La Mujer Chicana

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Recommended Citation
Berry, Erlinda Gonzales, "La Mujer Chicana" (1974). CUNY Academic Works.
https://academicworks.cuny.edu/wsq/141

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LA MUJER CHICANA

La Mujer Chicana, a course in the Women's Studies Program at the University of New Mexico, was taught for the third time in the fall of 1973. The idea for the course germinated in an organization called Las Chicanas. Dissatisfied with their "women's auxiliary role" in the activities of the Chicano Center on campus, these women decided to come together to conduct consciousness-raising sessions. Most of the group were reluctant to become involved in the women's movement, for they felt the kind of intimidation Chicanas often feel before men and white women. But they also felt a strong need for the opportunity to explore feminism within their own cultural context. Why not a class where Chicanas could focus upon their past and evaluate their present powerless situation amidst growing Chicano and feminist movements?

In the spring of 1972 women from the group, under the leadership of Beverley Padilla, a Chicana feminist already under fire because of her pro-abortion article in the campus newspaper, approached Chicano Studies with a proposal for such a class. When the proposal was rejected, Beverley Padillo turned to the Women's Studies Committee on campus. This committee immediately recognized the need for such a class in a state where 40% of the population is Chicano: they agreed that it should be one of the university's first women's studies courses. Offered in the American Studies Program, paid for out of the Women's Studies budget, La Mujer Chicana was taught for the first time during 1972-73, under the guidance of Beverley Padilla and myself.

We spend a great deal of time in our course in consciousness raising: talking about ourselves, our mothers and grandmothers, our sisters, reading and discussing what other Chicanas are feeling and expressing. We read critically about what has been said about la familia—aware that the unqualified glorification of this institution has been and continues to be one of the main causes of our oppression.

We also evaluate our relation to the women's movement and we have discovered thus a bond of empathy. However, we realize that our struggle is not and cannot be the same. We have also found that a great deal of paranoia about the women's movement exists among Chicanas, paranoia resulting from lack of knowledge and understanding. One of the goals of the course is to eradicate this fear through a better understanding of the issues and objectives of the women's movement.

The general attitude of the collaborators of this book is shared by a large number of Chicana feminists and forms the base of our course: the Chicana woman cannot separate her ethnicity from her womanness. As a woman of color and a member of an oppressed minority, she struggles equally against sexism and racism. To dedicate herself solely to combat sexism would mean turning her back on the oppressed men among her people. Hers is a dual battle and a difficult one, for sexism runs rampant in the Chicano movement. But she cannot, must not give up because the Chicano movement needs every one of us. Chicanas are beginning to discover the untapped wealth of potential within themselves. This potential must be developed and channelled into the Chicano movement as well as into a Chicana movement. I view our course as instrumental to this goal.

NEWS FROM CAMPUSES

Additions to our Women's Studies Programs list:
Brooklyn C, CUNY, Brooklyn, N Y 11210—Women's Studies, Evelyn Raskin (psychology), Pamella Farley (English), Directors.
Indiana U, Memorial Hall 219X, Bloomington 47401—Women's Studies, Ellen Dwyer, Dir.
New York; S U of, Binghamton 13901—Women's History Program, Mary P Ryan, Coordinator: program offers curriculum to complement graduate study in a regular area.
Rutgers U, Newark C of Arts and Sciences, Newark, N J 07102—Women's Studies, Marie Collins (French).

Corrections: Boston U does not have an official Women's Studies Program. California S U, San Francisco, does not offer an M.A. degree. Purdue U does not have a Women's Studies Program.
U Mass/Boston, Coordinator: Ann Froines.