A Countryless Woman

The Early Feminista

> I would have spoken these words as a feminist who "happened" to be a white United States citizen, conscious of my government's proven capacity for violence and arrogance of power, but as self-separated from that government, quoting without second thought Virginia Woolf's statement in *The Three Guineas* that "as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world." This is not what I come [here] to say in 1984. I come here with notes but without absolute conclusions. This is not a sign of loss of faith or hope. These notes are the marks of a struggle to keep moving, a struggle for accountability.
>
> —ADRIENNE RICH, "Notes Toward a
> Politics of Location," *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*

IN THE 1980S I COULD not call myself a citizen of the world as Virginia Woolf, speaking as an Anglo woman born to economic means, declared herself; nor did I make the same claim to U.S. citizenship as Adrienne Rich does, despite her universal feeling for humanity. Today, in my own nation of birth and citizenship, as a mestiza born to the lower strata, at best, I am often mistaken for an immigrant, at worst, as a nonentity. Moreover, this occurs not only in the United States, the country of my birth, but also in European countries. In Latin America, including México, I am taken for a foreigner.

Nationhood aside, there is a visceral connection within me for the land of my ancestors. If in search of refuge from the United States I took up residence on any other continent, the core of my being would long for a return to these lands. The collective memory that I share with other *indigenas* and mestizos and mestizas makes me yearn to claim these territories as my spiritual homeland. In the following pages I would like to review our socioeconomic status, our early activism and feminism, and begin the overall discussion that progresses toward a Xicanista vision.

Leftists and liberals recognized the atrocities of U.S. intervention in Central America during the 1980s, as similar sympathizers did with Vietnam in the 1960s. Their support was also reminiscent of North American leftists and liberals in the 1930s who struggled against fascism during the Spanish Civil War. Yet, mestizas on U.S. soil, immigrants and native, are viewed less compassionately, even skeptically. We are advised to assimilate.

Racism polarized into a black-white issue. Mestizos in the United States were seen by many white people as having the potential to “pass” for white. This opinion was based on assumptions, lack of information, and misinformation that accompanied policies, media control, and distorted historical documentation. The United States cannot deny its early history of importing Africans as slaves; however, censorship continued regarding the extent of genocide of Native Americans. Mestizos and mestizas were identified as a mixture of the dispensable Amerindian race and the lowly Spaniard. (In colonial times, according to the caste system, the ruling Spaniards designated the criollo, an individual of Spanish blood born on Mexican soil, as having genetically inherited laziness by virtue of his/her birth.) Little is known by the general public about how these attitudes caused ongoing persecution of Mexic Amerindians and mestizas on land that was México and later became U.S. territory. For example, while it is well recognized that in the South there were lynchings of African Americans, it isn’t common knowledge that Mexicans were also lynched and hung in Texas and throughout the Southwest. Today there is a common belief that the civil rights movement succeeded in creating a true democracy and that increasing poverty and unemployment are primarily a matter of the repercussions of world economics and the lack of motivation of certain racial and ethnic groups.

PEREGRINATIONS

While I’ve had more in common with a Mexican man than with a white woman, in many ways I have more in common with an Algerian woman than with a Mexican man. Although women everywhere experience life differently from men everywhere, white women are heiresses to the privilege granted by colonization. We have lived in a polarized world of contrived dualisms, dichotomies, and paradoxes: light versus dark and good versus evil. We as Mexic Amerindians and mestizas have been the dark. We are the evil . . . or at least, the questionable. Ours is a world imbued with nationalism, real for some, yet tenuous as paper for others. Nonwhite women—Mexicans/Chicanas, Filipinas, Malaysians, and others—who comprise 80 percent of the global factory workforce, are the greatest dispensable resource that multinational interests own.[1] The women are, in effect, represented by no country. We have been the invariable targets of every kind of abusive manipulation and experimentation. As a mestiza, a resident of a declining world power, I have the same hope as Rich who, on behalf of her country aims to be accountable, flexible, and learn new ways to gather together earnest peoples of the world without the defenses of nationalism.

I was born, raised, and spent most of my life in one of the largest cities in the United States. Despite its distance from México, Chicago was the third most frequent U.S. destination of Mexican migrants after El Paso and Los Angeles. A great influx of Mexicans occurred during the first half of the twentieth century when the city required cheap labor for its factories, slaughterhouses, and steel mill industry. In an effort to minimize their social and spiritual alienation, Mexican communities developed and maintained solid ties to Mexican culture and traditions. This was reinforced by the tough political patronage system in Chicago, which was dependent on ethnically and racially divisive strategies to maintain its power. Thus I grew up perceiving myself to be Mexican despite the fact that I did not visit that country until the age of ten.

Assimilation into dominant culture, while not impossible, was not encouraged nor desired by most ethnic groups in Chicago—Mexicans were no exception. We ate, slept, talked, and dreamed Mexican. Our parishes were Mexican. Small Mexican-owned businesses flourished. The spiritual and psychological needs of a people so despised and undesired by white dominant culture were met in our own growing communities with the establishment of small businesses and parishes. During the seventies, arts, community centers, nursery schools, and such that were bilingual and bicultural were established by grassroots activists.

As I was growing up, Mexicans were the second largest minority in Chicago. There was also a fair-sized Puerto Rican community and a fair amount of Cubans and other Latin Americans. In those years, however, before the blatant military disruption of Latin American countries such as Chile and El Salvador, a person with “mestiza” characteristics was considered Mexican. When one had occasion to venture away from her insulated community to, say, downtown, impressive and intimidating with its tremendous skyscrapers and evidently successful (white) people bustling about, she felt as if she were leaving her village to go into town on official matters. Once there she went about her business with a certain sense of invisibility, and even hoped for it, feeling so out of place and disoriented in the presence of U.S. Anglo, profit-based interests, which we had nothing to do with except as mass-production workers. On such occasions, if she were to by chance run across another mestiza and mestizo, there was a mutual unspoken recognition and, perhaps, a reflexive avoidance of eye contact. An instantaneous mental communication might sound something like this:

> I know you. You are Mexican (like me). You are brown-skinned (like me). You are poor (like me). You probably live in the same neighborhood as I do. You don’t have anything, own anything. (Neither do I.) You’re no one (here). At this moment I don’t want to be reminded of this, in the midst of such luxury, wealth, this disorienting language; it makes me ashamed of the food I eat, the flat I live in, the only clothes I can afford to wear, the alcoholism and defeat I live with. You remind me of all of it.
>
> You remind me that I am not beautiful—because I am short, round bellied and black

Castillo, Ana. Massacre of the Dreamers : Essays on Xicanisma. 20th Anniversary Updated Edition., University of New Mexico Press, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csun/detail.action?docID=1794563.
Created from csun on 2020-03-21 17:21:31.

> eyed. You remind me that I will never ride in that limousine that just passed because we are going to board the same bus back to the neighborhood where we both live. You remind me of why the foreman doesn't move me out of that tedious job I do day after day, or why I got feverish and too tongue-tied to go to the main office to ask for that Saturday off when my child made her First Holy Communion.
>
> When I see you, I see myself. You are the mirror of this despicable, lowly subhuman that I am in this place far from our homeland, which scarcely offered us much more since the vast majority there live in destitution. None of the rich there look like us either. At least here we feed our children; they have shoes. We manage to survive. But don't look at me. Go on your way. Let me go on pretending my invisibility, so that I can observe close up all the possibilities—and dream the gullible dreams of a human being.[2]

AT SEVENTEEN I JOINED THE Latino/Chicano movement. It was 1970, and as a high school senior, I rallied around City Hall along with hundreds of other youth screaming, "¡Viva La Raza!" and "Chicano Power!" until we were hoarse. Our fears of being recognized as lowly Mexicans were replaced with socioeconomic theories that led to political radicalism. Yet our efforts to bring unity and courage to the majority of our people were short lived; they did not welcome the ideology. Among the factors contributing to this were the desire to succeed, the consumer fever that overrides people's fundamental needs, and the competitive American premise that encourages individual versus community efforts. The temptations of the rewards of assimilation and the internalization of racism by the colonized peoples of the United States remain devastating. Society has yet to acknowledge the trauma it engenders. The United States, has allowed to some extent for the representation of people of color in the institutions that influence and mandate peoples' lives, such as government, private industry, and universities. It has gradually relented to fulfill its professed democratic ideals and include the descendants of its slave trade, the Native Americans, mestizas and mestizos, and North and South Africans and Asians (who also come from a wide variety of countries and social and economic backgrounds and who, due to various political circumstances, are immigrating to the United States at an rapid pace). It will do so because the world economy will not permit anything short of it.

Today, it may be argued that immigrants do not necessarily share the sentiments expressed above formulated throughout the late sixties through the eighties. They know they are citizens of their homeland and have willingly come to and may embrace their new country. The Reagan era altered the way politics were thought about in the United States. The Republican administration managed to dismantle most of the grassroots organizations supported by the government. With the shrewd dexterity managed in a con's cups and balls game, the dismantling of a communist "threat" took place in Central America. The average U.S. citizen did not know what country their government was for or against there. (Indeed, the average U.S. citizen does not know where to locate the countries in Central America, often mistaking them for being part of the Mexican Republic.) The influx of Central and South Americans escaping horrors visited on them by their governments (as well as others, who did not disagree with the horrors) altered the previous agenda of the Latino movement. Activists born on U.S. soil, whose antecedents trace back to before annexation of their home states, had a different perspective. “We didn’t cross the border,” the Southwest saying goes, “the border crossed us.” Across the ocean, in a staged production, Reagan challenged the leader of the Soviet Union in 1987, “Tear down this wall, Mr. Gorbachev.” No such cries by Republicans or Democrats are made regarding the U.S.-México border in 2013. To the contrary securing the border is a main point of contention regarding passing any kind of immigration bill.

México has been nothing if not cooperative with the needs and demands of the free enterprise system, evident most recently with the NAFTA Agreement, and yet the U.S.-México border is the sorest point of contention for conservatives regarding an immigration bill. The public is aware of the complaints of ranchers regarding the trespassing of Mexicans who are crossing illegally. We do not often hear of the generations of mestizos who exist in a nether-state along the border. Subjected to prejudices, racism, and poverty, complacency is mostly the rule. Contrary to the perspective that the majority of a population changes policy, voting does. Voting requires conscientización.

The resident Hispanic population in the United States totals nearly 52 million. In 2011, according to the PEW Hispanic Center, the female population of native and foreign-born Hispanic/Latino identified residents was more than 26 million.[3] According to the same source there was an estimated 11.2 million unauthorized immigrants living in the country. These individuals are from all over the world, but according to the PEW report, more than half of the undocumented population are from México.

Hispanic as the ethnic label for all people who reside in the United States with any connection to the culture brought by the Spaniards during the conquest of the Americas was established in the 1980s by the U.S. government. In my opinion, bundling together a vastly diverse group resulted in a gross misnomer. The label was chosen over the activists’ preference of Latino or U.S. Latino (for native born). The term *Hispanic* is a misnomer because one-fifth of South America—Brazil—does not speak Spanish. A large population of Guatemala speaks indigenous dialects as a first language and maintains its own indigenous culture. Chicanos and mainland Puerto Ricans, having been brought up in an English-dominant society, having attended its monolingual schools, and discouraged from pursuing the language of their ancestors, may have some or no fluency in Spanish. In fact, even though Spanish speakers in the Southwest expected to retain their native tongue following annexation of the territory in which they lived in 1848, Spanish was prohibited in schools and workplaces. The debate rages on among educators and government alike.

If Hispanic refers to all natives and descendants of persons from Latin America, it includes no less than twenty countries—whose shared patterns of colonization may allow them to be called Pan-American, but whose histories and cultural attitudes are nevertheless diverse in very particular ways. The economies of Caribbean states and coasts in Latin America, which were dependent on the slave trade, explain the African makeup of many in the areas. The middle class and wealthy that first fled from Cuba after the Revolution were white. Today, many in Cuba are notably of African ancestry. Citizens of the Dominican Republic are considered Hispanic because they speak Spanish, but the residents of the other side of their island, Haiti, speak French (and more commonly, patois). Are there enough major racial differences between these two nationalities on the same island to justifiably classifying one as Hispanic but not the other? The Philippines were once colonized by Spain (and consequently some have Spanish surnames) and now have English as a dominant language, but they are not classified as Hispanic. They are placed in another catchall group, Asian.

For the purposes of census taking, Hispanic gives us all one ultimate paternal cultural progenitor: Spain. The diverse cultures already on the American shores when the Europeans arrived, as well as those introduced because of the African slave trade, are completely obliterated by the term. In the U.S. Census there are Hispanic subcategories divided by race or ethnicity. This is reminiscent of other legislated racism efforts. Shortly after the Conquest of México, Spanish rule set up a complex caste system in which to be of mixed-blood virtually excluded people from full rights as citizens and protection by the law. Jews and Moors in that Catholic society also experienced racist attitudes.[4] Just as with today's African Americans, among Mestizos, mestizas and Amerindians, the result of such intense, legislated racism throughout centuries is demoralization. As one historian puts it regarding the Mexic Amerindian people, "Trauma and neuroses linger still, and may not be entirely overcome. For the Spaniards, in México, did not commit genocide; they committed culturcide."[5]

Except for the historical period characterized by Manifest Destiny, fate is not part of U.S. Anglo-Saxon ideology. But the United States does have a fate. Sir John Glubb in his book, *A Short History of the Arab Peoples,* suggests reviewing world history to see how frequently great empires reach and fall from their pinnacle of power, all within two hundred to three hundred years. According to Glubb, for example, the Greek Empire (330 BC–ca. 100 BC) lasted 230 years; the Spaniards endured for (1556–1800) 244 years; and the British Empire lasted 230 years, (1700–1930). It is sobering to note that no great power simply lost its position as number one then to slip into second or third place, nor has any former great power ever resumed its original, unchallenged position. They all have ceased to exist as a world power. After the fall of the Roman Empire, Rome became little more than the home of the pope for the past fifteen centuries. Moreover, regarding his figures, Glubb tells us, "It is not desired to insist on rigid numbers, for many outside factors influence the fates of great nations. Nevertheless, the resemblance between the lives of so many and such varied empires is extremely striking, and is obviously entirely unconnected with the development of those mechanical devices of which we are so proud."[6] "Mechanical devices" means military might.

Arguably, signs of the decline of the United States as the leading world power were apparent since the phenomenal growth of the public debt in the 1980s. As reported by the U.S. Department of the Treasury, during the Reagan-Bush years the public debt of the United States climbed from $907.7 billion in 1980 to more than $3 trillion in 1990. By 2012 the country's national debt was more than $16 trillion.[7] In the second decade of this century, after a recession period felt by the majority of the residents in the modern world, such figures may not be shocking. Described another way, however, in personal terms (and how most of us tend to assimilate financial information as consumer debt), in 2010 the national debt at $2.4 trillion broke down to about $7,800 for every single individual.[8]

Along with the ongoing general view across the board that women are second-class citizens are the ramifications of globalization. Outsourcing as well as the installation of international industries in developing countries exploit impoverished populations, numbering more than 2 billion in 2010.[9] Illegal enterprises, such as a drug industry that includes slave trade and human smuggling, reap mind-boggling revenues of more than $300 billion annually. Every Latina in the Americas, indeed most women worldwide, are affected by these realities in some manner. This is the basis for the observations and conclusions given in the following chapters.

The largest movement in the history of the United States to force the government to reckon with its native Latino population was the Chicano/Latino movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. In recent times we may point to the millions who turned out in protests demanding a compassionate immigration bill to deal with the undocumented resident workers. However, demonstrations alone do not constitute a movement. Other than the issue of passing an immigration bill, native and foreign-born Latinos are widely divided on all significant civic concerns that affect their families and communities. Education, medical care, voting rights, housing, and discrimination are issues that remain critical for people of Hispanic/Latino identification, but there is no general consensus as to the best methods to approach these matters.

In the mid-1970s, however, there was some consensus. Many of the goals dealt with recompensation and affirmative action in correcting historical segregation and prejudice against Latinos in the United States. In 2013 it is understandable if an undocumented Mexican worker in the United States does not comprehend why a ninth-generation Tex-Mex is complaining about his economic disenfranchisement. The Mexican worker has come here for economic opportunities and many are sold on the American Dream, at least as an ideology. In other words, everybody can have a piece of the pie if they are willing to work for it. The immigrant has a sense of nation, his homeland. No one questions his nationality. If he experiences prejudice along the way or even persecution, to an extent he understands this is because he is on foreign soil. The hypothetical ninth-generation Tex-Mex, Hispano of New México, Californio, or native of Arizona may indeed enjoy most of the opportunities afforded native-born citizens. However, instances of racial profiling, for example, such as Sheriff Arpaio of Maricopa County, Arizona, was convicted of, stopping brown-skin drivers with intent to check their IDs, stereotyping on a day-to-day basis because of your ethnicity, the pigeonholing of people with Spanish surnames as being Other, impact the lives of native-born Latinos.

The effects of stereotyping may sound like whining about a little ignorance shown by a handful amongst the public, but people of color know all too well that our being offended cuts to the core of our character. Moreover, social exclusion results in economic, social, political, and cultural disadvantage. The goal of a political movement is to change policy. Postmarch drives, after millions turned out to demand a bill to allow a path to naturalization for the undocumented resident of good standing, turned the frustration into votes. This effort, known as the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, is a voter registration drive whose target is the “new Latino,” a young Latino.[10] These votes, obviously come from supporters of an immigration bill and not the undocumented millions who will be affected by it. Not only is the Latino population in the United States diverse, but those of the second, third, and earlier generations have a different relationship to their homeland, which is the United States.

Opponents of undocumented Mexicans point out how their white ancestors came to the United States “the right way,” worked hard, and assimilated seamlessly into the fabric of the American Dream. Such ahistorical references make their arguments void. Moreover, they negate the existence of race being a factor. European immigrants were encouraged and even granted citizenship in the past. Today, the ethnicity and race of undocumented white immigrants allows them to assimilate seamlessly.

Immigration is a fact of life and currently a result of globalization. The protests of Latinas and Latinos for desegregation and civic and political rights may be seen as the right of a population that has fought for the development of this country since its inception. Mexicans have fought for the United States since the Alamo, helped build railroads and industries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and have brought (and still bring) tomatoes to our salad plates in January. While Latinas and Latinos may be stereotyped today as landscapers and bilingual nannies, they work in all forms of employment, with the hope and expectation of rising as far as their talents will allow. However, Hispanic/Latino workers still lag behind their white counterparts in terms of income and career advancement.[11] There are no other convincing explanations for this socioeconomic gap other than the stubborn persistence of prejudice, racism, and sexism.

By the same token, we may be our own worst enemy. Equally saddening is the famous *envidia*, familiar to all Latinos. We want to make it. We want to see ourselves represented better and more in government and elsewhere, but all too often when someone from our culture “makes it,” we are envious of the individual and don’t lend our support. By helping every member of your family, community, background you are helping yourself and your family. We too often don’t see it that way. This attitude allows the opponents to win.

In 1980 the Reagan administration came into office and systematically quashed the Chicano/Latino movement. Community projects and grassroots programs dependent on government funding—rehabilitation and training, child care, early education and alternative schooling, youth counseling, cultural projects that supported the arts, rehab-housing for low income families, and women’s shelters—were shut down. In their place the old “American Dream”—a WASP male philosophy on which this country was founded at the expense of third world labor—was reinstated. As in U.S. society before the civil rights movement, private material accumulation equaled self-worth.

The new generation of Latinos who came of age in the 1980s had a radically different attitude than the collective mentality of the 1970s activists, believing that after two hundred years of racist and ethnic exploitation, the age of the “Hispanic” had finally come. Their *abuelos*, *tiós*, parents (some who had been in the Chicano/Latino movement) had paid the dues. Some of the media declared the 1980s to be the “Decade of the Hispanic,” and for the first time in U.S. history ad campaigns took the Latino consumer into consideration. Magazines, billboards, and even television commercials showed brown, beautiful Latina models in flashy wear, reaping some of the comforts and pleasures of free enterprise. Also there was the unprecedented tokenism that resulted in the hiring of Latinas and Latinos in mid- to high-level government posts and private industry. The new generation was not alone. The previous generation became more conservative, along with immigrating Latinos who were sold on the trickle-down theory of Reaganomics—all whistling the theme song of the TV sitcom, *The Jeffersons*. Believe in the free enterprise system, and you too, like the song said, will get a piece of the pie. How the pie got divided was another matter.

Personal disillusionment with leftist ideology may explain in part the change in attitude and goals for some. For many others, I believe it was basically a matter of desiring material acquisitions. It is difficult to maintain a collective ideology in a society where possessions and power-status equal success. Unfortunately, the continuous drop of the U.S. dollar in the world market caused the economy to worsen each year as our debt increased. In the 1980s jobs were already lost, companies closed down and moved out of the country, banks foreclosed on mortgages, and scholarships and grants once available to needy college students in the 1970s were taken away. These were only a few of the losses experienced not only by Latinas and Latinos but most of the population. Simultaneously, the cost of living went up. With the acceleration of drug wars and gang violence in the cities and cancer and AIDS on the rise as a backdrop, the highlights of the 1980s and early 1990s were the Persian Gulf War and the Rodney King riots—sending out a message around the world that the United States was indeed a troubled country going through difficult times.

El Movimiento saw its rise and fall within a time span of less than two decades on these territories where our people have resided for thousands of years. El Movimiento (or *La Causa*) was rooted to a degree in Marxist-influenced theory (despite the strong ties activists felt to their Catholic upbringings), because Marxism offered some response to a people's oppression under capitalism. Socialist and communist theories that were based on late-nineteenth-century ideas on the imminent mass industrialization of society did not foresee the high technology of the late twentieth century or fully consider the implications of race, gender, and sexual preference differences on that world. Wealth accumulation no longer simply stays within the genteel class but our aristocracy now includes athletes, rock stars, and Hollywood celebrities.

The early feminista had been actively fighting against her socioeconomic subjugation as a woman since 1968, the same year the Chicano movement was announced. I am aware that there have been activists throughout U.S. history, but I use as a date of departure an era in which women consciously referred to themselves as feministas. The early feminista was documented in a paper entitled, "La Feminista," by Anna Nieto Gómez and published in *Encuentro Feminil: The First Chicana Feminist Journal*, which may now be considered, both article and journal, archival material.[12] By the 1970s the early feminista had come to find it necessary to educate white feminist groups on her political, cultural, and philosophical differences. Issues that specifically concerned the feminista of that period were directly related to her status as

Other. Early white feminism compared sexism (as experienced by white middle class women) to the racism that African Americans were subjected to, but black feminists, such as those who belonged to the Rio Combahee Collective, pointed out that this was not an accurate comparison.[13] They stated that such analysis revealed an inherent racist attitude on the part of white feminists who did not understand what it was to be a woman and black in America. Brown women activists, too, were forced to point out a prevalent condescension on the part of the white middle-class toward poor women, and women whose first language was Spanish and whose culture was not mainstream.

Four decades later feminists of color find themselves in similar circumstances. According to Andrea Smith, feminist organizer and scholar, since the Violence Against Women Act passed in 1994 the priority for much of the white women feminist movement became services relating to “the influx of federal and states dollars into anti-violence programs.”[14] The language that has come to replace *poverty* is associated with the politics of social inclusion/exclusion, a concept originated in France in the seventies. The politics of social inclusion/exclusion present challenges akin to the practice of multiculturalism, which was a concept widely expounded in the 1980s and 1990s. Feminists of color are critical of the politics of social inclusion/exclusion insofar as they see the concept as another attempt by whites to include the disenfranchised as guests at their table. “As critical race theorist Kimerle Crenshaw has noted, it is not enough to be sensitive to difference; we must ask what difference the difference makes.”[15] As a translator this rings true. A word in one language does not necessarily mean the same in another. It is because an entire view of the world is embedded in the evolution of words. More significantly, the work of feminists of color is by its nature radical. Whether experiencing the hardships of marginalization of their foremothers directly, or the passion they feel for their legacy, the viewpoint of a member of society considered the least amongst all offers a radical perspective on the world.

Within the Latino movement, according to Nieto Gómez, feministas were labeled as *vendidas* (sellouts) by activists. Such criticism came not solely from men but also from women, whom Nieto Gómez called Loyalists. These Chicanas believed that racism, not sexism, was the necessary battle. Moreover, the Loyalists distrusted any movement led by any sector of white society. The early white women’s movement saw its struggles based on sex and gender, and did not take into account the race and class differences of women of color. The Loyalists had some reason to feel reluctant and cynical toward an ideology and organizing effort that at best felt condescending. Loyalists told the feministas that they should be fighting such hard-hitting community problems as police brutality, Vietnam, and *La Huelga*, the United Farm Workers’ labor strike. But white female intellectuals were largely unaware of these issues. While the Chicana resided in a first-world nation, indeed the most powerful nation at that time, she was part of a historically colonized people.

Contrary to ethnographic data that portrayed Chicanas as submissive, the feminista did not see herself or other women of her culture as such.[16] While the feminist dialogue remained among the activists in El Movimiento, *Encuentro Feminil* testified that there indeed existed a solid initiative toward Chicana feminist thought, that is, recognition of sexism as a primary issue. Clarifying the differences between the needs of the Anglo feminist and the feminista was part of the early feminista's tasks as early as the late 1960s.

Today there is no argument that a new generation of U.S. Latinas and Latinos who are not stereotype machos exists. However, the preponderance for violence against girls and women continues at staggering rates. According to the World Health Organization, in 2013 71 percent of women in the world reported violence by an intimate partner. Women know they are not safe in public spheres but we must consider that we are overwhelmingly not safe within the walls of our homes. We may point to factors such as financial hardship, alcohol and drug abuse, traditions of family honor, lack of schooling, and so on, but the bottom line is the legacy that men have power over females in their midst.

And if the focus of the Chicano male-dominated movement with regard to women had to do with family issues, the feministas zeroed in on the very core of what those issues meant. For instance, they believed that women would make use of birth control and abortion clinics if they felt safe going for these services; that is, if they were community controlled. Birth control and abortion are pertinent issues for all women, but they were particularly significant to the Chicana who had always been at the mercy of Anglo-controlled institutions and policies. Nonconsenting sterilizations of women—poor white, Spanish speaking, welfare recipients, poor women of color—women in prison among them—during the 1970s were being conducted and sponsored by the U.S. government. One third of the female population of Puerto Rico was sterilized during that period.[17] The case of ten Chicanas (*Madrigal v. Quilligan*) against the Los Angeles County Hospital who were sterilized without their consent led to activism demanding release of the Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) guidelines for sterilizations. During the 1970s, HEW was financing up to one hundred thousand sterilizations a year.[18] The feminista also wanted bicultural and bilingual child care that would validate their children's culture and perhaps ward off an inferiority complex before they had a chance to start public school; traditionally, monolingual and Anglocentric schools had alienated children, causing them serious psychological damage.[19]

The early feminista understood how the white woman's movement equated sexism to racism because she was experiencing its compounding effects in her daily life. The feministas were fighting against being a "double minority" in the labor market. According to Nieto Gómez, more Anglo women had jobs than did women of color. We must keep in mind that most women of color in this country have always needed employment to maintain even a level of subsistence for their families.[20]

In Susan Faludi's best-selling *Backlash* in the 1980s, which focused on the media's backlash against the white feminist movement, the only noteworthy observation about women of color referred to our economic status. Faludi stated that overall income did not increase for the African American woman and for the Hispanic woman, it actually got worse. Two decades later this remains true.

CLASHING OF CULTURES

We need not look very far back or for very long to see that we have been marginalized in every sense of the word by U.S. society. But an understanding of the U.S. economic system and its relationship to México is essential in order that we may understand our inescapable role as a productive/reproductive entity within U.S./Mexican society for the past two hundred years. The transnational labor force into which most of us are born was created out of México's neocolonialist relationship to the United States.[21] Throughout the history of the United States, Mexicans have served as a labor reserve controlled by U.S. policy. México encourages the emigration of this labor force to alleviate its own depressed economy, and the United States all too willingly consumes this labor without giving it the benefits enjoyed by U.S. residents. Contrary to the ideological claim of the United States that insists that all immigrants (which by legislature and action meant European) pay their dues before being able to participate fully in its melting pot economy, the underpaid Mexican worker has been crucial to the survival of the profit-based system of the United States. The maquiladoras along the U.S.-México border also illustrate this point.[22]

Since the late sixties, U.S. production has undergone a transfer of manufacturing to less-industrialized nations, such as México.[23] The U.S.-Mexican border has been an appealing site for such assembly operations. Unskilled women pressed with dire economic necessity serve as a reserve for these industries. A continuing influx of labor from the interior of México provides competition and keeps wages at a base minimum. In 2012 daily wage for a maquiladora worker was $7.50 a day.[24] However, much of that industry has relocated to China where workers are paid one third of that salary with heinous disregard to human and legal rights of its workers.[25] The objective of free trade agreements has proven to encourage the highest profits that countries will allow at the expense of their human labor.

The cultural and religious beliefs that maintain that most Latinas on either side of the border are (and should be) dependent on their men for economic survival are not only unrealistic, evidence shows they do not reflect reality. On this side of the border, according to the National Council for Research on Women in 2012, the poverty rates for households headed by African American women and Latinas, were at 40 percent.[26] Thousands of grandmothers took on the responsibility of grandchildren while one or another of the parents served time in prison.[27] We do not have measures for estimating how many undocumented women head households or must leave their children back in their home countries in order to support their families.

Any woman without the major support of the father of her children and who has no other resources in order to survive must commodify her labor. Even most Latino males do not earn enough to support their families and their wives must go outside the home to earn an income (or bring it home in the form of piece work). Furthermore, statistics show that many mothers do not live with the father of their children and do not receive any kind of financial assistance from him.

Most Chicanas/Latinas are not conscienticized. The majority of the populace, on either side of the border, in fact, is not actively devoted to real social change. That sense of inferiority, as when two people were confronted with their *mexicanidad* on the streets of downtown Chicago, permeates most Chicanas' self-perceptions. Lack of conscientización is what makes

Castillo, Ana. Massacre of the Dreamers : Essays on Xicanisma. 20th Anniversary Updated Edition., University of New Mexico Press, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csun/detail.action?docID=1794563.
Created from csun on 2020-03-21 17:21:31.

the maquiladora an ideal worker for the semilegal, exploitative operations of multinational factory production. At an early age we learn that our ethnicity is undesirable. Because of possible rejection, some of us may go to any length to deny our background or play down our ethnicity. But one cannot cruelly judge internalized racism or misogyny. Many women born in the United States or brought during childhood connect more strongly with the culture of the United States. The umbilical cord to their ancestral land was severed. Looking different, that is, not being white or black but something in between in a society that has historically acknowledged only a black/white racial schism is cause for great anxiety. While there are always exceptions, especially today, with more people in the world being offspring of mixed coupling, these comments are arguably less often the case. Our internalized racism causes us to boast of our light coloring, if indeed we have it, or imagine it. We hope for light-skinned children and brag to no end of those infants who happen to be born *güeros* (white looking). We sometimes tragically reject those children who are dark.

On the subject of color and internal conflicts, there are also those who, despite identification with Latino heritage, are light-skinned because of their dominating European genes or because one parent is white. For some this may be an added reason for internalizing racism, particularly when young (since it is difficult to explain the world to yourself when you are growing up). But for others, while their güero coloring may cause them to experience less racial tension in broad society, it may cause tension for a variety of reasons in their home, chosen communities, and when engaging in political activism against racism.

More so in the past, but still current to some extent, is the fact that Mexican Americans were derogatorily considered *pochos*—a Mexican American gringo—by some Mexicans, which only compounded our anxiety over our foreignlike identity in the United States. In the past American-born Mexicans were viewed as either among the traitors (as a result of fleeing from *La Revolución* of 1910) or the trash of México (migrating or escaping for other reasons). Currently, the extent of migration has changed the views of the general public in México. Not only do many people know someone who has migrated, entire villages are affected by migration to El Norte.

Aside from skin color, language can add to the trauma of the Chicana's schizophrenic-like existence. She was educated in English and learned it is the only acceptable language in society, but Spanish was the language of her childhood, family, and community. She may not be able to rid herself of an accent. By the same token, women may also become anxious and self-conscious in later years if they have no or little facility in Spanish. They may feel that they had been forced to forfeit an important part of their personal identity while never finding acceptability in white society.

Race, ethnicity, and language are important factors for women who aspire to a decent standard of living in an Anglocentric, xenophobic society. Gender compounds their social dilemma and determines the very nature of their lifestyle regardless of the ability to overcome all other obstacles set against them. Feminism at its simplest has not ever been solely a political struggle for women's rights, that is, equal pay for equal work. The early feminista's initial attempts at placing women-related issues at the forefront were once viewed with suspicion by Marxist-oriented activists. "The Woman Question" was seen to be separate from or less significant than class issues. By the same token there remained a strong heterosexist bias among Chicano/Hispanic/Latino-based organizations and our varying communities.

On a pragmatic level, the basic premise of Xicanisma is to reconsider behavior long seen as inherent in the Mexic Amerindian woman's character, such as, patience, perseverance, industriousness, loyalty to one's clan, and commitment to our children. Contrary to those who don't understand feminism, we do not reject these virtues. These traits often seen as negative and oppressive to women may be considered strengths. Simultaneously, as we redefine (not categorically reject) our roles within our families, communities at large, and dominant society, our conscientización helps us to be self-confident and assertive regarding the pursuing of our needs and desires.

As brown-skinned females, often bilingual but not from a Spanish-speaking country (and not a Mexican citizen yet generally considered to not really be American), we continue to be viewed by many in our own society in stereotypical and denigrating ways. The U.S. women's movement, which began long before the civil rights movement and the ensuing Chicano movement, is now incorporating a more expansive vision that includes the unique perceptions and experiences of all peoples heretofore excluded from the democratic promise of the United States. Until we are all represented, respected, and protected by society and the laws that govern that society, millions remain countryless women.