and sounds, but with a modern and pop-like quality. The same applied when she released *Abriendo Puertas* in 1995 and *Alma Caribeña* in 2000. Each CD had its own unique style, but all were crowd-pleasers. Gloria Estefan and her husband, Emilio, have contracts with Universal Television Group and Disney that allow them to create movies for the Latina/o market and to share their heritage with the whole community.<sup>20</sup>

All the women who have been part of Latin music through the years have influenced many people, including each other, but they have helped influence more than just their own culture. They have helped incorporate Latin music styles into all other styles of music.

Musical styles that trace back to African and American indigenous peoples can be seen in music of the past and of today. The typical beginning of a *rumba* (the solo voice with words that make sense or meaningless syllables) is also seen in modern and contemporary music as well as classical music.<sup>21</sup> Take, for example, the collection of pieces in The Latin American Choral Series. Each piece contains the opening solo or unison section, and as the pieces continue, other parts and instruments enter. Throughout the series, many of the offspring of *rumba* are present, such as the *mambo* beat, the *salsa* beat, and others, as well as text that is similar to that of *son*.<sup>22</sup>

Latin beats are also readily heard in music that people would not immediately identify as Latin. The entire soundtrack to the movie *Dirty Dancing* has Latin-based rhythms, which is the foundation of the movie.<sup>23</sup> Another example of this presence is in the song "In Christ Alone," which is a contemporary Christian song.<sup>24</sup> The song contains the call-and-response theme, as well as the *Diana*-like beginning. Another style of music that contains the *rumba* and call-and-response style is vocal jazz. Scat came from the nonsense syllables of the *rumba*, and much of the jazz style is based on call-and-response. Riffs are an improvisational version of call-and-response, where someone sings a basic riff, and then the next person sings a similar version of the previous riff. Latin rhythms have also made it back to Europe. The brief hit in 2002, "Asereje," by the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>22</sup> Carlos Guastavino, "Indianas," Score, 1968. Special Collections, RICORDI AMERICANA S.A.E.C., Neil A. Kjos Music Company, San Diego.

<sup>23</sup> *Dirty Dancing: Original Soundtrack from the Veston Motion Picture*, RCA, 1987, Compact Disc.

<sup>24</sup> Margaret Becker, Maire Brennan, and Joanne Hogg, "In Christ Alone," *In Christ Alone: New Hymns of Prayer and Worship*, Kingsway, 2001, Compact Disc.

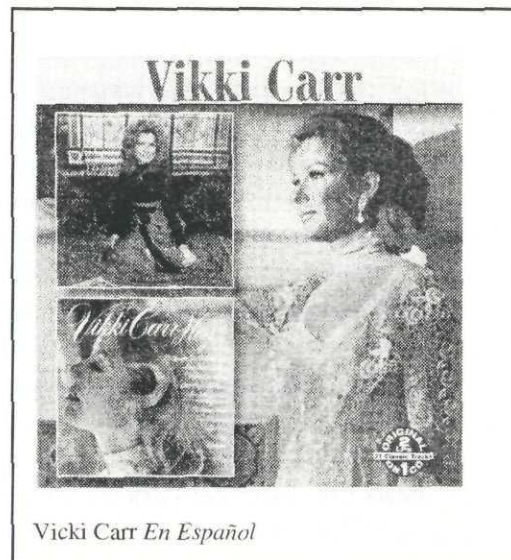


group Las Ketchup, had a *mambo*-like style to it and was used in dance clubs for that style of dance.<sup>25</sup>

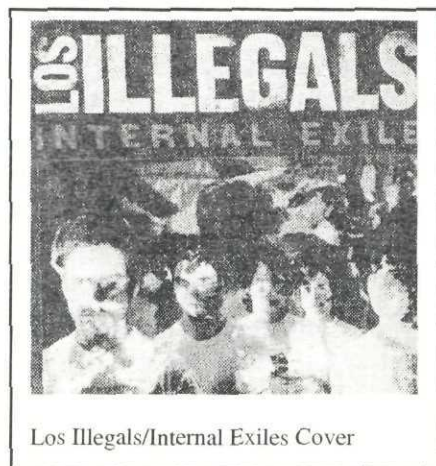
Latino culture has contributed much to the music world over the past five hundred years. The *mezcla* of different musical styles, instruments, and voices has pushed the myriad of Latin beats forward. Our music will not fade away as a relic of the past. We live on by borrowing, crossing borders, honoring our forebears, and celebrating our new musicians and audiences. Examples abound: Linda Ronstadt and Vicki Carr, celebrating their *latinidad*; *Los Illegals*, challenging us to recognize our colonial status within the U.S.; Latina/o hip hop artists; and a myriad of others. We and our music are the makers of history. We see that history represented in sound, dance, and images of our music. We have an enormous impact on the contemporary music industry. The strength and power of Latinas and Latinos to recreate ourselves through our music keeps us alive and allows us to thrive.



Linda Ronstadt,  
*Canciones de mi Padre*



Vikki Carr *En Español*



Los Illegals/Internal Exiles Cover



Los Illegals, 1984

<sup>25</sup> Las Ketchup, "Asereje," *Las Ketchup*, Sony, 2002, Compact Disc.

## Female Salsa Performers in a Male-Dominated Music Industry

Stephanie Pfaff

Power is gendered. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the music industry, and Latin music is no exception. Latina *salsa* musicians construct their musical performances on the boundaries of a male-dominated music industry. Sometimes this means that their talents remain on the fringes. Other times, Latina *salseras* use the borderland they occupy to challenge the status quo of the industry and to break through creative boundaries. In her book, *Listening to Salsa*, Frances R. Aparicio offers insights into why there are gender inequalities within the *salsa* music industry:

... the unfortunate fact remains regarding the subject position of the male: he is in control of the musical discourse and of its production, composition, and distribution. By virtue of this inequality within the music industry, music interventions still perpetuate a masculinist discourse of the female and the feminine.<sup>1</sup>

Why are female *salsa* performers rarely recognized for their talents? Investigating female, working-class *salsa* performers and the *salsa* music industry provides a closer look into how the culture is male-dominated. Although female *salsa* performers are a large part of the *salsa* music industry, they often find that they do not receive the same recognition as their male counterparts.

"*Salsa* is an idea, a concept, the result of a way of approaching music from the Latin American cultural perspective."<sup>2</sup> This quote from an interview with Willie Colón illustrates how *salsa* music includes a variety of meanings. *Salsa* is political and personal. *Salsa* provides Latinas/os the opportunity of self-expression, an opportunity that may not always be available in other forms of public speech. *Salsa* gives Latino/as living daily with discrimination an avenue of expression and a venue for representing their own vision of the world. Its vigorous beats and spirited tones transformed Latin music in the United States and influenced a wide variety of other musical styles. *Salsa* is the music of the working classes and is a form of recuperation for the body and for the soul after the work week.

One of the *salsa* music industry's finest record labels, Fania, was created by Johnny Pacheco and Jerry Masucci in 1964. Johnny Pacheco first performed with Gilberto Valdez when he came to New York City from the Dominican Republic. He eventually formed his own band, and shortly thereafter he met Masucci, an Italian-American lawyer. The record label Pacheco and Masucci created "would become



<sup>1</sup> Frances R. Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1998), 171.

<sup>2</sup> Leonardo Padura Fuentes, *Faces of Salsa* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2003), 31.



synonymous with the best *salsa* players,”<sup>3</sup> already establishing that the recording industry was headed by males—males who would determine who the best *salsa* players were in society. *Salsa* was “undoubtedly the first Latin music style where production values were of paramount importance” because the promotion of the industry was dictated by those who had the most financial backing for the industry—Pacheco and Masucci.<sup>4</sup> With these two men heading the *salsa* music industry, they were in control of who would be marketed, and of what would be produced. In fact, “very few women, with the exception of Celia Cruz, have been associated with the development of *salsa* and with the music industry that produces it.”<sup>5</sup> By denying Latinas the opportunity to be part of the music industry, men are not taking into consideration the valuable insight and ideas that women can bring to the industry.

The “Fania Empire,” considered the golden age of *salsa*, lasted from 1971 to 1978.<sup>6</sup> During this time, Pacheco and Masucci put together “all-star shows containing members of its best groups” such as Willie Colón, Hector Lavoe, and Ray Barretto.<sup>7</sup> It is apparent that female *salsa* performers were not mentioned in the list of these top performers, even though women such as Celia Cruz were performing in the same time period. These “all star” shows prevailed at some of the most popular clubs in New York City. Women were missing out on recognition of their musical talents by not being part of these performances. This lack of acknowledgment and respect from the very start played a large role in how women would struggle to attain the same musical recognition as their male counterparts.

After the golden age of *salsa*, characterized by “cultural nationalism and masculine discourse,” came to an end, *salsa romántica* emerged.<sup>8</sup> This new style of *salsa* that focused on love ballads was considered a softer form of traditional *salsa* music: “Lyrics shifted from predominantly collective, decolonizing reaffirmations of the community to a repertoire of romantic ballads that articulated individual, heterosexual subjectivities.”<sup>9</sup> Women *salsa* musicians are most often associated with this shift in repertoire. The contributions of many Latina *salsa* performers were not recognized until the softer tones and smoother rhythms of *salsa romántica* emerged. It is not a coincidence that the social binary of men and hard *salsa*, and women and soft *salsa*, emerged after this shift in music. It seems that the *salsa* music industry compromised and gave women credit for their musical contributions, but only when less radical and political lyrics were in style. In other words, “*salsa romántica* was equated with women’s voices and was rendered depoliticized.”<sup>10</sup>

One of the reasons men may have dominated, and continue to control, the *salsa* music industry is the emphasis on power and control that society has dictated. Men are

<sup>3</sup> Ed Morales, *The Latin Beat: The Rhythms and Roots of Latin Music from Bossa Nova to Salsa and Beyond* (Cambridge: Perseus Books Group, 2003), 61.

<sup>4</sup> Charley Gerard and Marty Sheller, *Salsa! The Rhythm of Latin Music* (Tempe, AZ: White Cliffs Media, Inc., 1998), 28.

<sup>5</sup> Lise Waxer, *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meaning in Latin Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 137.

<sup>6</sup> Morales, *The Latin Beat*, 83.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>8</sup> Waxer, *Situating Salsa*, 137.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.



told to be strong, to take action, and it is these societal messages that continue to push them into this *machismo* way of thinking. In his book on Hispanic culture, Rafael Falcón states that "as young boys grow into adulthood, they experience the myth that the true mark of masculinity is to demonstrate courage, virility, and male domination," and it is this myth of *machismo* that leads men to believe that they must subordinate women in order to be viewed as men in society.<sup>11</sup>

The *salsa* music industry was clearly "dominated by *l'machismo*" from the very start because Pacheco and Masucci were interested in pursuing their own ideas of what they considered creative and expressive forms of music.<sup>12</sup> And, since they were performers themselves, they had their own styles of music and their own personal preferences. Charley Gerard and Marty Sheller comment in *Salsa! The Rhythm of Latin Music*, that "Fania had an interest in controlling the direction of the music it helped . . . distribute worldwide so successfully. As a result, artists were discouraged from straying from the sounds they were known for."<sup>13</sup> In other words, if Fania did not approve of your style, you would not be promoted. Stifling the variety of performances and dictating who could perform what made gaining recognition an even greater challenge for female *salsa* performers.

Because the industry is composed of mostly male producers, Latina *salsa* performers struggle to gain acknowledgment. The *salsa* industry "continue[s] to ignore female participation"<sup>14</sup> and neglects the impressive talent that performers such as Celia Cruz and Lupe Victoria Yoli Raymond, or La Lupe, offer to the music industry. If the *salsa* industry only promotes and recognizes male performers, then it is not appealing to its entire audience. In order for the industry to continue to be successful, it needs to appeal to all types of individuals—men and women. Recognizing Latina *salsa* performers will expand the audience for the *salsa* music industry and will continue to appeal to a variety of listeners.

Men in the music industry do not give Latina *salsa* performers proper credit because this freedom of expression threatens men's view of women as submissive. Mainstream media tended to and still tends to promote male musicians, while reducing "women to a passive and submissive status."<sup>15</sup> When female *salsa* musicians present themselves and their opinions, they are challenging societal assumptions about women's passive role. For example, in 1962 La Lupe was considered "Cuba's most controversial, sexually explicit singer" because of her uncultivated performances and her rebellious lyrics.<sup>16</sup> La Lupe went outside stereotypical gender boundaries in her performances and expressed sexual, erotic desires through her words and her gestures. She went against patriarchal standards, and she recognized that many male *salsa* musicians were casting females in a negative light. In a sense, she called their bluff and challenged inaccurate depictions of women as the "wicked ones."<sup>17</sup> This going against cultural norms illustrates women gaining a voice and a presence in society as a whole. When women demonstrate that they are not afraid to speak up and to show their true feelings, men feel

<sup>11</sup> Rafael Falcón, *Salsa: A Taste of Hispanic Culture* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 50.

<sup>12</sup> Jerry Marre, *Latin Music of New York and Puerto Rico* (Harcourt Films, 1998), videocassette.

<sup>13</sup> Gerard and Sheller, *Salsa! The Rhythm of Latin Music*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Waxer, *Situating Salsa*, 135.

<sup>15</sup> Falcón, *Salsa: A Taste of Hispanic Culture*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> Sue Steward, *Musica! The Rhythm of Latin America* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999), 66.

<sup>17</sup> Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa*, 180.



threatened because they are no longer the only ones expressing radical viewpoints and opinions.

Latina *salsa* performers also often dress in a hypersexualized way because the male-dominated music industry defines how female performers should dress in order to be successful in the industry. For example, a photo of Celia Cruz embracing La India in a concert shows a woman in a brightly colored outfit with her hair curled and her face made up.<sup>18</sup> Cruz may dress this way because she prefers to wear this type of clothing when she performs, but her audience also expects a woman to accentuate her womanliness and her female characteristics, such as her lips and hips. Putting on bright make-up and colorful dresses emphasizes these characteristics. Another example of female *salsa* musicians emphasizing their womanly features is a picture from *Ballet de la Salsa* in the early 1970s. The women in this picture are dressed in very short skirts, low-cut tops, and high heels.<sup>19</sup> It may be argued that they are dressed this way because they are performing, but these women are also dressed this way because emphasizing their female features (that is, their legs and breasts), will present them as more appealing to their male audience. Societal standards for a woman emphasize dramatizing her female features and her overall femininity. The male-dominated *salsa* music industry has emphasized to female musicians that this style of dress and showy presentation will promise them the most recognition, even though acknowledgement equal to men is rarely attained.

Not only are women held to a subordinate status in male *salsa* music, but they are also often the object of insult and scorn. Hernando Calvo Ospina comments not only on how women are rarely mentioned in *salsa* music, but also on how their recognition is often cast in a negative light: "There are very few studies on the role of women musicians in the Caribbean—in sharp contrast to the incredible number of songs devoted to women, whether ugly, pretty, mulatto, blonde, 'good,' or 'evil' in the way they love."<sup>20</sup> Women in many male *salsa* performers' songs are seen as temptresses who bring seduction and deceit. An example of a song that presents woman as temptress is *La Engañadora* (The Deceiver) by Enrique Jorrín: "She was voluptuous, shapely, charming; and well, just magnificent; But the truth always comes out eventually; Often without even checking; Those women who try and deceive us are so silly; But I can't say you didn't warn me!"<sup>21</sup> Lyrics such as these illustrate the embodiment of misogynist values that many men express in their songs. Male lyrics often comment that a man should have known better than to fall for a woman's deceptive ways instead of giving in to her seduction. This paints women in a subordinate light and makes them appear as objects, rather than as individuals in society. These negative connotations also cast a dark shadow over female performers because society assumes that these descriptions of women in men's songs are accurate, since men have more power to control what society believes.

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<sup>18</sup> Waxer, *Situating Salsa*, 153.

<sup>19</sup> Lise A. Waxer, *The City of Musical Memory: Salsa, Record Grooves, and Popular Culture in Cali, Colombia* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 100.

<sup>20</sup> Hernando Calvo Ospina, *Salsa! Havana Heat, Bronx Beat* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992), 89-90.

<sup>21</sup> Steward, *Musica!*, 35.

Although many women have not received the credit they deserve, Celia Cruz is a female *salsa* performer who is not afraid of expressing her political viewpoints, and she has gained much respect in the music industry. Cruz has faced great adversities in the industry because of her strong points of view, but she has demonstrated her ability to connect with the audience and to reflect the opinions of other Latinas. It is said that this dynamic female performer has "the visual impact of a Hotel Tropicana show dancer,"<sup>22</sup> and that "onstage she can whip up a storm capable of blowing everyone and everything away."<sup>23</sup> She uses her body and her voice to create a social space where she can express herself. Cruz's ability to assert herself in the music industry has led to her great popularity and to respect among her fellow musicians and her audiences.

*Salsa* reflects many, often contradictory, attitudes: "a desire to forge roots in Cuban music, an interest in adopting the musical lexicons of jazz and rock, and an often politically motivated wish to create a pan-Latin American music."<sup>24</sup> It is this multitude of attitudes and expressions that creates an industry full of creative opinions and various points of view. Latina *salsa* performers deserve proper recognition for their musical talents and for their contributions to the music industry. By deemphasizing their contributions, men are stifling the added variety and creativity that women have to offer to the *salsa* music industry. And when women are recognized in the music industry, it needs to be done in a positive way, with recognition that women are as talented as their male counterparts. How music is used is culturally constructed. It is only when this cultural construction of music is equalized between the genders that women will receive the respect and the recognition they deserve for their contributions to the *salsa* music industry.



<sup>22</sup> Ospina, *Salsa! Havana Heat, Bronx Beat*, 93.

<sup>24</sup> Gerard and Sheller, *Salsa! The Rhythm of Latin Music*, 20.





## Section Two *The Power of Labor Activism: Work, Play, & Social Justice*

### Documenting the Undocumented

Julia Keister

"In order to craft more just and humane labor relations, workers will need to establish new forms of 'deterritorialized' community and overcome legacies of gender. And in fact they are doing so."<sup>1</sup> With these words, feminist Jane Collins speaks to women workers worldwide, announcing that their human agency and collectivity is critical to achieving international equality. This realization warrants a study of Chicana and Latina workers in the United States, due to their historical presence within this nation's base of international women workers. Included in this collective insurgency are those *mexicanas* and Latinas who remain undocumented immigrants. Not only must these women form a collective base in order to arrive and remain in the United States, but they often face the additional challenge of uniting in order to battle the exploitative nature of the workforce they encounter. For this research, I utilize Ken Loach's film *Bread and Roses* as a central primary source. This film depicts both how undocumented *mexicana* workers in Los Angeles utilize their families to network across borders, and how these Latinas unite with other multicultural immigrants to form a solid and collective mobilization effort.<sup>2</sup> I use this particular documentation because it provides unique insight and perspective into the agency of undocumented Latina workers in the United States, and thus serves not only as a point of reference but also as a base for comparison. Hopefully, at the very least, this study will strengthen the voice and help redefine the "illegal alien" status of the undocumented women laborers that comprise the backbone of our nation's workforce. A larger ambition remains, however, as this project illuminates and strengthens the presence of the global community of women by offering the perspective and undeniable agency of Latina and Chicana initiators.

The international migration of undocumented *mexicanas*, Latinas, and other women workers to the U.S. is not a novel phenomenon, yet their rising and lasting presence is unique to the past few decades. Of course, this migration cannot be completely generalized because it is contingent upon the historic, social, economic, geographic and political dynamics of specific countries. Mexico, for example, has an

<sup>1</sup> Jane Collins, *Threads* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Bread and Roses*, dir. Ken Loach, 110 min. (Vancouver, B.C.: Lion's Gate Home Entertainment, 2001), videocassette.



unusually extensive history of contributing to the workforce in the U.S., a relationship that should be traced back to the U.S. appropriation of much of Mexico's land (the present-day U.S. Southwest).<sup>3</sup> Since this occupation, millions of *mexicanos/as* have crossed the 2,000 mile border to the north in search of labor and eventual remittances.<sup>4</sup> Compared to their *mexicana* predecessors, the immigration of other Latinas is a fairly recent occurrence, with a visible upsurge beginning in the 1960s due to the similar "push and pull factors" induced by the birth of neo-liberalism and its relationship to both gender and oppression.<sup>5</sup> Thus, economic transformations led to U.S. intervention, overpopulation, and deprivation in many Latin American countries and influenced many Latinas to immigrate. The 1965 amendments to the racist Immigration and Nationality Act's quota system in the U.S. loosened regulations on immigration and attracted migrants to cross the border.<sup>6</sup> The legal status of immigrants is in constant flux and is determined by the laws, politics and economics that govern their entry and instigate their exodus. Therefore, like immigration itself, documentation crises escalated with the implementation of neo-liberal politics and have persisted due to changing legislature, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as well as the pervasiveness of globalization. As of 2000, there are an estimated 8.5 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S., 77 percent of whom identify as Mexican or Latino.<sup>7</sup>

Although historical accounts often ignore them, women have been a major presence in this migratory labor force. These neo-liberal pressures were and still are undeniably directed at "Third World" women, as they "constitute the majority of migrants seeking jobs as maids, vendors, *maquila* operatives, and service industry workers."<sup>8</sup> This majority is confirmed by growth in the number of female immigrants as a percentage of total immigration to developed countries, from 48 percent in 1960 to 51 percent in 2000.<sup>9</sup> Many of these immigrating women undoubtedly achieve a level of economic mobilization and professional employment, yet racialized and gendered inequalities continue to persist. Thus while almost half of the doctors in the United States are foreign-born, "Latinas continue to have the highest concentration of workers in 'blue collar' operative jobs and the lowest in management and professions among all races of women."<sup>10</sup> The history of *mexicana* and Latina immigration is mirrored by ongoing hegemonic political and economic projects that often function to exploit the world's labor force in terms of race and gender. These policies and exploitations are in part what prompt undocumented workers to form networks of support and resistance.

Through first-hand accounts and various portrayals, it becomes evident that the necessity and stratagem of this coalescing commences well before these traversing

<sup>3</sup> Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2001), 64.

<sup>4</sup> Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors*, 64.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Dianne Walta Hart, *Undocumented in L.A.: An Immigrant's Story* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1997), x.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Passel, "New Estimates of the Undocumented Population in the United States," *Migration Information Source*, 22 May 2002, [www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=19](http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=19).

<sup>8</sup> Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors*, 68.

<sup>9</sup> Hania Zlotnik, "The Global Dimensions of Female Migration," *Migration Information Source*, 1 March 2003, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=109>.

<sup>10</sup> Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors*, 65.



workers even set foot on U.S. soil. Thus as a growing number of women are independently deciding or pressured to cross the border into the U.S., they take a courageous risk, which they often attempt to mitigate through the aid of family, friends, or simply other crossers. Nowhere in the U.S. are the dynamics and dilemmas entwined with prohibited immigration more prevalent than at the border with Mexico. In the opening scenes of *Bread and Roses*, Loach portrays the circumstances and support systems that surround crossing this terrain. Here the main character, Maya, is shown in a desert amongst other exhausted migrants led across the U.S./Mexico border by a guide who constantly screams hurrying demands. The importance of networking is demonstrated in the subsequent scene as the guide collects money from various friends and family awaiting the new arrivals.<sup>11</sup> Maya's experience is mirrored by real-life accounts that similarly mention the chaperonage of a previously arranged guide or "coyote."

These true stories differ, however, as they depict the various levels of networking that are involved. Lucrecia Tamayo, for example, seeking to flee her abusive husband, explains how she hitchhiked from Acapulco to Tijuana, where she "relied on a female relative, the well-developed migrant 'underground railroad,' and a waiting job market," and successfully "came by *el cerro* (through the mountains), with a coyote."<sup>12</sup> The Mexico/U.S. border is not a point of entry exclusive to Mexican emigrants. Instead, this boundary has often been the final frontier for millions of Latinas voyaging from all over Central and South America, whose experiences accentuate the complexity of these social systems. Through a series of interviews, Dianne Walta Hart traces the life of Yamileth, an undocumented immigrant, from her departure in Nicaragua to her eventual reunion with her sister in Los Angeles. Yamileth narrates her journey across the borders of Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and finally the U.S. with four of her young nieces, during which they had to hitchhike, sneak onto "shopping excursion" buses, pay off *la migra* (immigration officials) and cross treacherous rivers in order to cross the varying frontiers.<sup>13</sup> Her account further reveals how Yamileth and her family networked with various women along the way who were either her friends or her sisters', or even "a humble woman who had an equally humble apartment, and invited (them) to sleep with her because they had few people at her place."<sup>14</sup> Once they reached Mexico, "Uncle Mundo," Yamileth's distant relative, aided Yamileth and her nieces and acted as their "coyote" and eventual ticket to the U.S.<sup>15</sup> These portrayals and testaments reveal that, although undocumented women are crossing into the U.S. everyday, their entrance often involves great personal strength and the social or familial ties of other Latinas.

Many of these courageous women reach the U.S. expecting to achieve a level of economic freedom or at least gain, yet these visions are often blurred as numerous undocumented Latinas confront exploitative and even abusive job environments. *Bread and Roses* depicts undocumented women being taken advantage of in various ways, conveying the pervasiveness of this injustice and how it traces lines of economics and gender. Issues of wages and benefits are often addressed, especially when union

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<sup>11</sup> *Bread and Roses*, Loach, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors*, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Hart, *Undocumented in L.A.*, 9-18.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



organizer Sam is attempting to convince Maya and her sister Rosa to join his association and exclaims, "Don't you think you deserve health care, dental care and overtime pay like every other janitorial company on your block?" In this same scene, Sam pulls out a pay stub from December 22, 1982, attesting that a worker at their same company had earned \$8.50 per hour with full health coverage, a wage that eighteen years later had fallen to \$5.75 without benefits of any kind. The film also includes instances where undocumented Latinas are abused in terms of pay and job security. For example, Maya's boss only agrees to provide her with the paperwork necessary to cover her illegal status if she sacrifices her first two months of wages, and one Salvadoran employee of thirteen years named Teresa is fired for not bringing her glasses to work. Not only do employers exploit the illegal status of these workers, but the film also illustrates the sexualized nature of coercion on the job. This issue is most poignantly brought to light through Rosa's character, who expresses to Maya that she was only able to get her a job at Angel Cleaning Company by fulfilling sexual favors for their boss, and further, that ever since she left Mexico to support their family, she has had "to suck and fuck so many white men." As disturbing as these portrayals might be, they bring the realities of racism, sexism, and classism to the public eye. Unfortunately, the inequalities that Loach depicts are real-life injustices that plague the lives of the millions of undocumented Latina workers across the U.S.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, while the number of employed undocumented workers has continued to rise in the past ten years, their wages have continued to fall. This contradiction is gender-contingent, for "women undocumented workers get paid the lowest of the low, averaging a scant \$5,300 a year."<sup>17</sup> The experience of Lucrecia Tamayo, an undocumented worker from Mexico, relates to this inequity. Tamayo explains that while working in an apparel manufacturing center in Los Angeles, she "worked over 12 hours a day, from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. at night, without Sundays off, *siempre, siempre trabajando* (always, always working)" and only walked away with a weekly pay of \$100.<sup>18</sup> These pay manipulations are not exclusive to any one industry, but instead, various service sectors that prevalently hire undocumented workers engage in this unscrupulous process. In her study of undocumented Latinas in domestic work, Grace Chang found that child care agencies specifically sought out "the illegal girls" because they are able to demand services for low wages and then offer low prices to their customers.<sup>19</sup> According to Cheng's study of several New York businesses, "'illegal' workers earned as little as \$175 a week and 'legal' workers as much as \$600."<sup>20</sup> While these numbers clearly depict distressing disparities in terms of pay, Chang's study also uncovers the extremely disturbing treatment that these undocumented Latinas often endure. One *mexicana*, María de Jesús Ramos Hernández, disclosed that while working as a housekeeper in California, "her employer repeatedly raped her, telling her that he had paid her way here and would have her jailed if she did not submit to him."<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, Hernández's case was not

<sup>16</sup> *Bread and Roses*, Loach, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> *Loose, Sweatshop Warriors*, 75.

<sup>18</sup> *Loose*, 87.

<sup>19</sup> Grace Chang, "Undocumented Latinas: Welfare Burdens or Beasts of Burden?," *Socialist Review* 23, no. 4: 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



atypical, for Chang found that numerous domestic workers reported horrid working conditions often "approaching slavery or indentured servitude."<sup>22</sup>

In response to these rampant workplace inequalities, some of these workers joined and helped form unions, which have had a significant role in Latina and Chicana laborers' lives for many years. Arising in the 1930s with the onset of the Great Depression and the organizing efforts of strong mobilizing figures such as Emma Tenayuca, unions have historically been an important tool for Latina/mexicana immigrant workers to obtain their rights and induce social change.<sup>23</sup> Tenayuca helped form chapters of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) in 1934. She also led the largest labor strike in San Antonio's history in 1938, a time when "Tejanas made up 79 percent of the city's low-waged garment, cigar and pecan-shelling workers."<sup>24</sup> Today, unions continue to play a pivotal role in the lives of Latina/Chicana workers, including those who are undocumented. Thus, Latina and Chicana garment workers followed Tenayuca's legacy with the ILGWU, now UNITE-HERE, by creating and running its Justice Center where workers congregate on a regular basis as support groups, job networks, and legal advisors.<sup>25</sup> Through the creation of this center, Latinas give other laborers strength, both by uniting them in a collective force and by allowing them the autonomy they are often denied in the workplace.<sup>26</sup>

In *Bread and Roses*, Maya and her janitorial co-workers battle their discriminatory working conditions by joining Sam, a representative of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). SEIU is a workers' union based out of Washington, D.C.<sup>27</sup> Sam and the SEIU organize the mobilization of the Angel Cleaning Company employees, who use various methods of resistance, such as blocking off intersections and crashing the social gatherings of executives in the office building where they work. By holding a non-violent sit-in in the lobby of the office building, the workers eventually achieve their goal and obtain higher wages with benefits.<sup>28</sup> Including the SEIU in the film was not a random decision, for producer Esther Cohen is also the Cultural Arts Director for the union and feels that visual representation is crucial to achieving equality, for "most people in this society of workers feel invisible."<sup>29</sup> Her current project with SEIU, entitled "Unseen America," has for the past three years given migrant workers video cameras and asked them to document their lives with the goal of giving them a voice and forum for expression with which Cohen plans to create the "only working people's art gallery in the country."<sup>30</sup>

Although unions have played a major part in the resistance strategies of undocumented Latinas and *mexicanas*, the majority of these women are not unionized. Instead, a growing number of the estimated 86 percent of U.S. non-unionized workers are

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>23</sup> "La Pasionaria de Texas," *La Voz De Aztlán* 1, 6 (2000): <http://www.aztlan.net/default6.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors*, 198.

<sup>25</sup> Maria De Soldatenko Gutierrez, "ILGWU Labor Organizers: Chicana and Latina Leadership in the Los Angeles Garment Industry," *Frontiers* 23, 1 (2002): 46.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> *Bread and Roses*, Loach, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel H. Pink, "Making unseen America visible," *Fast Company* 68 (2003): 36.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



becoming a part of and constructing independent worker centers.<sup>31</sup> This modern phenomenon relates to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, prior to unionization, when economic shifts coincided with new "ethnic and gender-based organizing techniques" amongst immigrant workers.<sup>32</sup> For *mexicanas* and Chicanas, this connection seems legitimate due to the presence and importance of *mutualistas* (mutual aid societies) that they established in the southwestern United States in the late nineteenth century. According to Chicana historian Vicki Ruiz, these societies "were often the only means immigrants had to defend themselves and to acquire help."<sup>33</sup> Based on this pattern, historian Miriam Louie projects that the current wave of worker centers in the twenty-first century is part of a new cycle in which "ethnic-based organizing among immigrant sweatshop workers is a signal both of the deleterious effects of global economic restructuring on the most vulnerable workers and of the means through which these workers can organize to defend themselves."<sup>34</sup> Thus, Latinas and Chicanas are forming these worker centers in response to undeniable exploitation, and also as an innovative mobilizing model.

Loach's film deserves some criticism, since it fails to represent the development of worker centers. Although he represents a collective effort on the part of immigrant workers, he does so only by including the central leadership of a Caucasian male union figure, ignoring the sentiment of many third-world workers who "have often been hostile to unions that they recognize as clearly modeled in the image of the white, male, working-class American worker."<sup>35</sup> Many of the most successful self-organizing immigrant groups echo this sentiment, such as La Mujer Obrera, whose leader María Antonia Flores claims started when immigrant workers envisioned "an independent organization, where they could not only defend themselves against the bosses, but also defend their right to be organized, a right which the 'union' continued to deny them."<sup>36</sup> Since its establishment in 1981, La Mujer Obrera has empowered numerous immigrant workers from primarily Latina, Chicana, and Asian backgrounds to institute programs and gain basic rights.<sup>37</sup> One remarkable example occurred in 1990 when the organization's members chained themselves to their sewing machines and led a hunger strike that successfully dismantled the underground sweatshop for which they had gruelingly worked.<sup>38</sup> UNITY, another worker cooperative center, based in New York City, is a unique case, for not only does it act as a labor rights organization, but it is also an agency that provides employment for domestic workers.<sup>39</sup> Founder Jennifer Gordon explains that she was motivated to create UNITY when she noticed that New York City was flooded by Latinas in low-wage service employment and then realized that "many immigrant women of color who lack legal status are unable to claim their basic rights and

<sup>31</sup> Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors*, 200.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>33</sup> Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York & Oxford: Oxford Press, 1998), 86.

<sup>34</sup> Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors*, 200.

<sup>35</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), 263.

<sup>36</sup> Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors*, 202.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>39</sup> Drucilla Cornell, "Achieving Dignity by Taking Power Through Unity," *Social Policy* (Spring 2003): 1.



to organize into unions.”<sup>40</sup> UNITY empowers these Latinas, who are now able to collectively make decisions as well as stipulate their own working conditions. One worker states, “Once you are in UNITY, you will never again be forced to work on your knees.”<sup>41</sup>

Many recent examples of these immigrant-initiated organizations also reflect the globalized shift of the world economy due to their cross-cultural composition and leadership. In fact, *mexicana* garment worker Lucrecia Tamayo is currently a leader in the Thai and Latino Workers Organizing Committee of the Retailers Accountability Campaign, which seeks “economic, racial, and gender justice” within the garment industry of Los Angeles, California.<sup>42</sup> These worker-run centers not only are culturally connected through their members but also work to form coalitions across the country and around the world. Petra Mata, a leader of the garment workers’ group Fuerza Unida, sees the organizations’ efforts in a collective light and explains, “We work with Asian, Filipino, African American, Mexican, white. We are part of the same vision, the same movement.”<sup>43</sup> She further claims that, through the experience that members attain by participating in Fuerza Unida and fighting their own local battles, they can offer a hand to other disenfranchised workers and have “built working friendships with Asian immigrant women and other low-waged workers across the globe, and won victories.”<sup>44</sup>

Miriam Louie argues, “Listening to women means returning to the source, to the heart of what today’s struggles for justice and dignity are all about.”<sup>45</sup> It was by simply listening to my best friend Paola Nazati, a first generation *colombiana*, that I realized the importance of recognizing as well as documenting the mobilizing efforts of these Latina and Chicana equality warriors. Paola would not be here today if it had not been for her mother, Esperanza, who single-handedly fought to get her wrongfully accused husband freed from jail in Colombia. Through the help of her Colombian friends already in the U.S., she hid in the freight area of a cargo jet that landed safely in Miami. Although the stories revealed through Esperanza and this research are shocking, they must not be heard with consumer ears. Instead, it is our duty as fellow human beings, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or economic standing, to consciously join these women, and thereby work together towards building a global community where no person is considered “alien.”

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors*, 78.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 253.

## Fighting for Rights and Recognition in Two Worlds

Elizabeth Burke

In the summer of 2002, when I worked with Mexican domestic workers in San Juan, Texas, I learned that some people's sacrifices and struggles allow others to enjoy countless comforts. Although I took many interdisciplinary courses in college that discussed issues that directly affect people of color in the United States, seeing their experience first-hand put valuable classroom learning in perspective with an out-of-classroom experience. Through an internship the following summer in the Philippines, I interviewed women and children to learn more about the effects of labor migration on the women who work abroad and the children who are left behind in the Philippines. These experiences helped me better understand the sacrifices people make all over the world to have a better life for their children, if not for themselves. Although it is impossible to describe a single migrant experience or equate one person's experience with another's, there are many similarities between Filipina and Mexican women who work as domestics. Even though these women are employed in lower wage jobs in the U.S., they currently yield great economic power in their home countries, with the potential of further influence in the future through the electoral process.

Census records show that the number of Mexican women who settle in the U.S. is now equivalent to the number of men. For decades, it was mostly men who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border, but recently, more women have been making this journey. The changing roles of women in a traditionally patriarchal Mexican society partially explain the increased levels of female migration. The newly found independence they enjoyed in Mexico, however, is sometimes reversed when they work in the U.S. as domestic workers.<sup>1</sup>

As Mary Romero explains in her essay "Domestic Service in the Transition from Rural to Urban Life: The Case of La Chicana," historically, domestic work carries the image of an "occupational ghetto," particularly for women of color. Whereas Caucasian women used domestic work during a transitional phase in their lives and as a method of social mobility, for women of color, working as a domestic has been more permanent. Many continue such work even after getting married and having children. Historically, the mistress was white and the domestic servant was a woman of color. It was understood that the lighter in skin color the mistress was, the darker the servant would inevitably be. Through her interviews with Chicana domestic workers, Romero learned that domestic work allowed women to earn money while also meeting the needs of their own families. Since most of the women she interviewed had little education and employable skills, however, they did not have many employment opportunities available to them. Women often obtained these jobs through friends or family members who also worked in this area.<sup>2</sup> This also holds true for Filipina women. Their experiences are the culmination of the intersection of race, class and gender. All three of these factors influence, guide, and, at least to some degree, determine how much education the women

<sup>1</sup> Tim Golden, "Evolving Roles of Mexican Women Evident in Rising Illegal Migration," *Austin American Statesman*, 26 July 1992, C1.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Romero, "Domestic Service in the Transition from Rural to Urban Life: The Case of La Chicana," *Women's Studies* 13 (1987): 200-214.



obtained, what types of employment they could secure, and how much money they were capable of making.

Although the concept of domestic workers is not new, the demand for domestics has risen in recent years. Since 1980, in southern California alone, the number and percentage of migrant women working as domestics has risen in the three largest cities. This is particularly noteworthy because a mere twenty years earlier, domestic work was on such a decline that people anticipated it being eliminated all together. Three main factors are responsible for this increase. With the increasing polarization of the U.S. economy and the creation of more high-powered and demanding jobs, there is more need to support these positions. Moreover, the number of women entering the workforce, either out of necessity or interest, also increased. Since men have failed to pick up the household responsibilities that women are incapable of doing because of work, they need to hire someone to help. Finally, since the life expectancy continues to rise, there is an increased demand to help not only working mothers but also the elderly who need extra attention.<sup>3</sup>

In response to this increasing demand for domestics, Filipinas and Mexicans travel great distances to provide services in the U.S. while also supporting their family at home. Currently, there are approximately 7.5 million Filipinos who work abroad in over one hundred countries. Perhaps because of the shared historical relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines, and despite the complicated and disturbing historical past of American colonialism there, the U.S. continues to be the most popular destination for Filipinos to work abroad.<sup>4</sup> Mexicans also travel to the U.S. in great numbers to work.<sup>5</sup> Due to proximity and the U.S. and Mexico's shared histories, Chicana women serve as domestic workers more than any other ethnic group. The domestic workers support the economies and lifestyles of two countries: the U.S. and their home country. Without the tireless, often unseen and unrecognized work of these Filipina and Mexican domestic laborers, the U.S. way of life and functioning of society would not be the same. The 2004 film entitled "A Day Without a Mexican" hints at Americans' reliance on Mexicans through the title alone. The entire film revolves around Americans' reliance on the work Mexicans do and the utter chaos that ensues when Mexicans disappear for a day. This concept of our society being unable to survive a single day without the work of Mexicans shows our great dependence on all the functions they occupy to make the rest of our lives easier.

Filipinas and Chicanas also help to support their home countries. In 2003 alone, overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) sent back 7.6 billion dollars, which composes roughly 10 percent of the Filipino domestic product.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Mexican workers outside of Mexico sent back 10 billion dollars in 2002 alone. The only thing in Mexico that tops these remittances is oil.<sup>7</sup> These domestic workers do not let their lower social status get in the way of their right to vote. Filipinas working and living outside the Philippines only

<sup>3</sup> Maria de la Luz Ibarra, "Mexican Immigrant Women and the New Domestic Labor," *Human Organization* 59, no. 4 (2000): 455.

<sup>4</sup> Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1973), xxiii.

<sup>5</sup> Romero, "Domestic Service," 200-214.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Hogg, "Philippines: Fighting for the Migrant Vote," *BBC News UK Edition*, 22 March 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3545989.stm>.

<sup>7</sup> Tessie Borden, "Migrants seek voice in Mexico politics," *AZ Central*, 25 January 2003, <http://www.azcentral.com/specials/special03/articles/0125migrantvote25.html>.



obtained the right to vote in elections within the Philippines last year. The Filipinas who work overseas are usually heads of families, which means that their votes will likely influence the way other family members vote as well. Some argue that every vote cast by a Filipina living outside the Philippines influences the votes of at least three other people in the Philippines.<sup>8</sup> The voting power of overseas workers is thus tremendous—approximately 300,000 OFWs registered to vote. *Migrante*, one organization in the Philippines that advocates on behalf of OFWs, even designed a T-shirt for OFWs to wear, which reads, “Because we are worth more than the dollars we send,” thus acknowledging both the role they currently have in society and their desire to make it something more.<sup>9</sup>

Currently, Mexicans living outside of Mexico are fighting for the right to vote in Mexican elections. Although the Mexican constitution does not distinguish Mexicans living outside Mexico from those living within the country, Mexican immigrants are still unable to vote in elections because the constitution states that each vote must be made within the country. The concept of absentee ballots exists in over 60 countries, but not in Mexico. Mexicans living outside their home country resent that they are unable to vote for the politicians who use the millions of dollars they send back each year to improve Mexican infrastructure and communities. As one Mexican woman living in Los Angeles explained, “Democracy in Mexico will never be complete until it includes all Mexicans living abroad.”<sup>10</sup> Similar to Filipinas, Mexicans want to see a change in their home country to a more democratic system. Their votes may also significantly affect election results, especially considering that there are approximately 1.5 million Mexicans in the U.S. with Mexican voting cards. As a result, Vicente Fox and other Mexican leaders have campaigned in California, concentrating on issues that directly affect these workers, such as the cost of money transfers from the U.S. to Mexico and corruption at the U.S.-Mexico border. There have also been measures to allow Mexicans in the U.S. to vote in Mexican elections until a more permanent ruling is in place. For example, buses have been organized to travel from U.S. cities, as far away as Chicago and Washington, over the U.S.-Mexican border to polling stations.<sup>11</sup>

The fight for the vote could be classified as a strategy and tactic for workers to gain more power and control over their own lives. These women are continuing the long historical tradition of women fighting against discrimination for their survival and improvements in their lives. As Vicki L. Ruiz showcased in her book, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*, it has been, and continues to be, women who provide and create opportunities for social justice. Historian Mark Saad Saka writes, “Rather than assimilating and disappearing into the shadows or simply ‘contributing’ to Western history, women proved the core movers and shakers of history, a subaltern force in the making of the modern world.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Norman Bordadora and Martin P. Marfil, “300,000 overseas Filipinos may swing vote in tight race,” *Inquirer News Service*, 2 October 2003, [http://www.inq7.net/nat/2003/oct/02/nat\\_8-1.htm](http://www.inq7.net/nat/2003/oct/02/nat_8-1.htm).

<sup>9</sup> Hogg, “Philippines,” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3545989.stm>.

<sup>10</sup> The Associated Press, “Mexicans in U.S. intensify voting campaign,” *The Desert Sun* (Palm Springs), 8 November 2004, <http://www.thedesertsun.com/news/stories2004/election/20041108014643.shtml>.

<sup>11</sup> Ken Ellingwood, “Getting Out the Cross-Border Vote; Mexican Candidates Working Hard for Migrants’ Ballots,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 June 2000, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Saad Saka, review of *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820-1880*, by Deena Gonzalez, in *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* 14, no. 8 (Jan. 2004): 48.



Given that Mexicans working outside Mexico cannot vote in Mexican elections, and Filipinas just recently received this right, one can question the status of migrant workers in their home countries. In particular, if women in both the Philippines and Mexico are regarded as heroes for the work they do abroad, it is difficult to understand why this voting right has come so late for Filipinas and is still unavailable to Mexicans. Disenfranchisement closes an additional avenue with which to protect oneself from exploitation and vulnerability. Without the ability to vote for parties and candidates that advocate migration policies to serve and benefit the workers that keep the economies afloat, workers have one more burden to carry. After working in a country such as the U.S. where there may be less corruption, or less overt corruption, Filipina and Mexican citizens may be even more distrustful of their home government and officials' concerns for their people. This can further discourage the workers from returning, which has multiple far-reaching effects, including the separation and breakdown of the family. If their voices cannot be heard through their votes, their home country has essentially forgotten and ignored them.

There is no doubt that changes need to be made to better provide for and improve the lives of domestic and migrant workers in the U.S. However, as the following passage written by Carlos Bulosan, one of the first Filipino writers to write in English in the U.S., proves, it is equally as important to remember the strides that have been made and the reasons why people come to the U.S. Although there are many divisions between Filipinas, Mexicans, and people of other ethnicities, there are also grounds for unity:

America is in the hearts of men that died for freedom; it is also in the eyes of men that are building a new world. America is a prophecy of a new society of men: of a system that knows no sorrow or strife or suffering. America is a warning to those who would try to falsify the ideals of free men. America is also the nameless foreigner, the homeless refugee, the hungry boy begging for a job and the black body dangling from a tree. America is the illiterate immigrant who is ashamed that the world of books and intellectual opportunities is closed to him. We are the nameless foreigner, that homeless refugee, that hungry boy, that illiterate immigrant and that lynched black body. All of us, from the first Adams to the last Filipino, native born or alien, educated or illiterate—*We are America!*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, xxiv.

## A Field Worker's Dream

Michelle Behl

In the summer of 1967, Olga Moya's father received a letter from a group of farmers in North Dakota asking him and his family to hoe one hundred acres of beets for fifty dollars an acre. Fifty dollars an acre seemed like a fortune to them, so they accepted the offer. After a long journey, they arrived only to find misfortune. Olga's father was called into a meeting room, and the farmers announced that they could only afford to pay him ten dollars an acre. After checking his wallet, Olga's father realized that they did not have enough money to return to Texas, and since he had quit his job in Texas, they had to accept this very low-paying job. Enraged, Olga thought that there should be laws against breaking promises and vowed that she would do something about it when she grew up. Olga went on to become one of only six Mexican-American women tenured law professors in the country. She currently fights environmental injustices in Latino/a communities.<sup>1</sup>

Many successful Chicanas started working in agriculture as migrant farm workers. Their responses to agricultural hardships have always been heroic and compelling. Rather than allowing themselves to be exploited, many Chicanas have found ways to resist. Until now, their responses have gone unnoticed by many outside of Latino/a communities. Chicanas are no longer silent about their resistance to labor oppression, and a significant number are entering the business world. The recent influx of successful Chicanas is in large part due to their tireless devotion to their families and their ability to utilize resources at hand in innovative ways.

For the first time in history, Chicanas outnumber Chicanos in managerial and professional positions by 5 percent and own 28 percent of all Latino-owned firms.<sup>2</sup> Chicanas lead in the growing number of businesses owned by minority women. In 2002, Chicanas owned five hundred thousand firms, which was a 39 percent increase from 1997. These firms employ two hundred thousand people and generate thirty billion U.S. dollars in sales each year.<sup>3</sup> The explosive growth of the Latino population and the increasing presence of Chicanas in the business sector are felt throughout all of the United States. Their rise started in the 1600s, well before their struggles and setbacks in the U.S., which resulted from racial and gender discrimination.

Chicanas were among the earliest settlers of New Spain, part of which is today the southwestern United States. Maria Betancour founded San Antonio, the first permanent settlement in Texas, forty-five years before the American Revolution. During this time, women directly received some of the largest land grants and managed several ranches that they inherited from their fathers or husbands. They were entrepreneurs already in the 1600s: some specialized in herbal medicine or as midwives, and others grew crops and raised farm animals, which they sold to other settlers and the military. Married women under Spanish law had many more legal rights than Anglo women who lived in the

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<sup>1</sup> Adalyn Hixson, "HO Perspective: Olga Moya; Tenured Latina Law Professor of Mixed Emotions and Toxic Torts," *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* 8, no. 20 (5 June 1998): 22.

<sup>2</sup> Richard-Abraham Rugnao, "Businesswomen: Changing the Face of Business," *Saludos*, <http://www.saludos.com/cguide/wguide.html>.

<sup>3</sup> "Statistics," United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.usbcc.com/res-statistics.html>.



United States. Chicanas had control over all property that they previously owned even after they married and shared half ownership of all the property their husbands owned. They could freely buy and sell crops, animals, and goods. There was nothing barring them from owning their own businesses or entering into contracts in their own names. They were able to exercise the right to file a lawsuit in court even if it was against their own husbands.<sup>4</sup> Chicanas refused to give up these rights and aspirations under American law.

When the U.S. borders crossed their lands, or when they migrated north in search of a better life, Chicanas were forced to accept low-paying agricultural jobs as migrant workers. Much of the Latino legacy in the United States is tied to the struggles and experiences of migrant farm workers. Chicanas were exploited in agricultural labor as children and as adults. They worked in some of the harshest conditions imaginable. Women and children worked in the fields under the hot sun without drinking water or access to toilets—an unimaginable hardship. Olga Moya worked in the upper Midwest fields as a young girl and remembers being very embarrassed to pull down her pants in front of strangers when she could not control it anymore.<sup>5</sup> The living conditions of the workers were worse. It was a luxury to have running water or electricity. The housing resembled tin shacks or cow barns with a sink and a showerhead. Many slept on dirt floors or on used mattresses. The Wautoma-Dakota Dumping Grounds near Wautoma, Wisconsin, was notorious for reselling discarded mattresses to migrant workers for a profit. Many laborers were paid low, unfair wages for work they performed and were taken advantage of when they could not speak English.<sup>6</sup> These conditions placed great strains on Chicana families—as well as on the ability of Chicanas to maintain customary practices.

During these hardships, Chicanas were the threads that held the community together and ensured its survival. Chicanas made sure there was enough food by engaging in subsistence farming when they could and by caring for each other when ill or needing help. Further, women were the key component in several successful strikes that helped increase fair wages and working conditions. During a strike, they distributed food to the entire community and walked the picket lines even if they were not directly involved in the strike.<sup>7</sup> During the grape strikes and boycotts of the late 1960s and early 1970s, women could be seen playing dual roles in Neenah, Wisconsin: holding a sign boycotting grapes in one hand while tightly grasping a baby stroller in the other. Wautoma's Police Chief, Max Blader, ate grapes in front of the boycott picket lines and blatantly looked away from the violence the Chicanas endured. Against the defiance they faced, Chicanas continued to stand up for what they thought was right.<sup>8</sup> Grape boycott lines were seen across the United States from California to Philadelphia. The majority of the picketers and organizers were Chicana. Chicanas such as Carolina Franco traveled across the U.S. and walked the most crucial picket lines. She walked pickets in Los

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<sup>4</sup> *¡Adelante Mujeres!: A History of Mexican-American/Chicana Women* (Produced and distributed by the National Women's History Project, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Hixson, "HO Perspective," 22.

<sup>6</sup> Jesus Salas and David Giffy, *Struggle for Justice: The Migrant Farm Worker Labor Movement in Wisconsin* (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Labor History Society, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 72-98.

<sup>8</sup> Salas and Giffy, *Struggle for Justice*.



Angeles, New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. Chicanas are credited with the success of the grape boycott.<sup>9</sup> They are also credited with the success of the 1975 Tolteca Foods strike in Richmond, California. One hundred fifty workers, mostly women, held a picket line for a mere twenty-four hours before they won. Throughout the strikes, women were subject to horrific violence and to deportation.<sup>10</sup> This type of brutality did not alter the morale or aspirations of the Chicanas.

Many Chicanas are driven by the promise of a better life for themselves and their family. While working in the fields picking tomatoes as a migrant worker, Linda Torres-Winters became determined to do more with the tomatoes than pick them. Linda enrolled in the *Mi Casa* Business Center for Women and went on to open her own *salsa* business, *Lindita's Salsa*. Her *salsa* is sold in over five hundred stores in sixteen states. Linda is one of several hundreds of success stories since *Mi Casa* opened in 1990.<sup>11</sup> Chicanas have taken advantage of the newly available resources to aid their quest for a better life for their families.

Chicanas who made it through high school were very fortunate. The nature of migrant labor and the economic hardship that forces the entire family to work has resulted in many young Latinas dropping out of school. The dropout rate for migrant students is currently between 55 and 60 percent. Most women are torn between the clash of cultures, supporting their family with an outside job and dreaming of going to school and bettering their life. Some new programs make it possible to do both. The University of South Florida's High School Equivalency Program is a federally funded dropout program serving migrant and seasonal farm workers. The five women who are currently enrolled are all married with children and range in age from twenty-six to forty-four. They attend classes from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and never miss a day of school. Patrick Doone, who visits with the students frequently, says, "That they find the time and energy to balance their families and education is truly remarkable. These students are driven by their desire to improve the overall quality of life for their families."<sup>12</sup> These women are willing to improve their lives no matter the cost.

One example is Yrma Rico, who labored as a migrant worker in the Southwest as a child. She picked cotton in Texas and grapes in California's Central Valley with her family. She worked after school, on the weekends, and during vacations. Rico's mother taught her and her sisters they should expect to marry, have their husbands take care of them, and live a life like that of their mother, a migrant farm worker. Rico did not aspire to this type of lifestyle. She saw a chance to escape this expectation and was determined to make a different kind of life for herself. Rico is now the author of "The Latinas Guide to Success," an investor of Entravision Communications Corporation, the owner of a BMW dealership, and mother of two businesswomen. Her rise to the top of the socioeconomic ladder did not come easily. She worked as a field worker for years before

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<sup>9</sup> Margaret Rose, "Woman power will stop those grapes: Chicana organizers and middle-class female supporters in the Farm Workers' Grape Boycott in Philadelphia, 1969-1970," *Journal of Women's History* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 6-22.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Martinez, ed., *Viva La Causa: 500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures: The Complete Teaching Kit* (Albuquerque: Southwest Organizing Project, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> "Mi Casa to celebrate 10-year anniversary of the Business Center for Women," *La Voz* (Denver) 27, no. 12 (28 March 2001): 2.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Doone, "Punto Final! Migrant Students Need Access, Have Aspirations," *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* 13, no. 22 (11 August 2003): 52.



she started using her Spanish-speaking ability to her advantage. Rico first worked as a Spanish translator in a dentist's office and then went on to work as an interpreter in Las Vegas. She was a Latino spokeswoman for the *Univision SIN* television station and made it a household name. From there she made the sky the limit. She uses her position as a successful Latina to inspire, encourage, and convince Latinas that they too can succeed.<sup>13</sup>

Another woman who uses her position to inspire Chicanas is Dolores Huerta. After teaching elementary school to migrant children and seeing the condition in which they came to class, she made it her life's mission to help fight the injustices forced upon migrant farm workers. Huerta co-founded the United Farm Workers Union in 1962. She is an advocate for women's involvement and strength. She bears the motto "Behind Every Successful Woman Is Herself." She has said, "Women are made to think 'I can't have it all.' I have eleven kids. I hope to prove them wrong."<sup>14</sup> Even in the worst situations, Huerta made something good come out of it. After handing out the UFW grape boycott press release in 1970, the San Francisco Police Department riot police beat her until she had to undergo emergency surgery to remove a ruptured spleen and repair six broken ribs. She sued the city and forced them to change their crowd control methods.<sup>15</sup> Her response to this situation was proactive and helped save others from suffering the same abuse.

Chicanas have united as a group to address and educate each other about issues such as poor working and living conditions, sexual harassment, and discrimination faced while on the job. The first Statewide Female Farm Workers Conference was held in Fresno, California, in July of 1993. At this conference, Chicanas discussed low salaries, lack of drinking water, bathrooms and hygiene products in the field. They also educated the women on how to confront and deal with these issues. Also during the conference, they held a domestic violence workshop to teach Chicanas how to stop the violence and how to teach their daughters to break the cycle.<sup>16</sup> The conference presented more than one way for women to better their own lives and the lives of their daughters.

The influx of successful Chicanas has not undermined a shared sense of familial responsibility. Many businesses are still family affairs, and some even celebrate family. For example, the Robledo Family Winery in California is one of the few wineries with a traditional Latino name. Mr. Robledo emigrated from central Mexico and worked as a migrant farm worker picking grapes before creating the winery. Opened in October of 2003, the winery's success and survival depends on the effort of the entire family. All nine children take part in making the winery successful. The oldest daughter, Lorena, takes care of the crushing of the grapes and the bottling. At age twenty-six, Vanessa Robledo is the youngest female president of a California winery. Vanessa grew up watching her father struggle and overcome challenges, and she uses those experiences as a lesson in overcoming challenges.<sup>17</sup> Chicanas are no strangers to challenge; they have faced racial and gender hardships since they arrived in the United States.

<sup>13</sup> Holly O. Rizzo, "Yrma Rico: Living Fearlessly, Living Passionately, Living Richly," *Hispanic Trends* (September 2004): 38.

<sup>14</sup> Lu Herrera, "For the Sake of Good," *Hispanic* 16, no. 5 (May 2003): 28-29.

<sup>15</sup> Lalo Lopez, "Si Se Puede," *Hispanic* 9, no. 8 (August 1996): 41.

<sup>16</sup> Eduardo Stanely, "Female Farmworkers Raise Issues," *El Sol Del Valle* (Sanger, Calif.) no. 138 (11 August 1993), 1.

<sup>17</sup> "Toast of the Town, The Robledo Family Winery," *Hispanics Today* (Produced by the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, 2004), Episode 320.

Olga Moya became a law professor out of determination to change agricultural injustices her family faced and prevent the Latino community from facing more of the same injustices. Many Chicanas have traveled the same path, starting in the field. Chicanas have overcome great challenges to get where they are today. They possess an incredible strength, courage, and desire to create a better life for themselves, their family, and their community. Their sacrifices are truly amazing and awe-inspiring. Chicanas have supported their communities and culture for centuries. Their actions and ability to utilize new resources over the past forty years have put them on the map and have forced Anglos to take notice. Their stories and their lives offer a glimpse of the brave new world that is coming into being in the twenty-first century.



## Migrant Workers Struggles: Past and Present

Julie Covarrubias

Do you ever wonder, while grocery shopping, who picks the fruits and vegetables that you buy? Have you ever considered all the labor that it takes to get produce ready to sell in a grocery store? The life of a migrant worker is not very respected, although it should be because migrant workers make enormous contributions to the well-being of the nation. Have there been any improvements with regard to the way migrant workers are treated? I find it difficult to understand why mainstream society demeans migrant workers when they work hard, lead respectable lives, and make endless contributions to the United States economy.

Society has always disregarded migrant workers and looked down on them. From the 1960s to the present, there has not been enough improvement in the treatment and level of acceptance of migrant workers. Without much change in the way people perceive them, migrant workers have not been able to get ahead in society. The most obvious evidence of this is the migrants' poor wages and few benefits. Scholarship shows that migrant workers usually make far less than minimum wage. With better wages, they could begin to establish a better future and survive in society. According to Señora Maria Del Rosario Covarrubias, "Many immigrants come to the United States because it is said that here there is a surplus of jobs and good schools to send your children to. You can purchase nice things because you can make a better living."<sup>1</sup> With the sense of success that lingers in the minds of immigrants, they come to the United States in search of "the American dream." Why can't migrant workers get ahead when they take the jobs that many Americans would never consider taking? Migrant workers do not take jobs away from Americans. So, why is it that they still receive bad wages and few benefits for working harder than most in the United States? Migrant workers should have the opportunity to get ahead in mainstream society and to have a better future.

My own parents suffered and endured all of the hardships of migrants, which sparked my questioning of the treatment of migrant workers. My parents immigrated from their native land of Mexico in 1979 in order to give my siblings and me a better future. When I first started questioning my mom about her days as a farm worker, she got very tense and straight-faced. I did not realize how much it still affects her. She not only worked ten-hour days for two dollars per basket of zucchinis, but she still had to come home and take care of the family. I asked her many questions regarding her time as a farm worker. My main question was, why did she believe that many farm workers cannot get ahead in society? She responded, "Many Americans do not think very highly of us (immigrants) and sometimes cannot look beyond the stereotypes that are put on us when we come to the United States. I feel that even if a person goes on to do other things in life, once people find out that you were once a migrant worker, they look down upon you."<sup>2</sup> My mother overcame many obstacles to be where she is today. She moved from Los Angeles to Chicago, and then on to Madison. She had to deal with discrimination, a new language, cultural barriers, and poverty. Nonetheless, she found the courage and determination to prove to her children that it was possible to go from having nothing to, in her case, owning a house, becoming a teacher, and supporting her children in college. Having to recapture her past made her aware of other problems that she never considered. When she looked back at all of the

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<sup>1</sup> Maria D. Covarrubias, interview with author, Madison, WI, November 26, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



difficult, low-paying jobs, she realized that the glass ceiling effect is harder for many immigrants than for white women. The glass ceiling is the idea that a particular group can only attain certain promotions before a cap is placed on how far that group can progress in the workplace. It is based on societal standards. "When you think of farm working, it is not respected in American society. Yet society is so overbearing and does not let us get ahead to have a better future. I feel the glass ceiling effect is seen more with immigrants than with women. Women who were born in the United States are higher in the minds of mainstream society. We (immigrants) are seen as inferior and can never move up in the rankings. If we do somehow make something of ourselves, we still have to prove ourselves every day."<sup>3</sup> Covarrubias had to overcome many obstacles, and today she is a fifth grade teacher at Chavez Elementary School. During the interviews I realized that my mother and father gave up everything in Mexico and came to a foreign land where they were not welcome. Maria Covarrubias is one of the thousands of farm workers who contributed to the well being of the nation. They never came here to steal jobs from Americans; they came for a chance to have a future. Although many Americans assume that immigrants take away jobs, they in fact take jobs that the average American would never consider doing. Out of curiosity, I asked Covarrubias if she had seen any Americans working in the fields picking vegetables. She responded, "I do not recall seeing any Caucasians in the fields with us; I just remember every boss that I had was Caucasian."<sup>4</sup> As my interview with Covarrubias ended, I asked her a last question, hoping that it would clear up some ideas I had about migrant workers. I wanted to know whether or not she thought migrant workers could get ahead in present day society. She responded, "Although many immigrants have been treated poorly, I believe that we (immigrants) can overcome the stereotypes and the negative idea that comes with the territory of being an immigrant. I just hope to God that people see that minorities are not as scarce as they used to be. Minorities can not be avoided any more; we are interacting with them every day."<sup>5</sup> With this idea lingering in my head, I decided to venture off into new territory and see what other immigrant farm workers had to say.

*Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child* describes Elva Treviño Hart's life as a farm worker who overcame the disadvantages of her economic background and discovered her true talents in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> She had similar experiences to those of Señora Covarrubias. Although they did not work in the same state, Elva Treviño Hart had the same difficulties trying to get ahead as a migrant worker. She was very young when her family took up migrant work. Hart, like many of her generation, was born into a family that worked as migrant workers. When she was growing up, she had to overcome many stereotypes in regards to being a migrant child, one being that she would follow in the footsteps of her parents. Hart's parents did not make a lot of money, and the whole family was involved in picking vegetables to survive their difficult economic situation.<sup>7</sup> Since birth, Elva Treviño Hart was defined by society as a poverty-stricken migrant child. Although she was poor, her parents wanted her to attend school. Once she did start school, Hart overcame many stereotypes. Although she did well in school, she still had to be quiet and not call attention to herself.<sup>8</sup> Hart had to follow the guidelines of respect and obedience, yet she learned how to work the system to her advantage in order to get ahead in the

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Elva Treviño Hart, *Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child* (Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press, 1999), 141.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



society in which she lived. Evidently, many migrants sacrifice for the well-being of their children.

Both Maria Covarrubias and Elva Treviño Hart had similar goals that came with trying to conquer obstacles that society imposed on them because they were minorities living in a new country. For example, they both believed that in order to survive in mainstream society, one must give up many rights that everyone has from birth. The same theme appeared in both their life stories. Covarrubias sacrificed herself to give her children a better future. Hart's parents had to work and sacrifice themselves to make it in society. Although the two narratives took place in different states at different times, together they show that life for a migrant worker has many obstacles that one must overcome to achieve satisfaction.

After much conversation about migrant workers, I explored how many farm workers there are today and what wages they receive. According to the Farm Employers Labor Service, the average hourly wage of farm workers on 282 farms was \$5.61, with a range of \$4.75 to \$8.50.<sup>9</sup> This study was conducted in 1998 and proves that the wages have increased slightly since the 1980s, if we recall that Covarrubias earned two dollars for a full basket of zucchinis working in the fields. Her employers had a mark system, so that when you brought up a full basket, they would put a tally by your name. They did not get paid for a basket that was half-full; it had to be full to count.<sup>10</sup> This may seem like the migrant workers' wages increased significantly because they are now paid at an hourly wage. One must remember that as the years progress, the cost of living also rises. Wages then increase to compensate. Yet, we must also determine if there still are as many migrant workers in the fields at the present time.

Many people argue that the population of farm workers has decreased since the beginning of the century. The farm labor population has decreased over the century from 13,400,000 to 3,000,000.<sup>11</sup> If the population of farm workers decreased, then why are the workers' wages still so low? If there is less competition, should they not have the right to benefits? When we interpret this situation, we see that many migrant workers and non-migrant workers are leaving farm labor. But what the graph does not show is what types of jobs they take after departing from the fields. Many migrant workers leave the fields for jobs in the fast food industry, or, in Covarrubias's case, washing dishes for a \$1.20 an hour. Knowing the number of people working in the fields is not enough to interpret the situation correctly. Given the negative ideas about immigrants, I decided to examine how much they cost the economy and how they help the economy.

A study carried out by Los Angeles County found that immigrants who arrived after 1980 cost the county \$2.5 billion in medical services, education, and other benefits.<sup>12</sup> But while the examiners were busy worrying about all of the billions lost, they forgot to add how much the immigrants gave back to the county. That same study shows that those same immigrants who made the county lose billions of dollars also contributed more in taxes than they cost the county. So if we think that \$2.5 billion is a lot to lose, then how about receiving \$4.3 billion in taxes that the immigrants contributed that same year, not only to Los Angeles County, but to the state of California and to the federal government as well? So in reality, the government and the state of California gained \$1.8 billion dollars from the undocumented immigrants.<sup>13</sup> That is a lot of

<sup>9</sup> Farm Workers Labor Service, <http://www.fels.org>.

<sup>10</sup> Maria D. Covarrubias, interview with author, Madison, WI, 26 November 2004.

<sup>11</sup> "U.S. Population Compared with Number of Farm Workers," <http://www.ctaitc.org/pdf/popchart.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Jorge Ramos, *The Other Face of America* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc, 2002), 225.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

money, especially when undocumented immigrants cannot use government services because they do not have the proper documentation. If immigrants clearly help the economy, why is there still so much ignorance about the whole idea of immigration in the United States?

Immigrants who come to the United States from Latin America face discrimination because many people do not give them a fair chance. What people need to understand is that they do not represent more poverty. They in fact enrich the country's heritage and help the economy stay stable or even grow. Without immigrants, the United States would not be a thriving, rich country. I am not implying that the citizens do not help. I am simply stating that to have a prospering nation, everyone who works and contributes to the economy should receive the credit they deserve.

When we look back in history and realize how many people gave their life to farm work, we see that farm workers should be respected for trying to make a living in the United States. My mother gave many years to migrant work, and now she is an inspiration not only to me, but also to all the people who know her. Maria Covarrubias left everything behind to pursue a dream she was not sure was attainable. With the help of only my father, Ismael Covarrubias, she was able to give my siblings and me a future that was nonexistent at the time they immigrated. Many immigrants sacrifice everything they have to come to the United States for a better life. Contrary to popular belief immigrants are not a burden to the United States. They are a positive contribution to both the social and economic aspects of this nation, without which we would not be so prosperous.



## Chicana Activism Through Literature

Melissa Cartagena

Creative solutions to social change comes with people who have creative life within themselves, a free woman can creatively contribute with radical solutions because she knows life from within.

—Mary Lou Espinosa

Mary Lou Espinosa is a poet who contributed her work to the periodical *Regeneración*. This quote comes from her poem "*La Madre de Aztlán*" and illustrates how many women were actively seeking a solution during the Chicano Movement. Writing has been a creative outlet for generations of people, allowing them to express themselves. The written word has allowed authors the unique ability to find creative, "radical solutions" to the problems that have plagued them.

The Chicano Movement inspired active dedication to *la causa* through organizations, rallies, music, art and literature. Activism had a significant place in the role of each family member, as he or she would use his or her position to strive for social change. Specifically, Chicanas attempted to make themselves heard, fighting against both racial and gender prejudices. This was not solely for self-expression but a vehicle for what they hoped would allow them to bring change to the future. Chicanas desired to affect and contribute to a cause in which they avidly believed. Chicana activists wanted to reach outside their narrow spheres of influence. Their own ambitions and aspirations would have been extremely limited without such efforts. Chicanas have used literature as a medium of activism to express what they felt, lived, and, essentially, what they wanted to see.

Chicana writing is unique. Its character has been formed through the multiple oppressions that Chicanas have had to endure because of race, gender, and dual oppression. A study of Chicana literature demonstrates that the writings of the Chicanas not only support the spirit of the Chicano Movement, but also address women's rights. Because Chicanas had to fight on two fronts, they often felt pressure from within *La Raza*, as Chicanos would assume that these women were putting feminist concerns before *la causa*. Some Chicanos held that feminism was in opposition to traditional values, and, further, that it resulted in acculturation of Chicanas into Anglo culture—a betrayal that they could not understand or tolerate.<sup>1</sup> For example, a survey taken at the 1971 *La Conferencia de Mujeres Por La Raza* indicated that 72 percent of Chicanas felt discrimination within *La Raza*, and 28 percent had no opinion. Not surprisingly, none of the women answered definitively that they experienced no discrimination at all.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Maria Herrera-Sobek, *Beyond Stereotypes: The Critical Analysis of Chicana Literature* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Bilingual Press, 1985), 95.

<sup>2</sup> Francisca Flores, "Conference of Mexican Women in Houston," *Regeneración* 1, no. 10 (1971): 3-4.

It is evident that Chicanas felt allegiance to both the feminist and Chicano Movement, and they had the ability to support both. A poem written by Josephine Madrid entitled *Brown* noted:

When someone asked me what is beauty,  
Someone said to me, the sea. Another said,  
A green tree. I just smiled and said,  
Look at me! What do you see?  
A CHICANA!!!!  
Standing as proud as can be.  
Still standing, I said, BROWN!!!  
That is the only true . . . Beauty to me.<sup>3</sup>

This poem clearly outlines the belief of Chicanas. The direct mention of "A CHICANA" being the explanation of beauty was influenced by feminist empowerment; however, "BROWN" being beautiful is generally a statement of empowerment for all Chicanos. Chicanas were motivated to support both causes because together the two movements spoke to the need for rights for Chicanas. Chicanas were adamant that they had the right to have liberation from both forms of oppression.

Chicana authors sought to make a statement that transcended prevalent stereotypes and allowed others to think of Chicanas differently. However, in order to influence others to see past their assumed roles, Chicanas needed to find answers to questions about identity: the question, "Who am I?" was often at the center of their writing. Mary Lou Espinosa wrote, "Man cannot change his attitude toward woman until the woman perceives her deep psychological self as independent and asserted from man."<sup>4</sup> The singular use of "woman" indicates the need for each individual woman to define who she is in relation to her own experiences and situations. A theme that runs through Chicano literature is the depiction of Chicanas as naive, unfaithful and hypersexual.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, men often believed that women had to protect their sexual honor at all costs.

The literary renaissance for Chicano writers began in the 1970s, and Chicanas took full advantage of this development to tell the world—and perhaps sometimes themselves—who they were. Scholars Maria Herrera-Sobek and Helena Maria Viramontes argue, "Chicana authors are deconstructing male-dominated narratives and re-inscribing themselves as subjects and acquiring their own voice. Chicanas are therefore, breaking the silence Chicano hegemony had imposed on them in the name of ethnic unity."<sup>6</sup> In a bold attempt to speak to Chicanas in *La Raza*, Bernice Rincon adapted a stanza from the epic poem, "I Am Joaquin," and created a female version that read:

<sup>3</sup> Josephine Madrid, "Brown," *Regeneración* 2, no. 3 (1973): 27.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Lou Espinoza, "La Madre de Aztlan," *Regeneración* 2, no. 4 (1975): 2.

<sup>5</sup> Maria Herrera-Sobek, *Beyond Stereotypes: The Critical Analysis of Chicana Literature* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Bilingual Press, 1985), 36.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Herrera-Sobek and Helena Maria Viramontes, *Chicana (W)rites: On Word and Film* (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1995), 26.



*La Raza!, Mexicana, Espanola,  
Latina, Hispana, Chicana  
or whatever I call myself,  
I look the same, I feel the same  
I cry and sing the same . . .*<sup>7</sup>

This poem identifies many of the labels that Chicanas are assigned but that do not define who they are.

Chicana authors have created Chicana protagonists who portray women in ways that differ from the characters offered by Chicano authors. Female characters are symbols of spiritual strength, full of virtue and wisdom. They often are self-sacrificing, and the providers for their families, their husbands, and *la causa*. Such women are portrayed as both sensitive and the givers of life.<sup>8</sup> These Chicana writings provide an insight to human experience that describes a group of people who have suffered double oppression and marginalization, and yet find ways to nurture their intellect and creativity, and, as a result, continue to flourish. This portrayal of women as active participants, taking action and being assertive, allowed for the illusion that women could "do it all." Women could fight for the rights of the Chicano Movement along with the rights of Chicanas, because such rights could not be separated.

Apart from focusing on the strength of Chicanas, Chicana writers used the bonds between women as a reoccurring theme. This literature developed strong Chicana characters in their *abuelas* and *madres* (grandmothers and mothers) and the wisdom that these women passed along generations. Particular social behavior was taught to younger females through nurturing relationships with their female elders. The relationships in the writings between mothers and children were always very strong, and had dual meanings to both the writers and the readers of this literature. Chicanas defined themselves through these strong, nurturing and lasting relationships. The relationships that extended over generations also promoted a sense of unity among these women. The idea that strength comes through unity, whether among family members or among all of the women of *La Raza*, was at the center of the fight for equal rights.

Unity among all Chicanas is vital to winning the fight against the multiple discriminations they face. However, some women agreed with men and condemned Chicanas for fighting for their rights because, they argued, this shifted the focus away from *la causa* and placed individual needs before the needs of the group as a whole. Francisca Flores, editor of the periodical *Regeneración*, addressed this issue in an editorial titled "*El Mundo Femenil Mexicana*" (The Mexican World of Woman), as she advocated the promotion of unity:

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<sup>7</sup> Bernice Rincon, "Chicanas on the Move," *Regeneración* (1975): 52.

<sup>8</sup> Evangelina Vigil, *Woman of Her Word: Hispanic Woman Write* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1987), 7-8.

The issue of equality, freedom and self determination of the Chicana . . . . *is not negotiable*. Anyone opposing the right of women to organize into their own form of organization has no place in leadership of the movement. FREEDOM IS FOR EVERYONE. Women do not intend to argue or be diverted by engaging in wasteful and useless rhetoric on this subject.....It is hoped that women who disagree with any aspect of the new role of the Chicana will be willing to discuss the issue or difference of opinion within the group.<sup>9</sup>

Gender and racial rights for Chicanas were important in both the Chicano Movement as well as the feminist movement. The conference of 1971 attempted to promote unity among the six hundred Chicanas who attended with the hope that others would be inspired to join the movement. The issues discussed that were directly related to women included marriage, sex, the need for free 24-hour childcare centers in their communities, and the goal of making birth control and abortions free and legal.<sup>10</sup> These issues did not remain within the confines of the conference, but were actively addressed in many Chicana writings as well. Mirtal Vidal, for example, wrote a pamphlet titled *Chicanas Speak Out, Women: New Voice of La Raza* shortly after the conference that focused on the specific issues of Chicanas as part of the Chicano Movement, not as a division within the movement. She also argued that men who stood in the way of women's rights were suggesting that 51 percent of the population did not have the right to seek liberation.

Pamphlets, along with poetry, prose, periodicals, and newspaper articles, allowed Chicanas to voice their concerns about social and political oppressions, with or without the support of others. These women used such mediums of expression to their greatest capacity, and literary and artistic expression increased during the late 1960s and 1970s. Unfortunately much of Chicana literature was invisible because of the very discrimination that they fought against. However, these women were determined to be heard, and by the 1980s, Chicana literature gained a readership through self-published works and collective publication enterprises headed by Chicana writers.<sup>11</sup> The first organization of Chicana writers as an interest group actually took place in 1973 with *El Grito del Norte* and an underground Chicano newspaper, *Chicanas en la Literatura y el Arte*. *Regeneración* had a Chicana editor, which might have influenced the increase in female contributing authors as the years progressed.

Through writing, Chicanas found another form of activism. One Chicana author used a poem to support her belief that "progress is being made toward social change for all." The poem read:

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<sup>9</sup> Francisca Flores, "El Mundo Femenil Mexicana," *Regeneración* 1, no. 10 (1971): x.

<sup>10</sup> Mirta Vidal, *Chicanas Speak Out, Woman: New Voice of La Raza* (New York: Pathfinder Press Inc., 1971), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Tey Diana Rebellado and Eliana S. Rivero, eds., *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 21-24.



La Mujer (the woman) was created from the rib of the man,  
She was not made from his head to top him,  
Nor out of his feet, to be trampled upon,  
But out of his side, to be equal to him,  
Under his arm, to be protected, and under  
his heart to be loved.<sup>12</sup>

Poetry, thus, was an acceptable form of literature through which Chicanas could express themselves. However, Chicanas did not necessarily follow what others thought was "acceptable" for them and began exploring new frontiers of creative writing. Berta Orneles, for example, was the first contemporary Chicana novelist, and in 1975, her work explored political themes and had assertive Chicana protagonists who were political activists.<sup>13</sup> During the 1970s and 80s, many Chicana authors took the bold step of using humor in their writing. This action made a statement that indicated Chicanas were comfortable and assured of who they were because most writing positioned women in the role of "victim of the joke," not as the joke-tellers.<sup>14</sup> Chicana writings also turned to celebration to "sing the freedom and glory of being a woman" in spite of oppression.<sup>15</sup>

Chicana writers used their brilliant minds, strong spirits, and passionate convictions to create great pieces of literature in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Patricia Meyer Sparks, a theorist of women writers, says, "Changing social conditions increase or diminish the opportunities for women's actions and expression, but a special female self-awareness emerges through literature in every period."<sup>16</sup> This opportunity allowed Chicanas to unite, define both themselves and how others should view them, and establish what they need and deserve. This literature has the power to serve as a tool of activism, affect people around them, and establish a legacy through which future female activists can both survive and thrive.

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<sup>12</sup> Bernice Rincon, "La Chicana, 'Her Role in the Past and Her Search for a New Role in the Future,'" *Regeneración* 2, no. 4 (1975): 39.

<sup>13</sup> Maria Herrera-Sobek, *Beyond Stereotypes: The Critical Analysis of Chicana Literature* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Bilingual Press, 1985), 36.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>15</sup> Tey Diana Rebellado and Eliana S. Rivero, *Infinite Divisions: An Anthropology of Chicana Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 341.

<sup>16</sup> Maria Herrera-Sobek, *Beyond Stereotypes: The Critical Analysis of Chicana Literature* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Bilingual Press, 1995), 32.



### Section Three

### *The Power of Ideas: Sexism, Misogyny, & Fighting Back*

#### *La Malinche: From Harlot to Heroine*

Bryan Koronkiewicz

*La Malinche* is an important female figure in Mexican and ethnic Mexican history. She symbolizes for many the betrayal of the race by women. The word *malinchista* is invoked to used to identify women as particularly culpable for the conquest of the Americas by Europeans. This supremely sexist interpretation of the history of European conquest holds great sway among many ethnic Mexicans—men and women alike.

Yet, there are others who challenge this view and see *La Malinche*, instead, as a figure of valor. Casting off the title of traitor, Chicana and Chicano feminists assign her the role of the strong Chicana and proud mother of the Mexican race. How did this complete reversal of meaning take place? A large part of the answer can be found in a careful reading of the work of contemporary Chicana authors and poets, such as Carmen Tafolla, Naomi Quiñonez, and Helen Silvas. These women empower themselves and their fellow Chicanas by using their writings to challenge the dominant historical constructions of *La Malinche*. Instead of devising a new symbol to embody their feminist ideals, these Chicanas and their Chicano brothers help to (re)construct the history of *La Malinche*. In doing so, they not only challenge pre-existing views of a prominent historical figure, but they also challenge the long-accepted traditional roles of Chicanas more generally.

Chicana feminist writers transformed *La Malinche's* identity by first relating the history of her condemnation. They found a multitude of negative portrayals of *La Malinche* upon which to draw. Ironically, even though *La Malinche* is recognized in historical documents as having an extraordinary facility with many different languages that allowed her to serve as a translator, her intelligence, skill, and even brilliance are overshadowed by her complicity with the enemy.<sup>1</sup> Yet, very, very few accounts allow *La Malinche* to speak for herself. Chicana scholars have constructed, nevertheless, an alternative (her)story of this important historical figure.

Malinal—as her actual given name is believed to be—was born the daughter of an Aztec *cacique*, or chief, and a member of the privileged and educated class. After the death of *La Malinche's* father, her mother sought control of all of the inheritance. Not wanting her daughter to challenge her power, she gave Malinal away to traders, who in turn sold her to the ruling *cacique* of a territory located on the coast of the Yucatán peninsula.<sup>2</sup> Over the years, she was sold or traded by one owner after another. Finally, around age eighteen or nineteen, *La Malinche's* role in history was set in motion when she and twenty other young women were

<sup>1</sup> Anna Lanyon, *Malinche's Conquest* (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Cordelia Candelaria, "La Malinche, Feminist Prototype," *Frontiers: Journal of Women Studies* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 2.



presented by a *cacique* as gifts to the Spaniards in 1519 to serve them as slaves.<sup>3</sup> By chance, the Spaniards discovered that Malinal, newly christened Doña Marina, could speak both Mayan, the language of her adopted people, and Nahuatl, the language of her Aztec heritage. She quickly became skilled at speaking Castilian Spanish as well, and this provided the connection necessary to converse with the Aztec emperor, Moctezuma. Soon *La Malinche* developed into not only a translator but also the personal advisor to Hernán Cortés, the leader of the Spanish *conquistadors*. She served Cortés as guide, a consultant on indigenous traditions and culture, and a skilled strategist.<sup>4</sup>

Since scholars only have fragments of Malinal's story, gossip, conjecture, and rumors have filled in the gaps. *La Malinche* assumed mythic stature as the cause of the horror that befell native peoples as millions upon millions perished following contact with Europeans—through warfare, murder, disease, and rape. *La Malinche* became the “Eve” of the paradise of the Americas, who could be blamed for the near destruction of the race at the hands of Europeans.<sup>5</sup> Since she played such a pivotal role in building alliances among native peoples against Moctezuma, many Mexicans blamed her for the fall of the Aztec empire and the rise of European dominance. Over time, *La Malinche* became the national icon of betrayal—the native woman who not only submitted to the Spaniards but joined in the conquest of her own people.

*La Malinche* is associated with the common scornful phrase *hijo de la chingada*, which translates to “son of the sexually violated woman.” This insult confers a degraded status to women who are sexually violated—blaming them for their own victimization—thus deflecting responsibility from the sexual violator. *Hijo de la chingada* extends this degradation to all the children of such women, who become bastards in the eyes of the race. It refers to Malinal's *mestizo* son whose father was none other than her Spanish companion, Hernán Cortés.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, calling someone a *malinchista* implies that the person is not genuinely Mexican, but rather, greatly influenced by foreigners.<sup>7</sup> This person is the product of race mixture—a mixing of native blood and culture with that of Europeans. Sexism is also inherent in this term. Whether a man or a woman “betrays,” the action becomes implied through the language as something female.<sup>8</sup> This correlates directly to how *La Malinche* occupied the role of the biblical Eve. This association represents her as the sinful embodiment of inherent feminine weakness that transforms all women into *chingadas*.<sup>9</sup> A good example of an object of popular Mexican culture where this is evident is in the mural *Cortés and Malinche* by José Clemente Orozco.<sup>10</sup> In the painting, *La Malinche* is shown being held back by her master's hand as the submissive Indian woman—dark, naked, and miserable. Orozco portrays *La Malinche* as nothing more than an object who is barely conscious, completely enigmatic, enclosed, and muted.<sup>11</sup>

In more recent times, however, the meanings attached to *La Malinche* have become more complicated and nuanced. Many historians now argue that the legendary indigenous translator in

<sup>3</sup> Lanyon, *Malinche's Conquest*, 57.

<sup>4</sup> Candelaria, “La Malinche, Feminist Prototype,” 3.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Verdonk, ed., *Twentieth-Century Poetry: From Text to Context* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 171.

<sup>6</sup> Verdonk, *Twentieth-Century Poetry*, 174.

<sup>7</sup> Lanyon, *Malinche's Conquest*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Verdonk, *Twentieth-Century Poetry*, 174.

<sup>9</sup> Sandra Messinger Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From Mystery to Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 94.

<sup>10</sup> Carlos Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 112.

<sup>11</sup> Lanyon, *Malinche's Conquest*, 9.



fact saved many of her people. They assert that the demise of the Aztec empire had already begun under Moctezuma's dictatorial control and that destruction was a foregone conclusion when gold was first discovered in the Americas.<sup>12</sup> Further, they hold that, without someone like Malinal, who was not only a fluent translator but an advisor to both native peoples and Spanish conquerors during negotiations, the Spaniards might well have been much more brutal and destructive in their conquest of Mexico. And, although the Aztec empire may have been destroyed, the *mexica* (Aztec) and other Indian groups, their Nahuatl, Maya, and other languages, and much of their history and culture continue to survive—thanks in part to *La Malinche*'s role as ambassador and strategist. Furthermore, her relationship with Cortés contributed to the production of a new race—*la raza cosmica*—both literally with the birth of their mixed-race son, Martín, and symbolically with the birth of the Mexican *mestizo* people.<sup>13</sup> The transformation of *Malinche*'s image has developed into a powerful, often poetic way to untangle the contradictory assertions of advocates of gender and racial equality, feminism, and ethnic nationalism.<sup>14</sup>

There are many significant reasons why Chicana writers choose to resymbolize *La Malinche*. First, they were all too familiar with the term and the misogyny it represented among ethnic Mexicans. Many had first-hand experience with how ethnic Mexican men used the name *La Malinche* for Chicanas who acted in ways that some Chicanos considered assimilationist, such as marrying white men or obtaining higher education. But, more important, Chicanos used the term *La Malinche* to refer to Chicanas who supported feminism.<sup>15</sup> By putting a positive spin on this term, Chicana writers sought to reclaim it as a means to confront the widespread male-centeredness of the Chicano Movement.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the image of *La Malinche* now personifies intellect, ingenuity, adaptability, and leadership. All of these are attributes that describe Chicanas free from conventional norms.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most important tools Chicanas use in their poetry is woman's voice. *La Malinche* is essential to this idea because during her time period, women's voices were forbidden in matters of public life or state affairs, very similar to the way things were during the start of the Chicano/a Movement.<sup>18</sup> Through this, instead of being interpreted as a victim, *La Malinche* can be understood as a survivor because she had strength and a voice in a violent society that particularly targeted women.<sup>19</sup> For example, in Carmen Tafolla's poem simply entitled "*La Malinche*," the opening line reads, "*Yo soy la Malinche*," which translates to "I am Malinche."<sup>20</sup> Not only is she giving the first-person power of voice to *La Malinche*, but she also assumes the role of *La Malinche* in the poem and invokes for herself the power that *La Malinche* possesses. At the same time Tafolla calls upon another famous poem, "*Yo soy Joaquín*" by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, one of the first prominent pieces of Chicano/a literature.<sup>21</sup> Tafolla's work is a direct retort to the masculine nationalism of Gonzales's work, which barred women from taking central roles in the Chicano/a Movement.

<sup>12</sup> Candelaria, "La Malinche, Feminist Prototype," 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>14</sup> Verdonk, *Twentieth-Century Poetry*, 171.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Candelaria, "La Malinche, Feminist Prototype," 6.

<sup>18</sup> Lanyon, *Malinche's Conquest*, 73.

<sup>19</sup> Maggie McFadden, "On Unprotected Females, Violence, and Survival in the New World: Introduction," *NWSA Journal* 13, no. 1 (April 1, 2001): ix.

<sup>20</sup> Carmen Tafolla, "*La Malinche*," *Canto al Pueblo* (San Antonio, TX: Penca Books, 1978), line 1.

<sup>21</sup> Verdonk, *Twentieth-Century Poetry*, 180.



Another essential aspect of Chicana poetry is reinterpretation. The feminist poets fervently discard the long-established constructions of *La Malinche*. They return to the historical record and rewrite *La Malinche*'s identity from an entirely different point of view.<sup>22</sup> Tafolla writes, again from *La Malinche*'s perspective, "I began to dream ... / I saw, / and I acted!"<sup>23</sup> And later, near the end, she says, "But Chingada I was not. / Not tricked, not screwed, not traitor. / For I was not traitor to myself — / I saw a dream / and I reached it."<sup>24</sup> Tafolla argues that *La Malinche* saw her chance to be more than a slave girl, took it, and achieved success. Naomi Quiñonez furthers this idea that *La Malinche* took the initiative when she states in her poem, "Trilogy," that through her relationship with Cortés, *La Malinche* "gave him Mexico."<sup>25</sup> Quiñonez implies that *La Malinche* was the one in control. In her poem "Malinche Reborn," Helen Silvas reinterprets *La Malinche* in a slightly different way, but also reimagines the events that befell Malinal. The poem asserts that *La Malinche* did not betray her nation because her people betrayed her first, when she was sent away as a slave and an outcast.<sup>26</sup> Silvas suggests that *La Malinche* did what she had to do to survive.

Throughout many aspects of Chicano/a culture, *La Malinche* appears as a principal historical figure. Since the fall of the Aztec empire, she has been regarded with negativity, which has infused Chicano/a history, culture, and society. This led to expressions such as *hijo de la chingada* and *malinchista* to single out someone out who is not "whole-heartedly" Mexican. Nevertheless, during the twentieth century, many reinterpreted *La Malinche*'s identity. No longer a symbol of betrayal, Chicana feminists portray her with pride as a strong Chicana. Many contemporary Chicana authors, including Carmen Tafolla, Naomi Quiñonez, and Helen Silvas, incorporate *La Malinche* into their poetry. By giving her a voice and reinterpreting her story, these feminist authors dispute the previously damned image of *La Malinche*. Chicanas have reconstructed the history of *La Malinche*, and, in doing so, they have altered not only the conventional attitudes toward this prominent woman in history, but also toward Chicanas in contemporary society.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>23</sup> Tafolla, "La Malinche," lines 14-16.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., lines 50-54.

<sup>25</sup> Naomi Quiñonez, "Trilogy," *Sueño de Colibri/Hummingbird Dream* (Boulder, CO: West End Press, 1985), line 15.

<sup>26</sup> Helen Silvas, "Malinche Reborn," *Irvine Chicano Literary Prize, 1985-87* (Irvine: Department of Spanish and Portuguese, University of California, 1988).

## Origins of the Weaving Tradition: A Historical Journey

Christine Kolowith

In the twentieth century, Señora Petra and many other women of Las Placitas, New Mexico, participated in village labors and made crucial efforts for its livelihood: "The people who built Las Placitas made their village of the material they found on the ground and they put the material together with their own hands. Likewise all the food they ate and the clothing that they wore were the results of their own efforts, and they possessed nothing aside from the fruits of their own labors."<sup>1</sup> Weaving was one of Petra's greatest efforts, for she was an "expert weaver of wool."<sup>2</sup> She was known for her weaving skills throughout the village and supported her family with commodities earned through trade. Petra wove on her homemade treadle loom every day, passing her weaving knowledge and traditions to other village women and to her own family.<sup>3</sup> Her skills were reflected in her art, while also showing purpose. Petra clothed her entire family using her exceptional weaving skills. But, one might ask, what influenced Señora Petra's weaving techniques? When did weaving traditions begin and who introduced the art of weaving to villages like Las Placitas?

Dating back as early as the seventeenth century, the craft of weaving has been recorded as a pastime, art form, and necessity of everyday life for women of the Pueblo and Navajo Indian peoples of New Mexico. Throughout this time, traditions and techniques of weaving took several different forms and changed both design and process. Spanish life in New Mexico influenced the indigenous cultures in the region. The Spaniards introduced European weaving techniques in the late 1630s, manipulating the progression of this native art form in New Mexico. As time passed, this Spanish influence also shaped the development of Hispano weaving techniques. The introduction of Spanish technique, equipment, and resources sparked changes in weaving, mimicking Spanish style and form while employing the neighboring indigenous visual art forms. A new style emerged, referred to as Chimayó weaving and named for its village of origin. The village subsequently became the "center of Hispanic weaving," and has remained so for the last two hundred years.<sup>4</sup> Similar to Navajo weavers, Chimayó women, such as Señora Petra, have been crucial participants in the weaving process since Chimayó's establishment. The development of Chimayó weaving can be traced back centuries, labeled as the culmination of multiple cultures and time periods, progressing independently into a desirable hybrid craft that is still practiced and respected in the twenty-first century.

In the late sixteenth century, led by the infamous Don Juan de Oñate, the Spanish began their journey to the territory known today as New Mexico.<sup>5</sup> These settlers searched for land and the labor of the Pueblo Indians. The Spaniards who came north from what is now Mexico brought with them European treasures that would influence the lives of those men and women living in the territory of New Mexico. Upon arrival, the Spaniards formed a settlement in San

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<sup>1</sup> Tey Diana Rebolledo and María Teresa Márquez, eds., *Women's Tales from the New Mexico WPA* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2000), 332.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 332.

<sup>3</sup> European-influenced loom that the Spaniards brought to New Mexico.

<sup>4</sup> Helen R. Lucero and Suzanne Baizerman, *Chimayó Weaving: The Transformation of a Tradition* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>5</sup> The Spanish king, Phillip II, sent Oñate to take possession of New Mexican territory in 1595.



Juan in 1598, but the colony was abandoned shortly after, resulting in the settlement of Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1607. As the Spanish settled Santa Fe, it "quickly stepped into the modernity of the 17<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>6</sup> The Spaniards enslaved many native peoples in the region because of the settlers' desire for labor to support their industrial, agricultural, and social needs. The Spanish and Pueblo Indians became linked by the repartimiento system. In this



Zuni Pueblo woman weaving a belt on upright loom. (B.A.E. report, 1882.)

system, the Indian population paid tribute to the Spanish landlords in exchange for the Spaniards' protection. These payments, which were often made with woven textiles and clothing, began the legacy of Chimayó weaving as it is known today. The Classic Period, dating from 1598 through the 1870s, began with the arrival of the Spaniards in the territory of New Mexico, combining the weaving techniques of the natives and the Spanish settlers.<sup>7</sup> The Pueblo Indians developed a unique weaving style for religious ceremonies.<sup>8</sup> The loom, or *telar*, that the Pueblos used was very straight-forward in form and function. The Indians constructed the looms upright, with fixed tension made possible by a simple, single warp. The warp created "the longitudinal threads of a textile" that formed openings into which thread was inserted.<sup>9</sup> The weavers fastened the warp at each end and pulled it taut to create the desired rigidity. They often tied one end to a central beam in a room or to a nearby tree. The opposite end fastened onto a smaller stick often held in the weaver's lap, or attached to a belt or garment the weaver was wearing. The native peoples used this ancient weaving technique to make garments and textiles as payment to the Spaniards.

Weaving was not only a Pueblo Indian skill. Europeans wove as well. On their ships, the Spaniards brought the blueprints for the European treadle loom, one of the most magnificent textile devices ever constructed. The Spaniards introduced the treadle loom to the Pueblo Indians shortly after their arrival. With the help of the native peoples, the Spanish constructed these looms and procured Pueblo Indian labor. Not only were the Indians expected to weave on their own looms for the Spaniards, but the Spanish also forced them to weave on treadle looms. The colonists exploited the Indians in order to supply Spanish shops with textiles. The treadle loom was more complicated and bulkier than the upright, fixed-tension loom, but it did have weaving advantages. It allowed the weaver to reach further on the loom, making the standing position less stressful on the weaver's body.

The treadle loom itself is a piece of artwork, demonstrating craftsmanship and quality design. According to Lucero and Baizerman, "the (treadle) loom is a device for holding warp threads under tension in order to interlace weft threads."<sup>10</sup> A treadle loom has two beams, the cloth beam and the warp beam, and the actual warp is stretched taut and held in between the two. The cloth beam holds the fabric once woven, while the warp beam holds the unwoven warp itself. With a technique called "winding the warp," the weaver measures the

<sup>6</sup> Andrew K. Gregg, *New Mexico in the Nineteenth Century: A Pictorial History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), p 2.

<sup>7</sup> For the dating system for Hispano weaving, see Lucero and Baizerman, *Chimayó Weaving*, x.

<sup>8</sup> Warren Honaberger, "The Threads of Culture," *Santa Fe New Mexican* 9 Sept. 2002, C1.

<sup>9</sup> Lucero and Baizerman, *Chimayó Weaving*, 210.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.







weaving, the Pueblo, the Spanish, and the Navajo: "Chimayó weaving [became] a unique synthesis—a distinct, regional weaving tradition in the New World."<sup>13</sup>

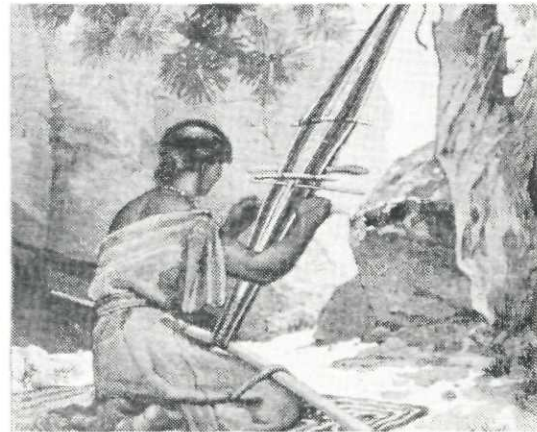
The Navajo Indians learned weaving techniques from the Pueblo Indians, mimicking the use of the upright, fixed-tension loom. The Navajo adopted the craft in the seventeenth century, and eventually their weaving techniques became considered exclusively as a Navajo craft. They adopted the techniques and made them their own.

The Navajo rapidly excelled at weaving and became known as the most skilled weavers in the Southwest. They often obtained their weaving materials from wool stolen from the Spaniards' sheep. Later, Navajo weaving became more desirable than Spanish or Pueblo woven textiles.

The Late Classic Period, at the turn of the nineteenth century, brought about the decline of Pueblo and Navajo weaving due to an increased demand for commercial weaving. Spanish techniques of weaving became more popular because, with the Spanish treadle loom, weavers produced weaves more rapidly. Due to the commercial appeal of Spanish woolen textiles, the sheep industry expanded. As the need for wool grew in demand, the breeding of Churro sheep also increased. The Spanish managed to create quite a lucrative trade.

At the same time, the *hispano* population of New Mexico popularized *hispano* weaving styles.

Their weaving reflected their culture and "the families' tie to heritage and ethnicity...self-reliance, pride, self-sufficiency, versatility, and skill."<sup>14</sup> According to Lucero and Baizerman, the *hispano* population grew by an unexpected 86 percent by the 1850s. As the population grew, so did the interest in weaving and textile design. Unlike the Pueblo Indians, *hispano* weavers "wove textiles for clothes, for warmth, and for utilitarian use."<sup>15</sup> *Hispano* weaving did not reflect religious or ceremonial purposes in the same way that Pueblo weaving did, but it was recognized as a functional and viable art medium and form. This growth prompted the *hispano* weaving trade. *Hispanos* proved to be organized and successful art dealers, often producing and



Navajo woman weaving a belt on upright, fix-tension loom. (B.A.E. report, 1881-2.)

Chimayó woman using drop spindle, 1910.  
(Lucero and Baizerman, p. 170.)



<sup>13</sup> Lucero and Baizerman, *Chimayó Weaving*, 183.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>15</sup> Honabarger, "The Threads of Culture," C1.



selling Navajo-influenced textiles and authentic Navajo blankets. They also created their own weaving communities in family units and as commercial weavers. In these communities, the women were integral players, both processing the wool and weaving garments and other textiles. They refined their weaving skills in these communities, and continuously educated each other in the art for decades to come.

*Hispano* women, similar to Pueblo Indian women, prepared wool from yarn preparation to spinning. The process began with sheep shearing, most likely by a man. After the men sheared wool fibers, the women began preparing the wool. The first step in preparation was to comb the wool. By combing the woolen fibers between two large combs, the fibers became aligned on a parallel plane. After alignment, the fibers were drawn and spun with the help of a drop spindle. This spindle is "a tool used for spinning yarn, consisting of a weighted stick or rod."<sup>16</sup> The spinning action of the spindle twists the wool fibers into yarn, collecting it on a spool. After being wrapped around the spool, the yarn is ready to be used. This method dates back to the early Pueblo Indians and was used in Spanish homes by the native Pueblo slaves. Like the Pueblo Indians, *hispanos* used these methods to process their wool.

During the Classical Period, colored yarn was limited to natural tints and shades, mimicking the colors of the sheep themselves. Browns, blacks, and whites were most easily attainable. Natural dyes were also used when available: indigo, a blue dye derived from shrubs and herbs from the pea family, and cochineal, a red dye made of the dried and milled bodies of female cochineal insects. Other dyes came from various indigenous plants in the area. Later, commercial products started to replace handspun and naturally dyed yarns.

The Transitional Period, from 1870 to 1920, introduced commercial textile products from England and companies in larger commercial textile regions, such as Pennsylvania. England offered chemically produced dyes for tinting spun wool as early as the year 1856, and the market for them grew shortly afterwards. These dyes offered the *hispanos* and the Navajos more diversity in their woven materials. They provided more colors in each piece, saved weavers valuable time, and allowed for the reproduction of wool colors. By the 1880s, the use of these synthetic dyes spread throughout the Southwest. These dyes exuded magnificent colors, including lavenders, pinks, blues, reds, and oranges that were otherwise unattainable with most natural dyes. In addition to dyes, a Pennsylvania company in Germantown introduced commercial yarns, pre-dyed and ready to use. These yarns and dyes also caught the interest of *hispano* and Navajo weavers, and the demand soon began to grow in New Mexico.

The framework of woven materials also changed during the Transitional Period. Cotton warps replaced handspun yarn warps. Although neither Navajos nor *hispanos* used cotton warps exclusively, they supplemented many woven textiles, due to their strength and pliability.

Despite the introduction of new and advanced weaving materials, commercial goods began to replace the hard work and efforts of *hispano* and Navajo weavers. The changes during this period resulted in another decline in hand-woven textiles. Fortunately, hope was restored when entrepreneurs such as Jake Gold began to market woven textiles to tourists in the Southwest.<sup>17</sup> The market for these goods took off, and hand-made woven materials found a new niche.

As this transition occurred, the practice of weaving increased because of its artistic value. *Hispano* families, unaware of the value of their products, often sold Chimayó blankets for money to local merchants. In turn, these textiles soon became collectors' items of increasing value by

<sup>16</sup> Lucero and Baizerman, *Chimayó Weaving*, 208.

<sup>17</sup> Gold was a collector of Indian goods and antiques, and a specialist in curios.



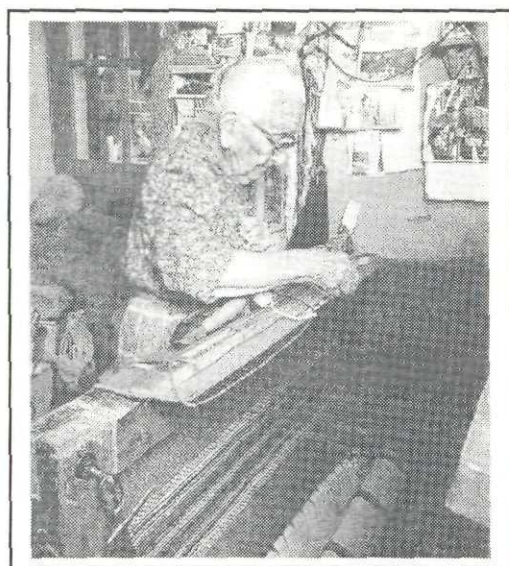
the early 1900s. Within the next twenty years, the market for hand-made *hispano* textiles reached its peak, becoming important commodities in the tourist trade.

For decades to come, the *hispano* population demanded respect from the art world. During the Modern Period, beginning in the 1920s, there was a heightened emphasis on the aesthetic value of the art form. The trade expanded because of high demand, and *hispano* weavers worked under contract for trade dealers. This ensured the desired product for the dealers themselves and kept up the competition between trade shops.

The Modern Period also saw an increase in women weavers. For hundreds of years, men had been the visible artists behind weaving. Navajo and Pueblo women commonly wove garments and goods for their families. Unfortunately, the men were the only members allowed to weave for trade and, therefore, pushed *hispano* women out of the scene. According to Lucero and Baizerman, "even though women were involved with production weaving behind the scenes, it was a picture of a male weaving industry that was portrayed by Anglo(s)."<sup>18</sup> Women did most of the work in preparing the materials, but they rarely received any credit. In this era, women weavers began emerging into the spotlight. In the past, women had been limited to weaving in the home, making clothing and goods for the family. Slowly, women began to put their faces on production weaving.

As a native of New Mexico, born in 1898, Agueda Martínez became an expert weaver. At age ten, she began weaving under the instruction of an elderly neighbor, and she refined her skills during her marriage to a well-known Chimayó weaver, Eusebio Martínez. This marriage combined centuries of weaving knowledge and technique. Agueda Salazar Martínez's history is linked to the Navajos by her great-grandfather, a Navajo weaver raised by a Spanish family. Eusebio Martínez descends from generations of weavers from the Chimayó region. Together they developed Agueda's weaving skills, and today she is known as the "matriarch of Hispanic weaving."<sup>19</sup> Her weaving skills made her known worldwide, and supported her financially and motivationally for decades. To continue the passage of Chimayó weaving skills, she taught each of her daughters and granddaughters the important skill and art of weaving. Agueda Martínez also continued her weaving legacy through a 1977 weaving documentary, entitled *Agueda Martínez, Our People, Our Country*. This video captures the art of weaving and the inspiration

Agueda Martínez at her loom.  
(Lucero and Baizerman, p 174.)



<sup>18</sup> Lucero and Baizerman, *Chimayó Weaving*, 97.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.



behind Agueda's work. The video also increased the demand for her work, and today many museums display her work in their permanent collections. Along with Agueda Martínez, many other women made their mark in weaving: Juanita Jaramillo Lavadie, Teresa Archuleta Sagel, and Irene López, to name a few.

As time passed, women continued to increase their visibility in the weaving market. Lucero and Baizerman concluded that by 1983, 76 percent of *hispano* weavers in several New Mexico counties were women.<sup>20</sup> Women also began to incorporate weaving into their everyday lives as the Navajo women had centuries before. These women created weaving communities, and taught each other the craft. Oftentimes, apprentice relationships formed between family members or community members to learn the trade. Today these types of relationships are still visible in New Mexican communities.

Tierra Wools, located in the Chama River Valley, is a weaving cooperative in New Mexico that understands the importance of community. The company, started in 1982, teaches *hispano* weaving techniques, including dyeing, spinning, weaving, and production marketing.<sup>21</sup> Tierra Wools employs over twenty-three families from the community and continuously supports local ranchers, keeping wool in demand. This company practices "centuries-old wool-growing and weaving traditions," turning these traditions into "money-making ventures."<sup>22</sup> Their efforts at weaving revival also include sheep breeding, reintroducing natural dyes, and reviving dying weaving art forms.

The Rag Rug Revival is another attempt at the restoration of historical weaving techniques. The revival began in Santa Fe in 1988, attracting women that could not afford to purchase expensive commercial wools and allowing them to create their own techniques.<sup>23</sup> The initial development of the *hispano* rag rug was in the late nineteenth century. Although this craft was not *hispano* in origin, the *hispano* weavers used the rags as yarn, unlike any other culture of rag rug weavers. Instead of introducing the rags directly in the weft, the *hispanos* first spun the rags, like yarn, producing a tighter weave. The Rag Rug Revival celebrates this century-old craft, emphasizing the importance of the community and promoting the cultural bond that the craft offers. Not only does this festival celebrate its own *hispano* culture, but it also encourages women from all cultures to get involved and learn about its history and weaving techniques.

Over the last two centuries, weaving has made great strides and undergone many transformations. Despite the progression of products, materials, and techniques, many still employ original weaving techniques. Companies such as Tierra Wools and festivals, including the Rag Rug Revival, are beginning to influence the use of older, traditional weaving styles. Natural, homespun yarns and pure, organic dyes once again have become desirable. Also, a historical and cultural community bond has reemerged through weaving.

Chimayó weaving developed as a result of multicultural exchanges. The Pueblo Indians, the Navajos, and the Spaniards each contributed to the development of the process, from shearing to weaving. Each culture introduced native and learned techniques, affecting the methods of the others. Chimayó weaving is an amazing art form that developed over the centuries, transforming the traditions of New Mexican culture, heritage, and ethnicity.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>21</sup> Goad, "Woman Weaves Business," D1.

<sup>22</sup> Nancy Plevin, "Time Looms Heavy," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 9 July 1995, A1.

<sup>23</sup> Tracy Dingmann, "Rags Form Fabric of Tiny Community of Weavers," *Albuquerque Journal*, 6 July 2000, F4.



## Chicanas and Latinas in Math and Science Fields

Claire Boylan

By examining the departments of mathematics at the Big Ten universities, one can see that there are very few Chicana and Latina professors on the faculties of university mathematics departments. Actually, of the 1,002 professors of mathematics across these schools, only three have Spanish surnames. One may wonder why the involvement of Chicanas and Latinas in mathematics and other science-related fields is so low. Taking a closer look at the programs, one can see that many factors contribute to this issue. Chicanas and Latinas face many roadblocks in their pursuit of careers in mathematics or science. These include cultural barriers for women wanting to achieve an education, gender-related issues with mathematics, and general mathematical barriers. Because the films *Stand and Deliver*, *Real Women Have Curves*, and *Mi Vida Loca* are based on true stories, the movies illustrate real difficulties for Chicanas and Latinas in their endeavor for success in the field of mathematics or education in general.

In the film *Stand and Deliver*, there are many vivid examples of cultural barriers that young Chicanas and Latinas face in their pursuit of education in general and advanced mathematics in particular. *Stand and Deliver* was produced in 1988. It depicts a true story of an inspiring and motivating teacher, Jaime Escalante, who successfully taught Advanced Placement Calculus at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles. The film begins with Escalante entering Garfield High on the first day of school, enthusiastic about his first teaching assignment. However, when Escalante arrives, he is surprised to find that he will be teaching mathematics instead of computer courses, since the school had run out of funding for the computer program. This is just the beginning of his spiraling experience. After Escalante discovers that his students lack basic math skills, he dedicates himself to developing a program for these students to learn and excel in upper-level mathematics. After meeting with the faculty, Escalante decides to teach everything from trigonometry to calculus during an intense school year and summer instruction.

Several young Chicanas and Latinas in this particular math class decide that they too want to work hard to eventually take the AP Calculus test to receive college credit. Unfortunately, three of these young women struggle with familial and cultural obstacles. One young woman named Ana is shy but quite dedicated to doing her best in Escalante's math class. She hopes to go to medical school. However, at the end of class one day, Ana tells Escalante that it is her last day. Her father does not see the value of her education and wants her to help with the family restaurant. Escalante feels awful that his student is forced to give up her education and her opportunity to go to college, so he and his wife go to Ana's family's restaurant for dinner. There, he has a chance to speak with Ana's father. Escalante tells him that Ana can be the first person in her family to graduate from high school and go to college. Ana's father sharply disagrees and explains to Escalante that Ana will work for the family business like her mother, sisters, and brother. Furthermore, he predicts that if Ana went to college, she would get pregnant and not finish. The two men argue, and the scene closes with Escalante explaining that if Ana got the opportunity to go to college, she could return home with knowledge of how to



improve the family business. In this instance, Ana is forced to confront her father and the traditions of her family and culture in hopes of changing his opinion about her aspirations for a higher education.

Claudia, another young woman in Escalante's math class, also faces cultural barriers when describing to her mother her calculus class and the extra time she will need to commit to the class after school and on Saturdays. Calculus excites Claudia, but her mother responds to her proposal by saying, "I hope this is not an excuse to stay out all hours. Boys don't like it if you're too smart." Then Claudia says, "Mom, I'm doing this so I don't have to depend on some guy the rest of my life."<sup>1</sup> Similar to Ana's situation, Claudia has a difficult time making her mother understand the importance of this math class and of her education in general. Claudia also has to confront a cultural barrier to show that a woman can be smart and still be liked.

Finally, one more young woman who is taking Escalante's class struggles with cultural and familial barriers in a different manner. This woman has difficulty studying and doing the homework for Escalante's class due to her role in her family. There is a scene in the film where this young woman is making a lunch for her father, who is going to work a graveyard shift. She packs his lunch, sees him off, puts several younger siblings to bed, and finally sits down to start her math homework. At this moment her mother arrives home from a long day of work. Her mother lies down on the couch to try to relax and asks her to turn off the light. This young woman obeys her mother, but in their small house she has nowhere else to study. She, too, is forced to overcome her familial situation in order to achieve success in her math class.

Similar to the three women mentioned above, in the film *Real Women Have Curves*, the central character, Ana, faces certain cultural and familial barriers in her pursuit of a college education.<sup>2</sup> *Real Women Have Curves* centers on a young Chicana from Los Angeles. After graduating from high school in Beverly Hills, she desperately would like to attend college; however, this is definitely not the traditional path for women in her family. Following her high school graduation, her mother decides that Ana will work at her sister's dressmaking factory, where her mother also works. Ana has no say in this decision. In the film, a teacher from Ana's high school comes to their home to encourage Ana's parents to allow her to apply for college. Ana's mother explains that Ana does not need to go to college to learn because she will teach Ana everything Ana needs to know. Ana is devastated but eventually turns in an application for Columbia University to her teacher without her parents' permission. While working at the dressmaking factory, Ana tells her female co-workers that women should have thoughts and ideas of their own. The older and traditional women smile and roll their eyes at this comment, which seems incorrect to them. Towards the end of the film, Ana finds out that she has been accepted to Columbia University. Her teacher returns once more to her home and tries to reason with her parents. Her father does not say much, but her mother makes Ana feel like she is breaking up the family. Ana would have to leave Los Angeles and go across the country to New York, which makes her mother very upset. Her mother also



<sup>1</sup> *Stand and Deliver*, edited by Ramón Menéndez and written by Ramón Menéndez and Tomas Musca, 104 min., Warner Studios, 1988, Videocassette.

<sup>2</sup> *Real Women Have Curves*, directed by Patricia Cardoso, 86 min., HBO Home Video, 2002, DVD.



tries to make her feel guilty for going away to school by bringing up her elderly grandfather who she would be leaving behind, maybe never to see again. Ana is torn between her love for and loyalty to her family and her burning desire for higher education. She does not know what to do. Eventually, she talks with her father and grandfather, who both give her their blessing and best wishes as she embarks on her college career. However, as she leaves for the airport, she tries to say goodbye to her mother and receive her blessing, but that does not happen. Her father and grandfather drive her to the airport and see her off to her new life. This film is quite moving because Ana is forced to confront the traditional roles of women in her culture. After achieving academic success in high school, she knows she is capable of more. The most difficult part for her is convincing her family of the importance of education.

A third film, *Mi Vida Loca*, a story about a group of young Chicanas and Chicanos living in Echo Park, California, shows the day-to-day difficulties and perils of surviving in a gang.<sup>3</sup> It does not appear that any of the main characters have "honest" jobs; a few of them are drug dealers. Also, none of them go to or have completed high school, and two of the central characters, Sad Girl and Mousy, are single mothers. These two young women were best friends until they both ended up with children from the same father. The two mothers do not work or go to school. They completely depend on their children's father to support them. He happens to be a drug dealer who gets shot early in the film.



These various aspects of the gang make their lives quite complicated, and they have very little knowledge of ways to better their situation. Later in the film, another Chicana in the gang is released from prison. She returns to the gang with a somewhat new perspective. She tells the other girls, who think she is crazy, that while she was serving time, she learned that she needs to think of the future. She also tells her friends that computers are the key to that future. When she returns home, she starts looking through the paper for a job. She knows that she can better her and her daughter's future after time in prison. When she rekindles an old romance, she tells the man that she does not want to depend on anybody but herself. She leaves his house and wants to start a life for herself where she will support her daughter.

The Chicanas and Latinas in these three films live in urban areas of California. However, they are not the only ones facing cultural barriers to education. The lifestyle of immigrant farm workers in California presents a similar barrier. In *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939*, historian Camille Guerin-Gonzales writes, "While Mexican immigrants often turned to the education of their children as a way to improve their position in American society, this proved especially difficult."<sup>4</sup> She describes how, while many parents "hoped that their children would be able to move out of agriculture work through education, necessity forced families to enlist the aid of their children during the school year." She cites an example of a young boy who picked fruit in southern California and went to junior high school during the winter. He did not think he would go to high school because, "as he

<sup>3</sup> *Mi Vida Loca*, directed by Allison Anders, 96 min., HBO Studios, 1993, DVD.

<sup>4</sup> Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 69.



told an interviewer, 'it costs too much money and anyway I have to help my father.' Farm-worker families required the labor of all able members to survive."<sup>5</sup> This obligation to contribute to the family income surely influences the importance placed on education for Chicanas and Latinas of subsequent generations. Just as the girls in the films were needed in the family restaurant and dressmaking shop, the rural Chicano and Latino children are needed to work with their families in agriculture. Their dreams of an education are often lost to culture and family.

Statistics from the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Bureau of the Census verify the anecdotes from the three films and the above example. It is important to note is that when the U.S. Department of Commerce conducts the census, they do not separate Chicanos and Latinos. Instead they group all Chicanos, Latinos, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and such under one category, Hispanic. According to the statistics regarding the educational attainment of Hispanic women in the United States from the year 1970 to the year 2002, the percentage of high school graduates increased, though not by a large percentage. Difficult cultural and familial barriers found in the films discussed above could explain these findings.<sup>6</sup> The percentage of Hispanic women who have graduated from high school or gone on to more schooling has increased from 34.2 percent in 1970 to 57.9 percent in 2002. Additionally, the percentage of Hispanic women who have graduated from college has increased, but not by a large amount. Only 4.3 percent of all Hispanic women in the United States graduated from college in 1970, and 11.2 percent of all Hispanic women graduated from college by 2002.

In each of the three films, the young women depicted were from various parts of California. The most recent census, in the year 2000, collected statistics that categorize California's Hispanic women's level of educational attainment.<sup>7</sup> Of Hispanic women, 28.9 percent completed less than a ninth grade education, and 21.3 percent finished their education somewhere between ninth and twelfth grade. Also, 21.2 percent graduated from high school, and 17.8 percent of Hispanic women attended some college, but did not obtain a degree. Only 4.1 percent went on to complete an associate's degree, while 4.6 percent of Hispanic women obtained a bachelor's degree. Finally, only 2.1 percent of Hispanic women in California received a graduate or professional degree in the year 2000. These statistics strengthen the stories of those young women who struggled against different obstacles in their quest for an education. Ana in *Real Women Have Curves* represents one of the 21.2 percent who graduated from high school in California. She also dreamed of being one of the few to get a college degree. One can see that with such a low percentage of Hispanic women receiving college degrees, Ana, and others like her, struggled and paved the way for Chicanas and Latinas aspiring for a higher education.

As they pursue higher education in math and science, Chicanas and Latinas face low expectations from virtually everyone involved in their education, often their teachers and school administrators. These low expectations go hand-in-hand with poor schools

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>6</sup> United States Department of Commerce, *U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2003* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> "Counting California: Data Extraction Results: Sex By Age By Educational Attainment For the Population 18 Years and Over," [http://countingcalifornia.cdlib.org/sas-bin/broker?\\_program=prd.calcube.sas&study=sf4200&varMtx=Pct65Hsf4200&dtbl=PCT65H&geo=state](http://countingcalifornia.cdlib.org/sas-bin/broker?_program=prd.calcube.sas&study=sf4200&varMtx=Pct65Hsf4200&dtbl=PCT65H&geo=state).

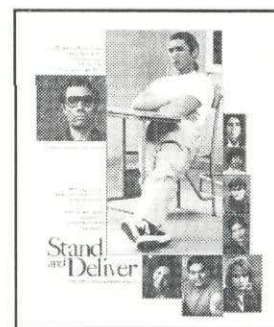


for Chicanas and Latinas. It appears that if experts doubt student capabilities, many times they provide poor or untrained teachers and inferior or outdated equipment.

The film *Stand and Deliver* includes many examples of this pessimistic attitude. During a faculty meeting at Garfield High School, teachers and administrators discuss the school's low test scores. Raquel Ortega, the chairwoman of the math department, says, "I'm the last person to say that this math department couldn't improve, but if you want high test scores, start by changing the economic level of this community...You can't teach logarithms to illiterates. Look, these kids come to us with barely a seventh grade education. There isn't a teacher in the room who isn't doing everything he possibly can."<sup>8</sup> Ortega, who herself may be Chicana or Latina, implies that the low economic level of the students is the main reason for the low test scores of the school, and that there is nothing they as teachers can do to improve the students' socioeconomic situations. Later in the film, Jaime Escalante tells the principal and the other teachers at another staff meeting that he wants to teach calculus the following year. The principal laughs and says, "Boy, that's a jump." His statement is quickly followed by Ortega rolling her eyes and saying, "That's ridiculous! They haven't even had trig or math analysis. Our kids can't handle calculus! We don't even have the books!"<sup>9</sup> Once again, Ortega and the principal are unwilling to even consider the possibility that their students, mainly Chicanos and Latinos, could learn calculus or excel in mathematics. To the average viewer, these two figures on the staff represent the norm with respect to the educational experiences of Chicanas and Latinas.

*Stand and Deliver* also expands the theme that low expectations excuse low-quality schools. Many teachers at Garfield High School are teaching a subject they are not qualified to teach. One mathematics teacher becomes a friend of Jaime Escalante. In the beginning of the film, when Escalante asks the teacher what he was hired to teach, the teacher answers physical education and health. However, due to funding and lack of qualified teachers, this man teaches mathematics. He jokes with Escalante about how he is often quite nervous because he does not know the material he needs to teach. The students in the math classes taught by this man, whose specialty is physical education, are at a clear disadvantage and do not receive the education that they deserve in attending a public high school in the United States. This example is just one of many cases of faculty juggled around in order to fill teacher vacancies at Garfield High School. Another, more important, example occurs in Escalante's math class. A week before the AP Calculus examination, Escalante excuses himself while teaching a night class, goes into the hall, and collapses from a heart attack. Escalante goes to the hospital for several days, and the school needs to find a substitute teacher for his AP Calculus class. The music teacher is the only teacher available to substitute for Escalante. He seems quite uncomfortable with the idea, most likely because he is not qualified or prepared to teach calculus.

Another example that sheds light on this issue from the film *Stand and Deliver* occurs when Jaime Escalante tries to convince the faculty members that the students at Garfield High School can learn and excel in upper-level subjects. At



<sup>8</sup> *Stand and Deliver*, 1988.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



the end of one meeting, Escalante says, "Students will rise to the level of expectations." This statement is in contrast with the attitude of the majority at the meeting. Escalante, unlike the others, believes that these students can achieve success. Later in class, Escalante explains this attitude to his students when he says, "You already have two strikes against you. There are some people in this world who will assume you know less than you do because of your name and your complexion, but math is the great equalizer."<sup>10</sup> Escalante, unlike Ortega, has faith that if his students work hard, they can do anything that anybody else can do.

Toward the end of the film, Ortega again displays her reservations about the potential achievement of the students at Garfield High School. After taking the Advanced Placement Calculus examination, all of Escalante's students passed, but all had similar or the same errors. These similarities caused the Educational Testing Service to suspect cheating by the students. When Escalante asks Ortega if she thought the students had cheated, she replies by accusing Escalante of putting the kids under a lot of pressure, saying they would do anything to please him. She does not directly answer his question, but she probably believes that they cheated. Her response signals the viewer that she does not have confidence that the students all could have passed the examination. Escalante is quite frustrated that the scores of his students are being investigated, so he decides to confront the agents from the Educational Testing Service to talk about the situation. Escalante says to the two agents, "Those scores would have never been questioned if my students didn't have Spanish surnames and come from barrio schools."<sup>11</sup> When the agents do not respond, Escalante storms out of the room. He feels that, once again, his students have been slighted solely because they are Chicano or Latino.

Similar to the attitudes of teachers and administrators, other prominent figures in society have low expectations for Chicanas and Latinas. A striking instance of this sentiment occurred after the making of the film *Stand and Deliver*, when the first President George Bush visited Garfield High School. After the overwhelming success of Escalante's students and the continuing success of other students, the school's academic achievement level increased and, on average, it began to send 70 percent of its mainly Chicano and Latino students to college. An apparently oblivious President Bush commented, "You don't have to go to college to be a success... We need the people who run the offices, the people who do the hard physical work of our society."<sup>12</sup> By this quick statement, President Bush revealed his attitude toward Chicanos and Latinos. He demonstrated where he felt Chicanos and Latinos are valued in society, which for him was clearly not in an academic realm. This incident speaks for itself. When your president projects low expectations in the face of your high achievement, continuing to strive for excellence is difficult.

In addition to the low expectations problem and other cultural barriers for Chicanas and Latinas, the simple fact that they are women is another central obstacle in the world of hard sciences. In the last thirty years, there have been many studies and publications discussing the gender gap for women entering math and science fields. Instead of focusing on biology, which many researchers used to think caused the male-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "Ronald Reagan - The Bonzo Years, 1988," <http://www.quickchange.com/Reagan/1988.html>.



female differences in math and science, researchers are now focusing on the child's social environment and how it may influence math and science achievement. According to the National Network for Child Care, "Very early on, boys are given the chance to tinker with toys or objects (for example, building blocks, Legos, racing cars, and simple machines) that involve many of the principles inherent in math and science. Girls often lack these experiences, so they enter math and science classrooms feeling insecure about their abilities. Girls then begin to believe they cannot do math and science as well as boys." In addition to the relationship between children's toys and confidence, the first talking Barbie exclaimed, "Math class is tough!"<sup>13</sup> For many young girls who play with Barbie, or even hear Barbie say that phrase, the idea that women are not able to do mathematics could be reinforced, contributing to young girls' lack of confidence in math- and science-related classes. Barbie's thoughts reflect cultural stereotypes about gender and education.

Additionally, the role of the teachers, the parents and the textbooks is an important contributing factor. Many teachers may be unaware of their own biases, but studies show that overall, teachers favor boys over girls. According to Myra Sadker, professor of education at the American University, "When it comes to math and science, you see some of the worst problems. Teachers hold very different expectations for girls and boys in the classroom. Boys are more central in the classroom. They receive more teacher attention and more questions, and when a boy makes a mistake, the teacher will say, 'Try harder; I know you can get it right!' Girls simply don't get that kind of encouragement."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, studies indicate that parents "are willing to let their daughters drop out of math class when the going gets tough. With sons, however, the same parents encourage persistence."<sup>15</sup> According to Dr. Catherine Krupnick of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, "Most math textbooks are written as if the female sex simply does not exist," which could also unknowingly contribute to the lack of confidence or interest in mathematics by women.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately for Chicanas and Latinas, these subtle cues could play an influential role in their interest, confidence, and pursuit of a math- or science-related field.

In order to close this gender gap in the hard sciences, educators are trying "to make math and science accessible, equitable and exciting to all students."<sup>17</sup> In addition, parents need to encourage and promote each child's interest in mathematics and science. Though improvements in education have been made to aid females in mathematics, "in 1995, a mere 17 percent of engineering master's degrees and only 31 percent of all science and engineering degrees were awarded to women."<sup>18</sup> Another interesting related statistic is that "while women make up 46 percent of the overall labor force, women are only 16 percent of the science and engineering workforce." Additionally, "women

<sup>13</sup> National Network for Child Care, "Math, Science, and Girls: Can We Close the Gender Gap?," [http://www.nncc.org/Curriculum/sac52\\_math.science.girls.html](http://www.nncc.org/Curriculum/sac52_math.science.girls.html).

<sup>14</sup> *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*, produced/directed by the American Association of University Women, 18 min., American Association of University Women, 1991, Videocassette.

<sup>15</sup> National Network for Child Care, "Math, Science, and Girls."

<sup>16</sup> *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*.

<sup>17</sup> National Network for Child Care, "Math, Science, and Girls."

<sup>18</sup> NAESP, "Closing the Gap for Girls in Math-Related Careers," <http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contented=474&action=print>.



receive over half of all bachelor's degrees awarded, but only one-fourth of those are in natural science and engineering."<sup>19</sup>

Another factor that contributes to the underrepresentation of Chicanas and Latinas in math and science fields is the lack of Chicano/a and Latino/a role models in those fields. Even though mathematics has been a male-dominated field, throughout history there have been young women who have overcome this gender barrier and studied mathematics. Coincidentally, the majority of these women who are remembered for paving the way for other female mathematicians had the presence of a math-related role model in their lives to follow. Several examples might best illustrate this point.

Hypatia, born in 370, is the first well-known female mathematician. Hypatia was the daughter of Theon, who was the director of the University of Alexandria and a mathematician. Her father was a great influence in Hypatia's pursuit and focus of her education. Theon, who directed her studies, wanted Hypatia to be the "perfect human being."<sup>20</sup> After finishing her education, she was asked to teach at the university where her father was the director. She taught geometry, astronomy, and algebra. Unlike Ana from the film *Stand and Deliver*, whose father did not initially see the value of her education, wanting her to drop out of school and work at the family restaurant, Hypatia's father felt that education was of utmost importance.

Maria Agnesi (1718-1799) was born into a wealthy family in Italy. Similar to Hypatia, Maria's father was a mathematician and a professor at the University of Bologna. Her parents were quite encouraging, and she was able to discuss mathematics and philosophy with intellectuals from around the world by the time she was an adolescent. Due to the influence of her family, she chose to lead what was seen as a rather non-traditional lifestyle in her pursuit of math analysis.<sup>21</sup>

Caroline Herschel was born in 1750 in Hanover, Germany. She, too, was influenced to study mathematics by her family. While keeping house for her brother William, Caroline began to study accounting and soon became interested in William's research in astronomy. The two began to work together as a team, but when William died, Caroline continued to make contributions in astronomy. She was awarded a Gold Medal of Science on her ninety-sixth birthday by the King of Prussia. Like the young woman from the film *Stand and Deliver*, Caroline Herschel had many obligations to her family, especially to her brother. Even though both women experienced obstacles, Caroline's brother and Escalante's encouragement empowered these two women to excel in mathematics.<sup>22</sup>

In a similar way, Ada Lovelace, born in 1815, also had an interest in pursuing mathematics due to a familial role model. Ada's mother was a mathematician, whose nickname was "the Princess of Parallelograms."<sup>23</sup> Ada was influenced by her mother's friends who were also mathematicians. And even though she never attended a formal school, she became a famous mathematician. Unlike Ana from the film *Real Women*

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Diane Farquhar and Lynn Mary-Rose, *Women Sum It Up* (Christchurch, New Zealand: Hazard Press Limited, 1989), 11-12.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 16-18.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 25-27.



*Have Curves*, who had to battle her familial traditions in order to attend college, Ada had the support of her mother in her pursuit of an education.

A final example is Sofia Kovalevskaya, who was born in 1850 in Moscow.<sup>24</sup> She had a keen interest in mathematics due to an influential role model. Sofia became interested in mathematics by listening to her Uncle Peter talk about the subject. Her father also encouraged her and provided her with tutors for algebra, geometry and calculus. She, too, became an accomplished mathematician.

If Chicanas and Latinas do not have prominent role models in math and science to inspire them, who are the well-known role models, and what makes them intriguing to young Chicanas and Latinas? In what fields do these famous Chicanas and Latinas work? These questions can be readily answered by the article "10 Fierce, Young Latinas Guaranteed to Inspire You" in the March 2004 issue of *Latina* magazine. A few outstanding Latinas mentioned in the article include: Celeste Troche, a Paraguayan golfer and the only Latina rookie on the 2004 Ladies Professional Golf Association tour; Nina Marie Martinez, a "bright new literary talent"; Maria Lya Ramos, an activist leader; Jossie Perez, an opera diva; Maria Antonia Berrios, Cindy Montanez and Diana Reyna, politicians; and Susana Mercedes, a fashion designer.<sup>25</sup> Several of these women attribute the pursuit of their careers to the influence of their family. Josie Perez talks about the influence of her father and his passion for classical music. Because of his encouragement, she began to love opera music at a very young age. Maria Antonia Berrios was also influenced by her father, who in 1982 was the first Latino to be elected to the Illinois state House of Representatives. His success influenced Berrios to enter politics. Similarly, Cindy Montanez's family also inspired her to pursue a career in politics, and they organized her campaign. Today, she is a legislator in the California State Assembly.

Not only do many of these women have familial role models who guided their choice of career, but also many of them come from what one might consider "ordinary" backgrounds, and they hope to improve the lives of future Chicanas and Latinas. These women aspire to be successful but also want to remember who they are and where they came from. Susana Mercedes, a fashion designer, finds her designs in Guatemala, sometimes when shopping with her family. Her work always includes Latin American influences.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, when Diana Reyna describes her politics, she says, "'When I represent my community, I'm not dealing with strangers. I'm dealing with the people I grew up with down the block.'"<sup>27</sup> Since these Chicanas and Latinas are in the spotlight, their pride, bonds to their homelands, and connection to common people make these women excellent role models for young Chicanas and Latinas.

There are different social and cultural reasons why Chicanas and Latinas are not prominent in mathematics and science. Contemporary movies like *Stand and Deliver*, *Real Women Have Curves*, and *Mi Vida Loca* provide strong anecdotal evidence that Chicanas and Latinas have real disadvantages when it comes to these areas. They have a family culture that stresses other measures of success at the expense of formal education.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>25</sup> Carolina Aguilera, "Mujeres on the Verge: 10 Fierce Young Latinas Guaranteed to Inspire You," *Latina* (March 2004): 94-99.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

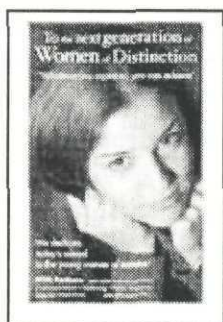
<sup>27</sup> Ibid.




They have cultural barriers that are also socioeconomic. Stereotyped as low-achieving immigrants, they often get stuck in poor schools that match the low expectations the rest of society has of them.

Real, historical examples verify these film anecdotes. A growing number of, but still disproportionately few, Chicanas and Latinas achieve a higher education. In her study of California agriculture, Camille Guerin-Gonzales substantiates these statistics from the historical perspective. She demonstrates the main premise related to the barriers to higher education among Latina/os; that is, from early on until today, the welfare of the family has taken precedence over everything else. Besides ethnic cultural barriers, there are gender cultural barriers as well that specifically extend to mathematics and science.

Nonetheless, Chicanas and Latinas are raising their status in many fields. These fields include the arts, politics, social activism and design. Their achievements have an element common to female mathematicians throughout history—role models, who show possibility, promote value, and excite passion. It is conceivable that at this time and place there may be Chicanas and Latinas being mentored in the field of mathematics. It is interesting to note the example of the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México: the mathematics faculty at this Mexico City school is 28 percent female.<sup>28</sup>




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<sup>28</sup> Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, "Departamento Académico de Matemáticas," <http://matematicas.itam.mx/facultad.html>.



## **Who is Prettier? Studying the Effects of Age, Gender, and Ethnicity on Perceptions of Female Physical Beauty**

**Lindsey Blank**

A woman is walking toward you on the street. Before she says a word to you, she already occupies a specific place in your mind. She is slender. Her small hips move side-to-side in her knee-length black pencil skirt with each step. She has a small, defined waist, and the outline of her breasts can be discerned from the way her blouse angles. As you get closer, you can make out more features. Her auburn hair is tied in a twist style at the back of her slightly long neck, where a few loose strands hang down. Her summer-colored skin is clear, and she has long dark eyebrows that frame her hazel eyes. She has a thin nose that turns slightly upward and pink lips that remind you a little of Steven Tyler's.

Is she beautiful?

Is she white?

Is she intelligent, loose, easygoing, sexy, reserved, undesirable, low-class, stupid, wealthy, aloof, average, or friendly? Is she the maid of a businesswoman, or is she the businesswoman herself? Would your perceptions change if you were a different person viewing her?

The world, and specifically American society, is constantly becoming more mobile and diverse. Views and expectations held by groups of people differ with location and background. Thus each ethnic group has its own ideas of what is beautiful. Of course, it must be said that individual tastes do play a part in what a person might consider attractive; however, it has been proven that individual tastes develop and form in relationship to the norms of the society in which someone is raised. The United States is extremely racially and culturally diverse, and it is arguably the most obsessed with beauty.

Beauty is an abstract, though very important, concept in contemporary U.S. culture. It is all around us, everywhere, every day. The study of beauty is not, for the most part, a traditional subject of scholarship. Because of its relationship to popular culture, beauty is often considered trivial. However, the impact of beauty resonates far beyond music videos and popular culture, as it directly influences how people classify themselves and how others classify them. It can determine how well people do in school, what kind of jobs they apply for, whether or not they are hired, who they befriend, who they trust, how high up they can move on the corporate ladder, their marriage prospects, and much more.

Conscious and subconscious levels of thought play a role in determining which physical features people believe are beautiful. In this essay, I explain the results of a survey in which I polled Latino/as and white Americans to find similarities and differences about what the different groups feel is beautiful. I explore these results and the reasons surrounding each group's choices. In the final section, I discuss the implications of this reasoning.

I designed a survey to aid in my research (Graphed Survey Results available from author). With its results, conclusions can be drawn about the roles that the media, gender-specific experiences, and ethnic background have in shaping conceptions of



physical beauty. The survey is designed for two groups: children between 7 and 8 years of age, and adults 18 and older.

I polled second graders from Cherokee Elementary School in Lake Forest, Illinois, and Ortiz de Dominguez in Cicero, Illinois, on April 5, 2004 (Student/School Profiles available from author). I also polled adults in the Madison area, including students at the University of Wisconsin. Altogether, I used 276 surveys.

Using 14 photographs of young women, I asked participants to rate the women from most beautiful to least beautiful according to their individual opinions. The photographs are all of women that popular culture defines as attractive, photographed at least to the shoulder, so that body type can be ascertained. None of the photographs are of famous or generally recognized women, in order to avoid biases. The women in the pictures can be categorized into four different appearance-based groups that remain unknown to the participants.

Photographs are labeled A-N and arranged in random order on a threefold cardboard presentation board. Group A-D includes Anglo women whom popular culture would consider beautiful. They are thin and have straight, if not blonde, hair and small features. Group E-G includes Latinas who are also thin with straight hair and small features. They are almost indistinguishable from group A-D. The next grouping is that of women who are more noticeably Latina. Women in group H-K have darker hair and eyes and are slightly more voluptuous than those in the previous two groups. Women in group L-N have even darker features, wavy-curly hair, dark eyes, and dark skin tones.

I have calculated results of the survey rankings to show how females, males, adults, children, Latino/as, Caucasians, and combinations of these categories (male Latino children, white adult women, for example) perceive physical beauty.

I made three calculations. For the first, I used choices 1-7 on the surveys and found which women were chosen most by each group. The second calculation used the first five ranked positions on the surveys and tallied which groups of people had discernable preferences for Latinas or White women. In the third calculation, discussed below in the "Women Critics" section, I used the number 14 spot (least attractive) and compared the ethnicity of the person surveyed with the ethnicity of the woman he or she chose.

### **Terminology and Classification**

Labeling the diverse populations originating from Central and South America, as well as parts of the southern and southwestern United States, is a difficult task. The terms "Latino/a" and "Hispanic" are umbrella terms that do not account for class, national origin, or generation. Nevertheless, they are generally accepted. I use these terms and specify further when needed. The term "Latina" refers specifically to women of Latin American descent, while "Latino" refers to a man, and "Latinos" can mean a group of men or both men and women. In this paper, I refer to male Latinos as Latino(s) and female Latinas as Latina(s). When I want to include both men and women, I use the increasingly accepted term Latino/a.

I use the terms Anglo and Euroamerican interchangeably to refer to American people of European descent.



In the graphing of survey results, I use the term "White" to describe women with Anglo features, whether they fit the "White Latina" classification or are Euroamericans with no Hispanic ancestry. When I discuss "Latina preferences," I refer to "Selena Latinas" and "Ethnic Latinas."

### Physical Appearance: Three Latina "Types"

Representations of Latinas in film, television, and magazines provide a narrow vision of Latina body types and physical appearances. In her article, "Resisting Beauty and *Real Women Have Curves*," Figueroa (2003) states that Latina physiques are classified and typically appear in the media in three main ways: the magazine Latina, the negotiated Latina, and the ethnic Latina.

The women mentioned first are Latinas who have physical features generally associated with Anglos. They are thin, and sometimes can have a slightly darker complexion or brown hair, but otherwise are indistinguishable from Euroamericans. They are often the tan version of their Anglo counterparts on the covers of *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, and *Glamour*. *Latina* magazine is one contributor to this image.

In the April 2004 issue of *Latina*, Christina Aguilera appears in an article about losing weight. She is an example of what we will call a "White Latina." Besides her surname, there is nothing about her or her physical appearance that would indicate her *latinidad*. She is of Irish and Ecuadorian descent (MTV Networks 2004). Soledad O'Brian and Paulina Rubio are other examples of White Latinas.



Image 1: Christina Aguilera

Throughout the pages of *Latina* magazine, there are articles about makeup, fashion, celebrities, and cooking, not unlike other magazines targeting women. What sets *Latina* apart is that it caters specifically to the Latina community. *Latina* claims to represent Latinas of all sizes, shapes and colors. However, Figueroa would argue that it really reinforces Anglo cultural norms, especially in reference to beauty:

*Latina* unfortunately entraps and contradicts itself in its attempt to represent and be inclusive of all Latinas as it perpetuates hegemonic thin bodies...While the magazine attempts to retain those ethnic markers and signifiers for authentic representation, it modifies them as exceptions to the mainstream ideal of white beauty, only to reveal that those exceptions can also pass as white (Figueroa 2003).

In essence, *Latina*'s presentation of bright clothing, celebrities of Latin American descent, articles about marrying white men, and exercising away the "pudge" that was celebrated as "*cadera*," or hips, just pages earlier, hides assimilationist tendencies. While it caters to a Latina audience and tries to negotiate between cultures, *Latina* reinforces Anglo beauty standards and thus marginalizes other body types and appearances that are unique to Latinas. In this way, *Latina*'s mission is contradicted by its content.



With the murder of singer Selena Quintanilla Perez in 1995 came a massive outpouring of grief by her fans and unprecedented mass media coverage. The Tejano music star gained popularity, and her record sales skyrocketed. Prior to her death, Selena was virtually unknown to non-Latino/as. English-language media coverage of her murder, however, quickly filled gaps with much-demanded information about this Latina star. She was introduced as an "American star," "Texan through and through," and thus her promotion was as both Latina and American (Beltrán 2004).

Selena's look corresponded with her image. She is what Figueroa (2003) calls a "negotiated Latina," meaning she has some features, like her bigger thighs and *café con leche* skin, that make her physical appearance different from that of Euroamerican women and Anglo beauty standards, including those often pictured in *Latina*.

Selena's death and the promotion of her image gave other Latino/a stars opportunities in the U.S. media. The Selena phenomenon and the increased belief by media executives that there is a market for Latino/a actors, singers, and other performers opened doors for people like Ricky Martin, J-Lo, and Salma Hayek.



Image 3: Lupe Ontiveros & America Ferrera in *Real Women Have Curves*

A third type of Latina portrayed in the U.S. media is that of women like America Ferrera's character Ana in the film *Real Women Have Curves*. The Ethnic Latina is seen less often than the other two Latina "types." Roles for women who have darker skin, larger features, and shorter frames are limited in the U.S. media. This occurs in Latin American countries as well and is a direct reflection of colonial standards of beauty (Mejia, personal interview).

What makes the Ethnic Latina look different from the other two aforementioned looks is that she is distinctly more ethnic and less "American." Usually women who have ethnic features are limited to peripheral roles as service workers or villains. Sometimes they are able to be desexualized altogether and play ethnic comedy roles, though this happens more often for men, and rarely at that.

In my work, I have used these three basic mediated classifications that Figueroa outlined, though I call women categorized as the first physical type "White Latinas," the second "Selena Latinas," and the third group remains "Ethnic Latinas."

Latinas who are physically distinct, whether as the Selena type or the Ethnic Latina, are not typically allowed enough space in Hollywood as writers, producers, directors, actors or technicians to promote a healthy, honest, and positive Latina image. Though there have been some recent changes, both in the image itself and with relation to the visibility of the image in the U.S. media, it is debatable whether or not the results are positive.



Image 2: Selena



### Euroamerican Boys: A Discrepancy?

In my survey, Euroamerican boys were the only Anglo group to prefer Latina women. Euroamerican boys had the strongest opinions of all the children, and 22 percent of them preferred white women, while a notably larger 29 percent preferred Latinas. At first, one would be quick to dismiss these unusual results as a coincidence; however, there are several possible explanations why the young Anglo boys chose as they did. Euroamerican boys potentially see Latinas the way other Anglo men, perhaps their fathers, do—as sex objects. So they are not offended or alienated like Latina girls are when a Latina is pictured in a less than complimentary way (Graphed Results). This is likely a product of the Hollywood Latina image. Latina bodies have been exoticized since colonial times, and the U.S. media continues to portray Latinas as objects of desire or passion even more than their Euroamerican counterparts.

Historically, women have been viewed in sexual rather than intellectual contexts, and ethnic women even more so because of the racialization that came out of the American colonial period (Beltrán 2002). In colonial times, a woman's value was contingent on her marital status, virtue, and marital potential. Because the dominant male Anglo portion of society did not consider Mexicans, Native Americans, Africans, Puerto Ricans and other traditionally darker-skinned women fit for marriage, the men saw the women as sexually alluring and tempting—as forbidden fruit. Beltrán states that “non-marriageable *mestizas* in this context arguably were viewed as little more than potential sex objects” (2002). Within this sexualized framework, Latinas have been perceived as naturally having more sexual desire and little control over their primal sexual impulses.

The notion that Latinas and other women of color are sexier than Anglo women, who were viewed as respectable and chaste, resonates in modern culture as well. Beltrán discusses how Latina stars often have been marketed with an ethnic twist that focuses on their bodies and their sexuality. Even early U.S. films marketed Latinas with sexual stereotypes. They are often marketed with words like “firecracker,” “tamale,” “spitfire,” and “tropical,” as well as sensory descriptions like “*caliente*” (hot), “dark,” “spicy,” and “delicious.” Often their dress is exoticized, their roles are limited, and their marketing and biographies are manipulated.



Image 4: Jennifer Lopez

Jennifer Lopez epitomizes this ethnic marketing (see Image 4). The focus on her posterior and the hypersexualization of her image depicts the American-born star as “different” from her Euroamerican female costars. She is marketed with typical stereotypes of independent, sassy, and sexually open Latinas. These images affect how people define proper role models.

Unlike young girls, boys are not normally encouraged by their families to have female role models, and perhaps regard women, especially mediated versions, as objects (Beltrán, personal interview). They have the media and the reactions its images inspire in adults on which to base their opinions of female physical beauty. The results of the survey show that adult men who might be fathers or other prominent figures in



young boys' lives also have strong inclinations toward Latina women. Of male Euroamerican adults, 31 percent preferred Latinas. Another 38 percent of these men chose a mixture of Latinas and Anglo women. Comments regarding beauty and physical appearance have an impact on how boys look at women, and objectified presentations of Latinas in the media do not usually inspire insightful positive feedback. This modeling of behavior, along with mediated images of Latinas' inherent sex appeal, account for the large number of Euroamerican boys choosing Latinas.

### **Latina Children and a Skewed Self-Image**

The survey showed disturbing results for Latina children. The figures show that Latina children prefer the way White women look, and it was White women who usually occupied the top three places on Latina children's surveys. The woman most chosen by Latina girls was letter A (Survey Photos available from author).

The lack of Latina picks by Latina children demonstrates the need for more positive Latina role models both in the media and in the lives of these young girls. Because children and adults alike tend to equate beauty with personality and success, these models must have, or be marketed with, positive character traits along with physical features that distinguish them as Latinas. Latina children were the only group of females to choose more women outside of their own ethnic group. Unlike Euroamerican boys, the Latina children did not see Latina women as possessing physical appeal. It is likely that because there are so few positive and complex Latinas shown in mainstream media, Latina girls look to emulate Anglo women (Beltrán, personal interview). In this way, they are not finding sufficient validation for their own physical appearance and thus their ethnicity in general.

Children Now findings show that Latinas account for only three percent of all female roles on primetime television. Most Latina women are in service roles and have accents and "attitudes." Children Now states, "Latina characters are...often secondary to the plot, and have non-recurring roles" (Children Now 2000). Latina characters are also limited in film. They often play the role of the seductress, the maid, or the gang member's girlfriend (see Image 5). There are few Latina stars who children admire in comparison to the number of Euroamerican movie stars available in the media.

The fact that Latina children preferred White women is interesting but not surprising. Latino boys did not seem to have very positive attitudes toward women within their own ethnic group either. On the survey they favored Latinas, but only by a small percentage. This result is similar to that of research by Kenneth Clark in his revolutionary study of the psychology behind segregation in the early 1950s. Clark studied the responses of both white and black children who were given a choice between white and brown dolls. His tests showed a preference for the white dolls even among African Americans from as early as three years old (*Encarta Africana* 2000). Decisions made by Latino/a children that give preference to the mainstream group, rather than the group to which the children belong, show the impact of segregation and discrimination. Though enforced segregation is illegal, it still



Image 5: Lupe Ontiveros as a maid



happens on different levels. Economic segregation keeps neighborhood and school populations virtually homogeneous, and media segregation promotes social inequality. While it is on a subconscious level, these children feel that the way they look is somehow less beautiful and less worthy than the way Anglos look.

### **Women Critics and the Self-Directed Critique**

The number fourteen spot on the survey represents the "least" attractive woman shown in the photographs. Every group of females, save Latina children, found women of their own ethnic group to be the most attractive. Following the preferences, it would only make sense that women of a different ethnic background than those surveyed would occupy the number fourteen spot. For instance, Latina women preferred Latinas by the largest percentage (49%), and thus it would naturally follow that the most chosen unattractive woman would be White. This was not the case. Latina adults and Latina children chose Latinas as the least attractive women considerably more often than they chose White women to occupy the number fourteen spot. In the same way, Euroamerican women and girls also chose White women as the least attractive. Since patterns like this could not be found among male participants, I argue that the women surveyed are self-critical and have distorted beauty goals and standards.

Whether adults or children, females are taught to be critical of their own physical appearance. Women also tend to be more critical of other women. The overwhelming numbers of women choosing the least attractive woman from their own ethnic group shows that women have been taught beauty standards and are more likely to reject someone who they feel fails to live up to this learned model. Women are the most critical of women who have what they view as undesirable features that they themselves, or other women they know, have.

For example, while I was conducting the survey, many people felt compelled to share with me the reasoning behind their choices. One adult Latina woman with red wavy hair pulled back into a ponytail told me that she had trouble choosing the woman to occupy her number fourteen spot. She told me that she finally chose letter N because she "didn't like the kinks in her hair." A Euroamerican girl told me that she chose letter B as number fourteen because "She looks like this girl I know. She has a really skinny face" (Survey Photos). These kinds of comments were presumably made on subconscious levels, perfectly natural and not subject to analysis by those making them. Nonetheless, these and other interjections about physical appearance show that while women find features from their own respective ethnic group beautiful, they also have distaste for women in their own ethnic group whose looks do not fit into the idealized physical mold.

Women have been made to believe that parts of their own physical appearance are ugly and undesirable, or that they are lucky not to have these unattractive features. They then project these images of perfection and their failure to live up to them onto other women. Girls as young as 7 and 8 years old already adhere to these concepts of beauty and imperfection. Judgment is natural, but it is telling that women have the tendency to find fault with the physical appearances of those who look most like them.



## **Childhood to Adulthood: The Development of Latino/a Ethnic Awareness**

When I went to second grade classrooms with the survey, at times I had to explain ethnicity. Many children did not know the meaning of ethnicity or which box to check for their own. One conversation between a few children went like this:

Child 1: What's ethnicity?

Child 2: I don't know. What are you putting?

Child 1: I don't know.

Child 3: You guys, put Hispanic.

Child 1: What's that?

Child 3: It's if your parents speak Spanish.

These types of conversations were common in the second grade classrooms that participated in the survey. It is noteworthy, however, that Latino/a children had more difficulty deciding how to classify themselves than Euroamerican children.

While unsure about the meaning of ethnicity, children were aware of Anglo standards of beauty. The preferences of Euroamerican boys, though exceptions to patterns of ethnic choices, were purely subconscious; Euroamerican boys were no more likely to understand the concept of ethnicity than any other group of children. Both Euroamerican and Latina girls were inclined to choose White women. Children chose women with little consciousness of ethnicity, and most did not have clear ethnic preferences. The adult surveys, however, show that a strong shift from childhood took place. Latino/a adult ethnic preferences skyrocketed, where Euroamerican adult preferences did not. Because of the growth in preference for one's own ethnic group, it can be ascertained that ethnic awareness develops significantly before Latino/as reach adulthood.

Latino/a adults were most consistent in choosing women they recognized as being from their own ethnic group as the most beautiful. I heard one Latina woman looking at the survey say, "Which one is the darkest? I am going to choose her [for the number one spot]." This is a clear illustration of how ethnicity and "ethnic looks" are conscious concepts for Latino/a adults.

### *A) Concepts of and Reactions to Ethnic Identity*

Ethnicity itself is a difficult concept. A generally accepted definition of an ethnic group is a "sizable group of people sharing a common and distinctive racial, national, religious, linguistic, or cultural heritage" (Dictionary.com). The idea of ethnicity is closely related to the concept of a minority group, best described by Louis Wirth. He gives a three-part definition with an implied element of constant change. He says that a minority group is a "group distinguished by physical and cultural characteristics subject to different and unequal treatment by the society in which they live and who regard themselves as victims of collective discrimination" (Marquez 2004). Ethnic identity becomes important when people are treated differently because of it. People can be given an ethnic identity or choose one. Often times it is a combination, but choice becomes less



of a factor when distinguishing physical traits are present (Waters 1990). Latinos have both ethnic and minority group status and become more aware of it as they get older and have life experiences that highlight their classification as Latino/a or Hispanic.

When a person feels out of place, the reason he or she feels so is identified and magnified in his or her mind. Once this classification occurs, becoming part of a group in one way or another is a method of coping with feeling different or marginalized. In studies done in India and the U.S., members of minority religious groups were three times more likely to mention religion when describing themselves than those of majority religious groups. In a similar study, Latina/o students who went to primarily Anglo schools were more likely to mention their background than Euroamericans in the same schools (Patchen 1999, 27). Choosing and adhering to an ethnic identity is one way of achieving a sense of membership and inclusion in a group. Different factors play a part in forming and strengthening ethnic identity and boundaries.

"People's concepts of themselves are formed to a large extent by how others see and label them" (Patchen 1999, 27). One reason for increased solidarity among Latino/as is that Euroamericans treat them as a different, non-white, "other" group. Patchen argues that attitudes about race and ethnicity are based on negative information people have gotten either from the media or from others (1999, 44). Mediated images of



Image 6 "Sueños fantásticos de la marijuana fantástica," depicts a man covered in marijuana sleeping under a sombrero

Latino/as are often negative (see image 6). Usually they are at the very least inaccurate or exoticized. These images serve as a double-edged sword because they spread stereotypes of Latino/as among Euroamericans, and they further alienate Latino/as from Euroamerican people and culture. Because of this estrangement, Latino/as are likely to subscribe to a defined ethnic identity to achieve a sense of self-worth and belonging and potentially less likely to appreciate or take part in the broader culture.

#### B) Ethnic Pride and Ethnic Antagonism

Increased preference for one's own ethnic group can result from feeling drawn more to the group's characteristics than to those of another group. Pride in one's ethnic roots is considered good in American society, and it is gratifying because it promotes a positive self-image. Viewing oneself as part of a group is important because it is a distinguishing factor that makes one feel individual; it is also important because it allows people to be part of a group (Waters 1990). People who feel such positive distinctions would be likely to place Latinos consciously in the upper slots on the survey. It is key to realize, however, that ethnic pride is often a reaction to feeling excluded from the rest of society. Ethnic pride is a constructive reaction to antagonism from a larger group. While some individuals are more attached to their own group and may have more positive feelings for it, this does not necessarily mean that they automatically have negative feelings for members of other groups, though this is sometimes the case.

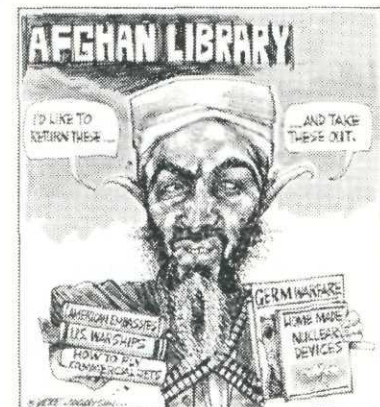


Image 7



Feelings of not being accepted in mainstream culture often perpetuate negative feelings toward the portion of society that is doing the ostracizing. Antagonism toward other groups is another way of increasing solidarity among group members. An extreme example of this is the dehumanizing propaganda shown when countries go to war (see image 7). This strategy of making individuals, ethnicities, and entire countries sources of contempt is meant to bring heterogeneous groups together by satirizing their victimization or perceived victimization. Antagonism and retaliation come both from the Latino/a perspective and, as discussed earlier, from the Euroamerican one. While these forms of antagonistic strengthening of ethnic boundaries are extreme, distaste for other ethnic groups does not have to be so overt. It can be as simple as denouncing an ethnically-owned bank, or, in the case of this study, consciously placing members of different ethnic groups in the less desirable spaces. Whether with cartoon depictions or verbal slurs, focusing negative attention on another group is detrimental to inter-group relations (see images 7 and 8).



Image 8 "gringo"

Experiences that Latino/as have with ethnic discrimination make them more likely to look for and notice ethnic similarities and differences. Adults have had more of these experiences and feelings of marginalization than children, and are thus more ethnically aware. When making choices about things like physical beauty, ethnicity has a direct influence on the choices of Latino/a adults. By considering Latinas more beautiful than Euroamerican women, Latino/as are further participating in the concept of ethnic identity by demonstrating either ethnic pride or antagonism. Even simply choosing Latinas over Euroamericans would accomplish this and promote individual feelings of solidarity with a group. At the second grade level, though, ethnicity is not a salient concept. While we can see that second graders are subconsciously aware of mediated images of beauty because of their tendency to choose White women, they do not use ethnicity as a conscious selection factor to counter these images and promote group solidarity and individual self-esteem.

### **The Absence of Ethnic Obligation for Euroamericans**

Completely unlike Latino/a adults, Euroamericans do not feel strong inclinations toward other Euroamericans based on shared ethnicity. The total increase in strong ethnic preference of Euroamericans from childhood to adulthood was 21 percent, whereas the number of Latinos/as with strong ethnic preferences experienced a more dramatic 30.5 percent increase from childhood to adulthood. These results demonstrate how Euroamericans are less aware of ethnicity because they do not feel its impact on the same scale or with the same regularity as Latino/as.

Euroamerican adults without ethnic preference remain at 46 percent of women and 38 percent of men; only 28 percent of Latinas and 27 percent of Latinos lack preference. This shows that Euroamericans are not making choices based principally on ethnicity. The dramatic increase in ethnic preference for Latino/as and the comparatively small one for Euroamericans is telling.



"Casual moviegoers or TV watchers do not concern themselves with the fine categorical issues of content analysis. They usually want to be entertained, distracted, absorbed, stimulated, or diverted" (Cortes 1998). Where it is impossible for someone of a minority group to ignore racial allusions and subject matter, Euroamericans can easily overlook ethnic content in the media because it seems trivial or they fail to notice it as such at all. Casual or not, Latino/as cannot miss ethnic content and stereotypes as they grow up. Euroamericans are not so likely to see ethnic content as stereotypical or negative, or even see it at all.

Euroamericans do not need to distinguish themselves ethnically because they are much less likely to be discriminated against based on racial or ethnic factors. In American society, Anglo looks, fashion, entertainment, and values are dominant. Waters saw Euroamericans as having limited views of ethnicity because their own ethnicity plays such a small role in their lives:

[A Euroamerican] ethnic identity is something that does not affect much in everyday life. It does not, for the most part, limit choice of marriage partner (except in almost all cases to exclude non-whites). It does not determine where you will live, who your friends will be, what job you will have, or whether you will be subject to discrimination. It matters only in voluntary ways. (Waters 1990, 147).

For Latino/as, subscription to ethnic identity is an act of self-preservation. It is a way of validating a self-image that mainstream culture and media constantly misinterpret, ridicule, restrict, distort and deny. As a whole, Euroamericans are the mainstream group and are not subject to discrimination based on ethnicity. This lack of experience makes concepts of ethnicity less tangible and less important for them than for minorities.

Euroamericans are not choosing white women as more beautiful or Latinas as less attractive because they are thinking about group identity. Mediated images of Anglo beauty as well as exoticized images of Latina beauty do play a part in the choices of Euroamerican adults, but they remain at the same subconscious level as they do for second-graders. Ethnicity and, more specifically, obligation to one's own ethnic group do not play a role in Euroamerican perceptions of physical beauty.

### **Latinas: On the Fringe**

As discussed earlier, when people feel marginalized, they tend to support their own group with greater enthusiasm. Latina adults feel a greater pull toward other Latinas than any other group I surveyed. As a minority, Latinas feel close to Latinas because of their ethnic background, and as women, they experience another bond due to gender-specific experiences. Survey data shows that Latino adults prefer Latina women to White women by 7 percent. This percentage nearly quadruples as 49 percent of Latina women prefer Latina beauty to White beauty (23%).

Latino men are not strangers to the concept of ethnicity, but many were still likely to prefer White beauty to Latina beauty. It is not clear if this reflects a desire to find an Anglo mate or a distaste in some for their own background, or if it is a simple and direct effect of the media's obsession with Anglo beauty. Regardless, Latino men's views



about ethnicity and beauty are less likely to play a part in choosing looks that are reflective of ethnicity. Meanwhile, women have created ideas of beauty that are clearly reflective of their own appearances as Latinas.

Across ethnic lines, women have been subject to significantly more objectification than men. Latinas are even more likely to be equated with sex. Stereotypes of Latinas are usually prevalent whenever Latinas, or people posing as them, are in the spotlight. And as ethnic women, Latinas are likely to be aware of them. This causes Latinas to feel a bond with other Latinas.

As the results of the children's portion of the survey would suggest, Latinas have few positive images of themselves. As these women become more attuned to this unequal imagery, moreover, they are more likely to identify closely with Latinas. In the April edition of *Cosmopolitan*, a women's magazine with a large Anglo target audience, there are two multiple-page advertisements. Each has a different motif and a different model. The first pages are photos of an Anglo woman on a fishing boat. She and a man smile and kiss, wearing relatively common clothing in various patterns of stripes and solids and different shades of blue, white, black, and red. The next add has a tanned woman with dark hair. It is not clear what her ethnicity is, but she is pictured with various tropical flowers and other images leading readers to believe that she could be in Latin America. She is alone and does not smile, but rather displays a series of seductive pouts. Her skin is wet, and more of it is exposed. She wears patterns with flowers and swirls in colors like orange, bright pink, yellow, red, and green.



This imagery, while not specifically negative, can nonetheless reflect stereotypes and derogatory reflections of Latinas. The fact that the Anglo woman was displayed first may seem trivial, but it suggests that she, and thus her "whiteness," are more important than the second woman and her status as "other" or "non-white." That the Latina woman did not have a man in the pictures while the Anglo woman did, that she was wearing less and had a more primal appearance, suggests that Latinas are more promiscuous and sexually adventurous than Anglo women,

who are monogamous and chaste. Colors and patterns exoticize Latina beauty; Latina women are unlikely to be lying seductively around the jungle, and they have the same access to bright or lackluster, intricate or simple patterns that any Anglo woman has at J. Crew, Target, or Versace.

Imagery in *Latina* and other media by and for Latino/as, is not devoid of stereotypes either (see image 9). An article that implies Latinas are predisposed to fits of rage and hot tempers appears in the April 2004 issue. Even in Spanish language or Hispanic-target media, Latinas are misrepresented and underrepresented. Within Chicano/a cinema, Latinas are few and far between. "Sad to say," neither Mexican nor Chicana/o film "has shown a penchant for creating strong, intelligent, multidimensional Chicana characters" (Cortes).

Because of their ethnic awareness largely through marginalization, Latinas are not only inclined to notice ethnicity, but they are also likely to choose members of their own ethnic group as the most attractive.



## Conclusions

Ethnic identity plays a huge part in shaping how Latino/a adults make selections, and thus see and interact with the world. Changes in perceptions of physical beauty come with age and experience unique to Latino/as and specifically Latinas. Euroamericans remain oblivious to ethnicity, and while they do not tend to give such extreme preference to their own appearance, they are unable to relate to the concept of ethnicity or to understand its importance to ethnic minorities and specifically Latino/as. Females, whether adults or children, and especially Latinas, who carry the double stigma of being negatively racialized and limited by gender, are uniquely self-critical. Furthermore, in adulthood, they find ways to feel good about their ethnic standards of beauty and those who look most like them. As Latino/a men and women grow older, they become more conscious of the choices they make and how ethnicity plays a part in them.

Mediated images are very powerful, and not just in theory. They act as major influences for perceptions of beauty and the choices people make about and because of it. Just as Clark's studies concluded that segregation is damaging, this project shows that on a subconscious level, Anglo standards of beauty dominate and are detrimental to the development and self-worth of Latino/a children. These ideals are presented both by Euroamerican culture and media designed to cater to Latino/as. Because of beauty's influence on social relations, it is important for people of all ethnicities to see positive images of Latinas, both as children and adults, to dispel fallacies and exoticized notions about ethnicity and beauty, and to promote positive self-images for Latinas.

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## Images

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## Latinas as Entrepreneurs

Yessenia Salazar

Why is it that Latinas are still underrepresented among business owners? There are certainly few Latinas in business. The business field is predominantly a man's world. Even though the numbers of Latina-owned firms have grown in the last few years, they still make up a small number of Latino/a businesses. Latinas have to work twice as hard to receive the same rewards. Because of the difficulties of gaining access to education, language, capital, and training and the unfamiliarity with U.S. business laws and regulations, Latinas often encounter discrimination in the business world. This is not to say that there are not any Latinas who are executives or CEOs. Other Latinas who decide to join the business field should follow the same footsteps taken by the few who are successful. Education may be key. Through education, Latinas can open doors for themselves and not be limited to getting married, having a family, and working in undesirable jobs. Latinas need to seize opportunities. Working in a male-dominated industry poses many challenges, however. Women who enter these fields must be specially trained for specific responsibilities. Through a strategy of *comadrazgo*, Latinas joining the business field can learn how to receive support, give support, and educate those who need assistance. Training makes a large contribution to the start of a business. Obstacles should be eliminated through the dissemination of information to Latinas in business. Through such means, Latinas will gain the potential to control their own destinies and erase the gender lines in the business industry.

According to the Small Business Administration, Latina entrepreneurs are the fastest-growing segment of the small business economy, starting new businesses at roughly twice the rate of men.<sup>1</sup> Although Latinas control just 5 percent of all women-owned businesses,<sup>2</sup> their numbers have certainly grown in the business industry, as they employ thousands of people and generate billions in sales. In 2003, the Hispanic Intelligence Special Report stated that the number of firms owned by Latina women experienced a growth rate of 39.3 percent from 1997 to 2002, outpacing the overall total growth in number of firms owned by minority women.<sup>3</sup> Heading into the business field is not an easy task. Too often women accept the stereotypes and assume that because of their gender they are not able to provide excellent service and be successful business owners. In fact, Eneida Uehlin, president of DANA Graphics, a Cincinnati-based design company, stated that clients often presume that her husband is the president of her company. Many times Latinas are not seen as possible contributors to successful businesses.

The level of education Latinas receive determines their preparedness when opening their businesses. Latinas who own businesses tend to be younger than male business owners. About 53 percent of Latina entrepreneurs are between the ages of 35

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<sup>1</sup> Richard-Abraham Rugnao, "Latina Entrepreneurs Revolutionize the Business World," *Hispanic* 11, no. 6 (June 1998): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Fitzgerald, "Rompiendo Barreras," *American Demographics* 25, no. 8 (November 2003): 1.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Limon, "Networking Latina-style," *Hispanic Business* 26, no. 4 (April 2004): 64, 66, 72.



and 44, compared to 30 percent for Latino business owners.<sup>4</sup> Latinas are therefore far less likely to have successful businesses because of their lack of education and experience. Latino/as in general tend to have the least amount of education in the United States. They are the least likely group to graduate from high school, enroll in college, and receive a college degree. The high school drop out rates among Latino/as in October 1999 were higher than those of white non-Hispanics.<sup>5</sup> Latinas in particular have the highest drop-out rate in high school of any social group. There are several reasons why Latinas drop out at a much higher rate. One major factor is pregnancy. A third of young women surveyed by the Academy of Educational Development cited pregnancy or marriage as the reason for dropping out of high school.<sup>6</sup> Another reason is the lack of proficiency in English. The speech and language barriers also have a lot to do with cultural differences. The best response to language barriers has been bilingual education programs. Bilingual education programs were designed to achieve dual language knowledge (students' native language and English), offer ways to help students transfer into English classes, and work in both students' native cultures and American cultures effectively. However, many schools do not offer high-quality bilingual programs. In order for Latinas to succeed, there must be school staff encouraging them, valuing their culture and language, and involving their parents. Educational programs are a key to reversing the trend of under-paid Latinas. Boundaries must be broken in order for Latinas to take non-traditional career paths. Events featuring successful Latinas are also a way to inspire other Latinas to pursue successful futures. A recent report indicated that the lack of math skills significantly decreased the earning power of women with a less adequate educational backgrounds.<sup>7</sup> This is consistent with previous studies pointing out that Latina business owners expressed slightly more business problems in gaining access to capital and in debt management.<sup>8</sup> The problems outlined in these studies stem from Latinas' lack of outside support, experience, and education.

Perhaps Latinas who were born in the United States have an advantage in business compared to immigrant Latinas. These women have gone through school, are proficient in English, and are more aware of outside resources. Latina immigrants have to work twice as hard. They have to go through training, access financial resources, and learn English. Latinas interviewed by the National Foundation for Women Business Owners said they were certainly not newcomers in the business industry. Those surveyed had owned their businesses for an average of 12 years. Two-thirds were born in this country, and one-third were immigrants who had lived here for an average of 30 years.<sup>9</sup> Their success can be attributed to their access to resources and education. One Latina entrepreneur board member in the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce shares her success

<sup>4</sup> Soyeon Shim and Mary Ann Eastlick, "Characteristics of Hispanic Female Business Owners: An Exploratory Study," *Small Business Management* 36, no. 3 (July 1998): 7.

<sup>5</sup> Phillip Kaufman, Jim Y. Kwon, Steve Klein, and Christopher D. Chapman, "Education Statistics Quarterly," *Education Statistics Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1999), [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol\\_2/2\\_4/e\\_section3.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_2/2_4/e_section3.asp).

<sup>6</sup> Olga Vives, "Latina Girls' High School Drop-Out Rate Highest in U.S.," National Organization For Women, <http://www.now.org/nnt/fall-2001/latinas.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Rugnao, "Latina Entrepreneurs," 2.

<sup>8</sup> Shim and Eastlick, "Characteristics of Hispanic Female Business Owners," 6.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Rodriguez, "Latina Entrepreneurs: An Economic Force in the U.S.," *Women Business Owners* (2000).



with other Latina businesswomen: "I enrolled myself in a business seminar and learned how to develop a business plan, work with budgets, and how to effectively market and operate my own business."<sup>10</sup> Many times women have the ability to be remarkable entrepreneurs but fail to do so because they have not built a strategy to tackle their goals. The few women in business who do manage to achieve their career goals do so with a detailed strategic plan.

In searching for ways to boost Latinas' business careers, *comadrazgo* comes to mind. Organizations such as 100 Hispanic Women and The Latina Leadership Network (LLN) focus on providing access to advancement opportunities in careers that would otherwise be unattainable.<sup>11</sup> They reach out to Latinas, encouraging professional success in order to give back to the community after achieving positions of power and leadership. This is called *comadrazgo*. *Comadrazgo* refers to a strategy used by Mexican-American women to unite together and help each other. Their duty is to educate women, share information, and network. The goal is to have Latinas come back to apply their knowledge and success to the community. *Comadrazgo* is a commitment all women have with one another. It is a method of advancement and a way to dismantle discrimination practices. Latinas have the power to succeed, but not all women have the right guidance. Women who are able to overcome obstacles and achieve successful careers have a responsibility to reach out to Latinas who are entering the business field with no experience. It is a technique to come together as allies, as women, as a community, and, most importantly, as Latinas. Dr. Donna Maria Blancero, chairwoman of the board of the National Society of Hispanics, found in her research that women who were mentored by a senior executive manager were more likely to be successful (as measured by salary, promotion and satisfaction).<sup>12</sup> From the various forms of support received from victorious women, a new Latina emerges—a Latina who has been given the knowledge of how to be successful by herself and for her family.

Patricia Lopez is the owner of Lopez Mercado in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. She is a Latina who is deliberately looking for new ways to reach out to the Latina/o community. She opened the first ethnic grocery store in Sun Prairie. Lopez came to the United States when she was eight years old. Her parents were migrant workers and moved constantly back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. The United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS), an organization that addresses the needs of the country's migrant workers who travel through rural Minnesota and Wisconsin, offered Patricia's parents an opportunity to live permanently in the United States.<sup>13</sup> From 1967 to 1981 she lived in Madison, and in 1981, she moved to Sun Prairie. Now a long-time resident, she is able to offer her services to the Latina/o community. Not only does she provide services with her store, but she also lends a hand in any way she can to Latino/a immigrants who arrive in the United States and settle in Sun Prairie. Lopez is not part of any business organizations and says, "I don't feel the need to join any organization to accomplish what I know I can do on my own. Of course if it's something more serious, then I will ask for assistance. I guess I am my own organization and help Latinos as much as I can."<sup>14</sup> She helps

<sup>10</sup> Rugnao, "Latina Entrepreneurs," 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Limon, "Networking Latina-Style," 64, 66, 72.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia Lopez, interview by author, tape recording, Sun Prairie, Wisconsin., 30 October 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



Latina/os get their drivers' licenses, assists in food drives, and collects furniture for those who need it. She is an active role model in the Latino/a community: "If anyone needs something, they know they can always come to me for help."<sup>15</sup> She knows there is discrimination against Latino/as because of the language barrier and their educational status. With what she knows, she feels a need to make Latina/os aware of the services that are offered. Free English classes are available at Madison Area Technical College (MATC), and Lopez strongly encourages Latino/as to attend the classes: "It is very important to learn English, that way you don't have to depend on anyone else."<sup>16</sup> She contends that if we want to see more successful Latinas in business, the first step is to search for assistance from people already in the field. A Latina faces complicated routes in order to be successful, and Patricia Lopez has been able to achieve her goals. Other Latinas have immense potential to achieve their career goals as well, contributing to their community and the U.S. economy.

Latinas are not represented in the job market as often as they should be. Most of them do not receive the right resources to excel. Their accomplishments result from hard work. Their cultural background can produce challenges to success but does not stop Latinas from entering the business field. Networking is a way for Latinas to overcome barriers in levels of advancement and discrimination. In this way, Latinas are able to accomplish personal and professional growth at the start of their careers. With *comadrazgo*, Latinas come together to help one another and achieve higher career goals, regardless of how many pitfalls they face. The new Latina has now arrived and will continue to reach for ever higher goals, knowing that she has *comadres y compadres* by her side.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



## **Latina Entrepreneurs: An Economic Force in the United States**

**Xiomara Vargas Aponte**

Over the last few decades, there have been dramatic changes in the roles of women workers, who now number forty-four million in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The male-dominated workplace has posed a challenge for women rising to positions of power, especially Latinas. During the 1980s and 1990s, hearing about Latinas as entrepreneurs in the U.S. was unusual, mainly because Latinas were mostly working in agricultural, industrial and domestic jobs, and were less likely than other segments of the population to own businesses. In addition, perhaps because Latinas were coming from two disadvantaged groups (women and Latina/os, both groups that have struggled for years for acceptance and equal rights), many did not expect Latinas to be entrepreneurs because the common stereotype is that all entrepreneurs are white men.

Latinas, however, found themselves in the unique role of encouraging cultural diversity, economic independence, and personal advancement through their experience in the workplace and the mentoring of other Latinas. This has led to more Latinas leaving agriculture, industry, and domestic work to become part of the entrepreneurial world. Today, the idea that a Latina entrepreneur is only a utopian vision is no longer true. A wide range of evidence shows that Latina business ownership is widespread, and Latina business owners are a diverse group of women, ranging from immigrants to those who have been in the United States for multiple generations. This classifies Latina business owners as part of the mainstream U.S. business culture. They are present in every industry and are now recognized as an economic force in the United States.

My paper will explore several questions: What motivates Latinas to become business owners? How do they acquire their businesses? Do they use methods similar to other women business owners when running their businesses? How do they differ from non-Latina female business owners? Finally, is entrepreneurship among Latinas viewed as a form of cultural expression? I found answers to these questions both in statistical data and in interviews with Latina entrepreneurs in Madison, Wisconsin, which describe the major characteristics of the complex profile of Latina entrepreneurs, reaffirming the fact that they are a fundamental ingredient in the nation's economy.

### **Latina Entrepreneurs in the United States: Immigration and Diversity**

Most Latina business owners are either first- or second-generation U.S. residents (see figure 1). These women have either immigrated themselves (34% are first generation), or else one or both of their parents immigrated (23% are second generation). However, a full 42 percent of Latina business owners indicate that both they and their parents were born in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> This data reaffirms that their presence is not a new phenomenon. They have been living in the U.S. an average of 30 years and owning their

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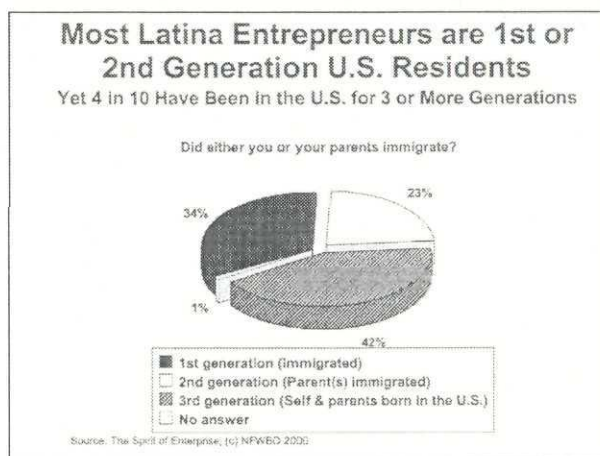
<sup>1</sup> Juana Bordas, *Follow the Leader: Women's Ways of Mentoring* (Denver: The National Hispanic Leadership Institute, 1992), 42.

<sup>2</sup> National Foundation for Women Business Owners, "The Spirit of Enterprise: Latina Entrepreneurs in the United States" (Washington, D.C: Wells Fargo, 2000), 1-5.

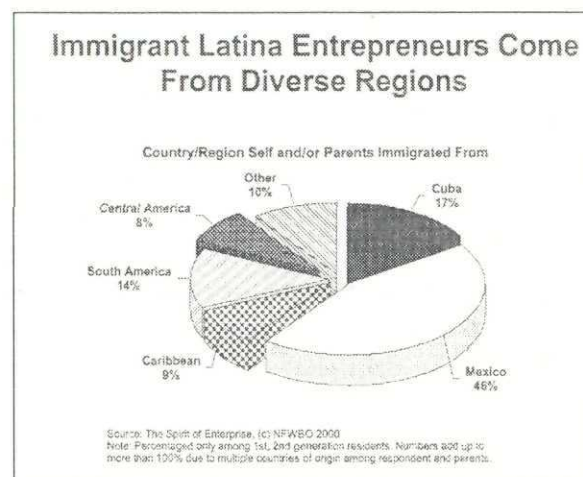


businesses an average of 10 to 12 years, statistics that do not vary significantly across “residence” generations.<sup>3</sup>

It is also important to identify that first- and second-generation Latina entrepreneurs have diverse backgrounds (see figure 2). Latin America is a *mestizo* region where races and cultures blended to form a new cultural identity. Diversity, then, is a cornerstone of Latina entrepreneurship. While nearly half (46%) have immigrated from Mexico, 17 percent immigrated from Cuba, 14 percent from South America, 8 percent from Central America, and 9 percent from the Caribbean (mainly Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic). These statistics reflect general U.S. immigration patterns. First-generation immigrants are most likely to be from Mexico (38%), followed by Cuba (19%), South America (17%) and Central America (13%). Second-generation immigrants are most likely from Mexico (59%), but some are from Cuba (13%) and the Caribbean (11%). Female entrepreneurs from Mexico account for nearly six in ten second-generation immigrants.



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

## Latina

## Entrepreneurs in the Borderlands

Latina-owned businesses are bringing new perspectives and energy to the U.S. and global economies. They are recognized nationally as trusted and competent entrepreneurs. Even though Latinas only control 8 percent of all women-owned businesses, their segment of the market is growing faster than that of other minority groups. From 1987 to 1996, the number of Latina small businesses grew 206 percent. Estimates from 2002 show that Latina entrepreneurs own over 470,300 firms, providing jobs to nearly 198,000 people and producing around \$29.4 billion in revenue.<sup>4</sup> The states with the greatest number of Latina business owners are New Mexico (20% of U.S. total), Texas (18%), California (17%), Florida (16%), New York (14%), and Arizona (13%). In the border states, the increase in Latina-owned businesses has accelerated in the last few

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Fitzgerald, “Rompiendo Barreras,” *American Demographics* 25, no. 9 (November 2003): 38-43.



years (see table 1). This increase positively affects economies along the U.S.-Mexico border and is an effective method of reducing poverty in the borderlands.<sup>5</sup>

Growth in Latina-Owned Businesses  
Border States, 1997-2002  
(percentage)

State	Change in # of firms	Change in sales	Change in employment
Arizona	58.3	10.6	13.0
California	24.3	-7.9	-13.8
New Mexico	12.3	12.7	-18.5
Texas	38.0	150.3	-7.8

Source: Center for Women's Business Research  
2003 using U.S. Bureau of Census data.

**Table 1**

### Latina Entrepreneurs in Wisconsin

The highest numbers of Latina business owners live in states that present high rates of Latina/o populations. However, in midwestern states such as Wisconsin, the Latina/o population has grown more than 107 percent. This outstanding growth of the Latina/o community has generated advancements in the Latina/o enterprise in Wisconsin.<sup>6</sup> According to data from the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin,

there are 5,500 Hispanic-owned businesses throughout the state, 1,675 of which are Latina-owned. In Madison, the number of Hispanic businesses increased remarkably during the last few years. Latinas run many of those firms as either owners or partners. Actually, the first Hispanic business in Madison, Fiesta Fashion, opened around ten years ago and is owned by Maria Garcia. As a Latina entrepreneur in Madison who owns four different establishments in the city, Garcia is a role model.

In addition to Garcia, there are other Latina entrepreneurs in Madison who own a variety of businesses, from food services to radio stations, including Graciela Rojas, Evelyn Arteaga, and Lupita Montoto. Through their examples, we can see the barriers Latinas have overcome in order to live out their dreams of running their own businesses.

### What Motivates Latinas to Become Entrepreneurs?

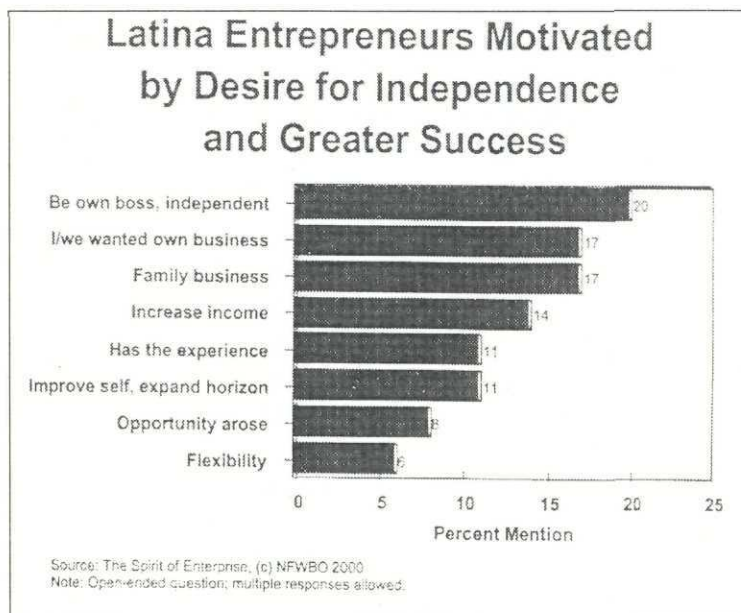
Women become entrepreneurs for many reasons. Some are frustrated by barriers to career advancement, for example (see figure 3). Some women want a particular work culture, or the flexibility that they cannot find in conventional jobs. Like other business owners, Latina entrepreneurs cite independence as their key motivation for starting their own businesses. The means of becoming entrepreneurs are similar for Latina and non-Latina business owners in general. Both primarily start their own businesses; Latina entrepreneurs are somewhat less likely to purchase an existing business. Once ownership is achieved, moreover, Latina entrepreneurs often reap the same rewards and feel the same frustrations as other women entrepreneurs, including the thrill of being their own boss and the challenge of putting in long hours. In a survey by the National Foundation for Women Business Owners, when asked about motivations for opening a business, Latina entrepreneurs cited the ability to be their own boss and gain independence (20%).

<sup>5</sup> Barbara J. Robles, "Emergent Entrepreneurs: Latina-Owned Business in the Borderlands," *Texas Business Review* (Austin: Bureau of Business Research & McCombs School of Business, October 2004), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin, "HCCW Newsletter – September 2004," <http://www.hccw.org>.



**Figure 3**



In the National Foundation for Women Business Owners survey, Latina entrepreneurs cited many other sources of satisfaction that come with operating their own businesses (see table 2). Other rewards that accompany business ownership include flexibility (18%), freedom and independence (12%), having personal and family time (11%), and the satisfaction that comes with completing a job, satisfying and serving

customers. With business ownership, though, also come frustrations. Latina entrepreneurs encounter many of the same frustrations and challenges as do all women business owners. Top sources of frustration include the long working hours (14%), managing cash flow and payroll (9%), and overwhelming responsibility (9%). Likewise, women in general indicate that their main frustrations are employee issues, long hours, numerous responsibilities, retention of employees, financing, and paying taxes.

**Table 2**

**Latina Entrepreneurs in Madison, Wisconsin**

For Latinas, Greatest Rewards of Business Ownership Include Independence, Greatest Challenges Include Long Hours	
Like Best/Greatest Satisfaction	Like Least/Greatest Challenges
► Being my own boss 29%	► Long hours, overtime 14%
► Flexibility 18%	► Managing cash flow, payroll 9%
► Freedom, independence 12%	► Amount of responsibility 9%
► Having personal, family time 11%	► Finding, keeping qualified employees 8%
► Accomplishing, completing job 10%	► Paying taxes 7%
► Making own decisions 9%	► Nothing, like everything 7%

Source: The Spirit of Enterprise, (c) NFWBO 2000  
Note: Open-ended questions; multiple responses allowed.

Many of the motivations of Evelyn Arteaga, Graciela Rojas, and Lupita Montoto correspond with the data presented above. Costa Rican immigrant Evelyn Arteaga, owner of Mundo Latino, was among the first Latinas to open a business on the south side of Madison. Arteaga has been in Madison approximately ten years and has

been running her business around six years. When she arrived in Madison, she started working domestic jobs. While engaged in domestic work, Arteaga began thinking about ways to open her business. She was primarily motivated by a sense of independence and



a desire to be her own boss. Arteaga also wanted to be more productive, since her husband traveled a great deal because of his job. She realized that she had some extra time to invest in producing additional income for the household. Arteaga expressed that her greatest satisfaction in owning her business is "giving something back"; building relationships with customers, employees, and suppliers repays the community for their support and trust.<sup>7</sup>

Graciela Rojas, a Mexican immigrant and co-owner of Sacramento Bakery, came to Madison six years ago. She has always pursued her dream of owning a business with her husband. Rojas used to work in factories; however, something inspired her to become an entrepreneur. She and her husband already had experience from Mexico in the bakery business, which was the main motivation for her to become an entrepreneur. She wanted to apply her knowledge of the bakery business so that she could manage her own time, increase the family income, and provide high-quality food service to her customers.

Lupita Montoto, also a Mexican immigrant, owns the radio station *La Movida* and the newspaper *Voz Latina*. She moved to the U.S. in 1998, when she got married, but at that point she already had some educational background in business administration from a Mexican university. In addition, her husband, Luis Montoto, already had experience in radio broadcasting from working at a radio station in Texas. This combination of communication arts and administrative knowledge motivated Montoto to open a business where she and her husband could apply their knowledge. The Montotos have achieved the greatest reward as entrepreneurs: a sense of empowerment from owning their own business. Lupita Montoto also said that before she and her husband opened *La Movida* in the year 2000, there was already a big Latina/o population in Madison. However, there was not any communication medium to connect Latino/as. This inspired Montoto to create a business, not only for her personal benefit, but also for the Latina/o community as a whole.

### **Types of Latina-Owned Businesses**

Latina entrepreneurs own firms in a variety of industries (see figure 4). Latina entrepreneurs own firms in construction (10%) and professional services (10%). Contrary to the stereotype, only 4 percent of Latina-owned businesses in the United States are in the accommodation and food services industries. Many Latina-owned businesses are also family-run. In construction, 95 percent of Latina-owned firms are family businesses; in agriculture, 90 percent; and in transportation and warehousing, 91 percent. Only 5 percent of family-owned businesses are in the accommodation and food services industry, along with 4 percent of businesses owned by first-generation immigrants.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, most of the Latina owners in construction share in the ownership of the business.<sup>9</sup> According to the Center for Women's Business Research, Latina firms are mainly located in the centers of large cities, followed by the suburbs and medium-sized cities. Location also varies by the business owners' length of residence in

<sup>7</sup> Evelyn Arteaga, interview by author, Madison, Wisconsin, 27 October 2004.

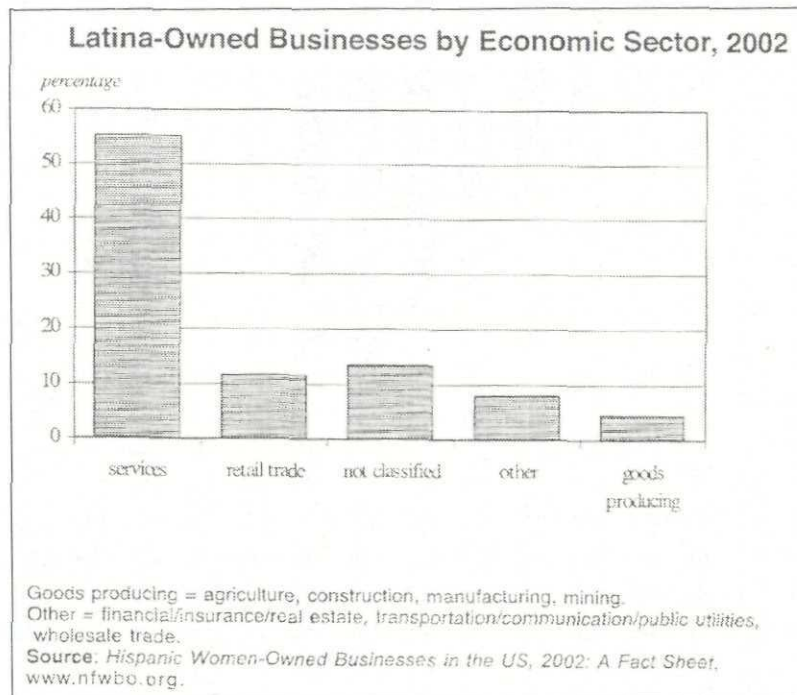
<sup>8</sup> Marcella De Simone, "Latina-Owned Business are a fast growing sector," *National Underwriter* 106, no. 2 (January 2002): 12.

<sup>9</sup> Center for Women's Business Research, <http://www.womensbusinessresearch.org>.



the U.S., with immigrants more likely to locate in the center of a large city, compared to second-generation entrepreneurs and those in the U.S. for three generations or more, who prefer mid-size cities or small towns.

**Figure 4**



The average age of Latina entrepreneurs is 48 years old, which does not vary significantly by how many generations the family has lived in the U.S. Furthermore, three-quarters are married and all average two children per household. One-third of Latina business owners have at least a bachelor's degree, while 27 percent have only a high school education or less, and 35 percent

have had some college or a two-year degree. Among Latina entrepreneurs, this is relatively consistent, no matter the length of residence.

### Funding Sources for Latina Entrepreneurs

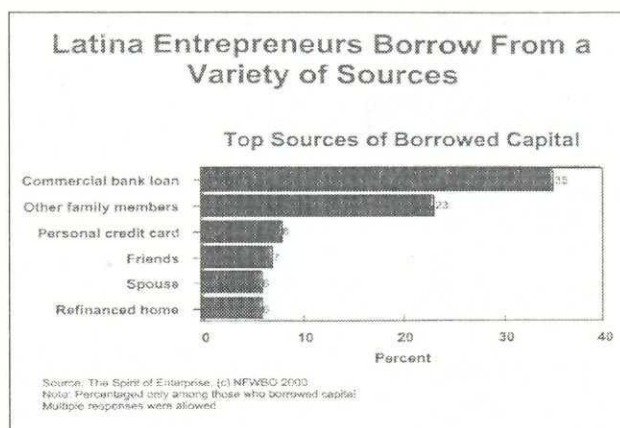
During the Reagan administration in the early 1980s, the federal Small Business Administration (SBA) created a program called Surviving Business Crisis. The program was a business support plan established to assist minority women-owned businesses.<sup>10</sup> Latina entrepreneurs showed a lack of interest in pursuing this government help. They simply did not want outside control over their businesses. Also, many of them had already saved some capital, and they had support from family members. Today, things have changed a bit. Latina entrepreneurs become business owners using roughly the same amount of capital as women business owners in general (see figure 5). For example, data from the National Foundation for Women Business Owners show that in 2000, 18 percent of Latina entrepreneurs used \$50,000 or more to fund their businesses, similar to 17 percent of women business owners overall. Thirty-six percent of Latinas and 27 percent of all female entrepreneurs started or acquired their businesses with between \$10,000 and \$50,000 in capital, while 32 percent of Latinas and 44 percent of all female business owners utilized less than \$10,000 in capital.

<sup>10</sup> Jesse Torres, "The Rise of Hispanic Business from 1980 to 1994," *CELCEE Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership Education DIGEST* 97:3 (April 1997).





**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**

In order to start their businesses, Latina entrepreneurs use money from various sources (see figure 6). While most Latina business owners use their personal savings, some rely on loans from a commercial bank. Other prime sources for start-up financing include family members, a personal credit card, friends, a spouse, and a refinanced home. Latinas who do not borrow money indicate that they save enough money to start their businesses.

Latina entrepreneurs now utilize different minority development programs offered by the U.S. Small Business Administration. These programs exist in cities throughout the country, and their purpose is to help socially- and economically-disadvantaged business owners. The SBA assists these firms in gaining equal access to the resources necessary to develop their businesses and, therefore, improve their ability to compete on an equal basis in the mainstream of the American economy. These programs are not only meeting Latinas' financial needs; in addition, they educate the businesswomen, providing them with training and assistance in the management of their businesses, information about how to open a business, and help in contracting with the federal government. On the whole, these programs provide information to Latinas on how to meet both financial and networking needs.



In addition to the federal programs for minority entrepreneurs, there also are many organizations founded by Latina/os in order to provide extra resources for Latina/o business owners. For instance, the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (USHCC) was established in 1979, when several dedicated Latina/o leaders realized the enormous potential of the Latina/o business community in the United States. They envisioned a national organization to represent their interests before the public and private sectors. The primary goals of the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce are:

- to implement and strengthen national programs that assist the economic development of Hispanic firms
- to enhance business relationships and partnerships between the corporate sector and Hispanic-owned business
- to promote international trade between Hispanic businesses in the United States and Latin America
- to monitor legislation, policies and programs that affect the Hispanic business community; and to provide technical assistance to Hispanic business associations and entrepreneurs.<sup>11</sup>

Every year, the USHCC hosts a convention and business exposition. These conventions are the largest networking events for the Latina/o business community. The conventions always include business leaders, entrepreneurs, corporate executives, and federal and state elected officials. This year, during the 25<sup>th</sup> annual convention, the Anna Maria Arias Hispanic Businesswomen's Luncheon focused on the Anna Maria Arias Memorial Business Fund, a collaborative initiative between the USHCC, *Latina* magazine, and Wells Fargo, which supports Latina business ownership. The fund was created in memory of the late Anna Maria Arias, founder and publisher of *Latina*. The fund provides cash awards to outstanding Latina business owners throughout the country. To date, the fund has awarded \$50,000 to Latina entrepreneurs. The photographs on the following page are from a photo gallery of this event (see figure 7).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.ushcc.com>.

<sup>12</sup> Luis Salinas, photo gallery, "Anna Maria Arias Hispanic Businesswomen's Luncheon 2004," <http://www.ushcc.com/25thConvention.html>.



**Figure 7:** Anna Maria Arias Hispanic Businesswomen's Luncheon 2004



In addition to the national organization, there are individual state Hispanic chambers of commerce. Wisconsin's is located in Milwaukee. The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin (HCCW) provides educational and technical resources in order to create, expand, and diversify small Latina/o-owned businesses in Wisconsin. Evelyn Arteaga, Graciela Rojas, and Lupita Montoto are active members of this organization. At



the beginning of their entrepreneurial careers, the HCCW helped them acquire their businesses.

Evelyn Arteaga knows how hard it is to succeed as an entrepreneur. She began renting Mexican video tapes out of her home. Eventually, she decided to create a business plan. With her savings from her small home business, she opened her first storefront, *Mundo Latino*, a business that has now been running for six years. Arteaga works in her business ten hours a day, and then she does bookkeeping until 11:00 p.m. or midnight. She says, "You are a slave to your business; it is not easy. It takes a lot of effort and drive; however, having your own business has a lot of rewards."<sup>13</sup>

Graciela Rojas, a new Latina entrepreneur in Madison, found out how difficult it was to live out the dream of running her own business; however, it came with rewards. Before acquiring her business, Rojas decided to attend a program for Latina/o entrepreneurs offered by Madison Area Technical College (MATC). She said that despite already having knowledge about how to run a bakery, she wanted to have some technical skills for opening and operating a business. She says, "With the combination of both the practical and educational knowledge, the business can succeed better."<sup>14</sup> With the help of the MATC program and a UW-Madison business counselor, Rojas incorporated her business and filed for permits. In November of last year, Rojas obtained a bank loan and was able to open her famous Sacramento Bakery to sell Mexican-style pastries.

Another Latina entrepreneur who serves as a role model in Madison is Lupita Montoto, the voice for local Latinos. Before incorporating *La Movida*, Montoto gained experience in a number of different venues. Upon moving to Madison in 1998, she and her husband decided to open a business in janitorial services. The business was successful; however, it was work that did not inspire her to expand the business. Montoto and her husband's passion for music, public relations, and administration influenced them to work part-time on establishing a radio station. Then a Wisconsin radio company finally provided the opportunity for which they had been waiting and working. The company offered them one day a week on the air. However, Montoto and her husband's dream was to have their radio station running twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. She said that many companies told them that it would hard to obtain this level of access, but Montoto knew that it was not impossible. *La Movida* became so famous and admired for its wonderful service to the Madison community that, in April 2002, Mid-West Broadcasting, the largest owner of radio stations in Wisconsin, decided to offer its 1480-AM signal to Luis and Lupita Montoto. Since then, *La Movida* has been broadcasting in Madison as a full-time Latino radio station (see photo gallery).

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<sup>13</sup> Evelyn Arteaga, interview by author, Madison, Wisconsin, 27 October 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Graciela Rojas, interview by author, Madison, Wisconsin, 27 October 2004.



## Photo Gallery: Latina entrepreneurs in Madison, Wisconsin



Evelyn Arteaga at *Mundo Latino*



Graciela Rojas at Sacramento Bakery  
(above, left; below, right)



JOSEPH W. JACKSON III/WSJ

Luis Montoto, left, and wife Lupita, of La Movida radio station, WLMV-AM 1480, in their broadcast office at 1017 S. Park St., will broadcast as Madison's first full-time Latino radio station.



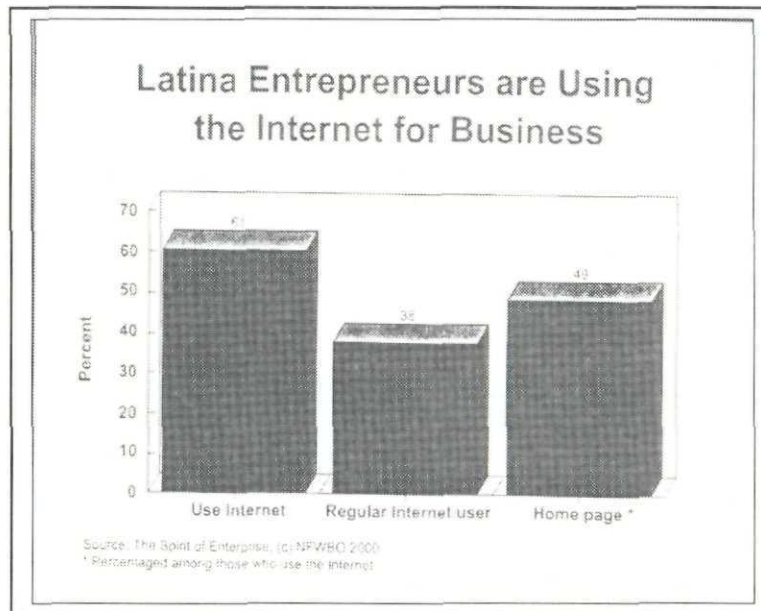
### Latina Entrepreneurs and Management

Another important aspect of the profile of Latina entrepreneurs is the way they run their businesses. Latina business owners use technology in their business at the same level as all women business owners (see figure 8). Many Latina-owned businesses also utilize the internet: 61 percent use the

internet in their firms, and 38 percent use it on a regular basis. Businesses that are constantly on the internet tend to be younger, with Latina entrepreneurs owning them for just ten years on average. Internet usage also varies by industry, and the lead industries are finance and insurance (86% use the internet) and real state business services (83%). Of those Latina-owned businesses that utilize the internet, 49 percent have web site for their businesses.

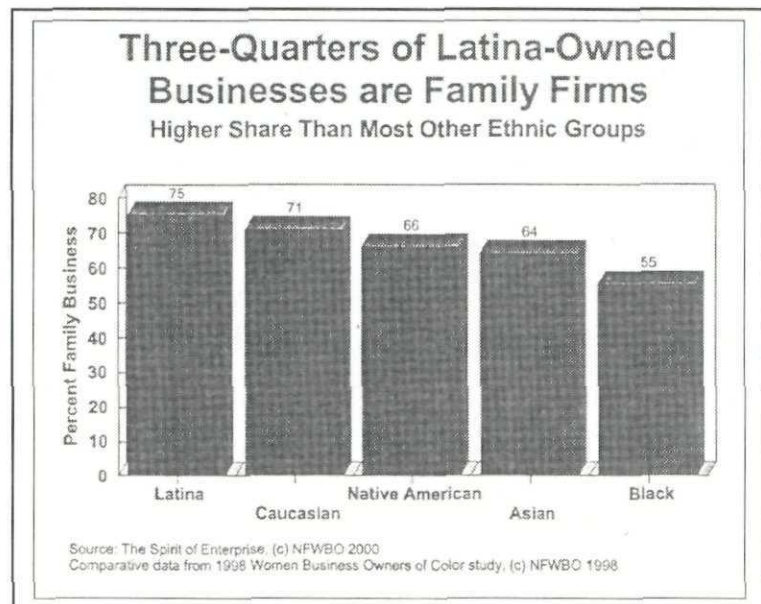


For Evelyn Arteaga, Graciela Rojas, and Lupita Montoto, the use of technology in their businesses has not been difficult. When they opened their establishments, they installed adequate equipment that could offer security in administrating their businesses. The language barrier, on the other hand, was a major obstacle. When they opened their businesses, they were not proficient in English; however, they received support from the Anglo community that motivated them in improving their English communication skills.



**Figure 8**

Most Latina-owned firms are family-run. Family members are involved in the daily operations of three-quarters of Latina businesses. This rate is higher for Latina entrepreneurs in relation to female business owners of other ethnic groups (see figure 9). For example, the involvement of Graciela Rojas's family in her business is an important factor for her success. She said in the interview, "Without the help of my husband, my son, and other family members, I would be getting crazy in this place."<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 9**

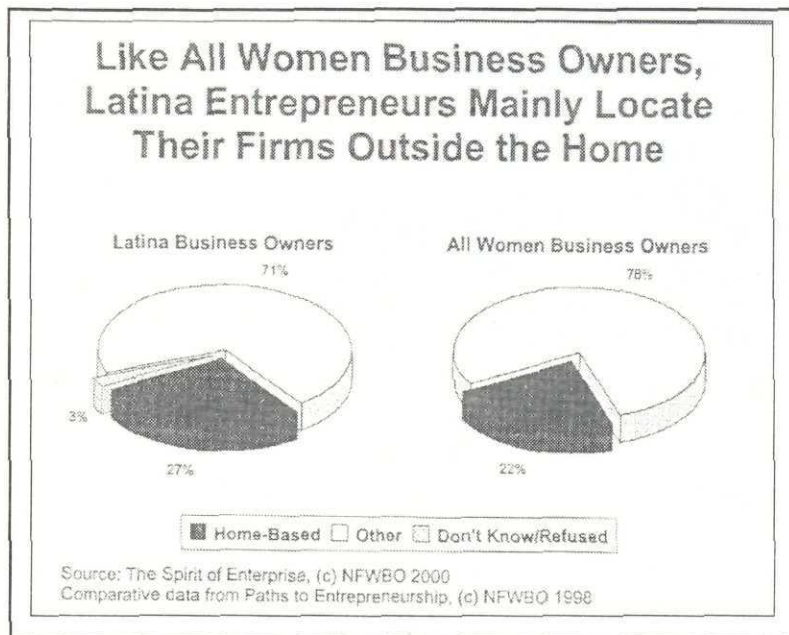
Many Latina entrepreneurs establish their businesses outside the home; however, Latina business owners are somewhat more likely than the average female entrepreneur to own a home-based business (see figure 10). These home-based businesses tend to be younger; for example, Evelyn Arteaga started her business at home so as to spend more time with her family.

However, Arteaga realized that her stress level was higher because she was combining her professional life with her personal one. She concluded that it was not healthy for her

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



or her family, so she installed her business in a storefront location that allowed her to organize her daily activities and meet her multiple responsibilities.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 10**

Finally, cultural background also influences the development of Latina entrepreneurship in the wider business world. According to Juana Bordas' book *Follow the Leader: Women's Ways of Mentoring*, the Spanish word *hispana* means "being both a woman and Latin; it symbolizes that a woman cannot separate herself from her culture. Both are integral to her identity and permeate her whole being."<sup>17</sup> Entrepreneurship among Latinas, therefore, is a form of cultural expression, with family involvement and a sense of control over the future playing major roles. Most Latina entrepreneurs are proud of their cultural heritage and consider it an asset, though Latinas whose primary language is Spanish are more likely to see their culture as a challenge (see figure 11). Bilingualism is a form of cultural expression among Latina entrepreneurs. Language use by Latina business owners differs depending on how long they have resided in the U.S. For example, first-generation Latinas consider Spanish their first language, while second- and third-generation Latinas consider English their primary language. Many Latina entrepreneurs, regardless of age, agree that mentoring is a powerful tool for helping Latinas share information, learn integration skills, and manage cultural issues that affect their productivity at work and their overall success in business. In addition, people of diverse cultures, including Latinas, use entrepreneurial relationships to build bridges of understanding and to learn mutual respect for differences.

<sup>16</sup> Evelyn Arteaga, interview.

<sup>17</sup> Bordas, *Follow the Leader*, 2.



Figure 11

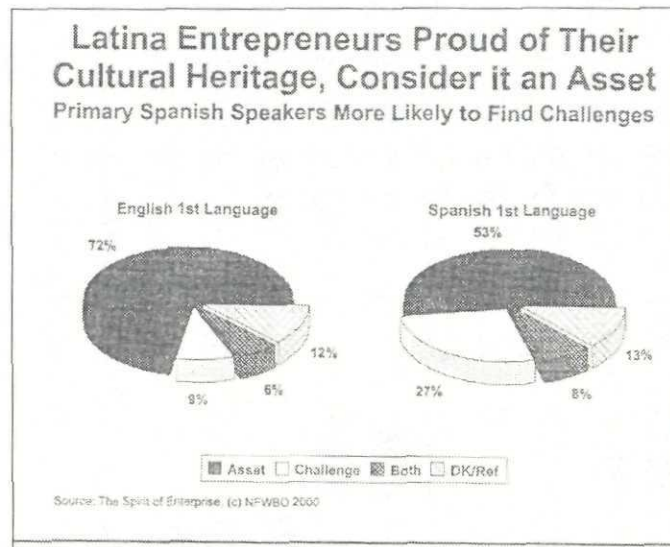
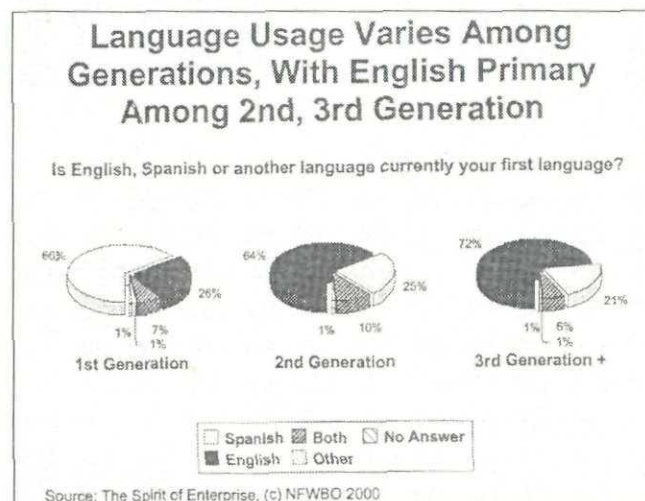


Figure 12



## Conclusion

Latina entrepreneurs are part of our daily life. The Latina entrepreneurs in this study all demonstrated that the decision to start a business was not easy; however, these women did not let their fears stop them from succeeding. These women are good entrepreneurs who recognized risks and made great efforts to minimize them. I want to encourage all Latina entrepreneurs to keep maximizing their entrepreneurial power. They need our recognition and support because they are adding innovative ideas and multicultural elements to our nation's economy. Their work shows a commitment to distributing wealth more fairly and managing resources more efficiently. Perhaps most importantly, their work contributes significantly to environmental, social, political, and economic equity.





### *Contributors*

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