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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 Padilla 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.

The problem of finding relevant material—or, better yet, any material dealing directly with the Chicana—seemed insurmountable. As a starting point, we focussed on the dehumanized images presented by Octavio Paz in *Labyrinth of Solitude* and the stereotypes of Villaroel in his documentary novel *Pocho*. The task before us was to attempt to understand the cultural forces behind these images which reflect the concrete role of Chicana women: on the one hand, the idealized mother, suffering and passive, avatar of Our Lady of Guadalupe, high on her pedestal; on the other, a pathetic woman, trampled under the feet of egotistical machos who turn on their women in reaction to the stripping of *their* human dignity at the hands of the Man and his system.

In time we discovered that other Chicanas in the Southwest, especially in California, were involved in classes of their own. One of the highlights of the second semester was a visit from Dorinda Moreno, a dynamic woman from California—a poet, activist, mother of three children and student at California State University at San Francisco. Dorinda Moreno has dedicated herself to the task of writing, uncovering and publishing materials by and about Chicanas and our Latin *hermanas*. *La Mujer—en pie de lucha*, edited by Dorinda Moreno, marks a cornerstone in our struggle.

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 womanhood. 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), Pamela Farley (English), Coordinators.

Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, N Y 14456—Women's Studies, Janet M Wedel, Coordinator: program offers "individual major" in Women's Studies.

Indiana U, Memorial Hall 219X, Bloomington 47401—Women's Studies, Ellen Dwyer, Dir.

Michigan, U of, 1058 L S & A Bldg, Ann Arbor, Mich 48104—Women's Studies, Nancy Rupprecht, Evaluation Coordinator.

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.

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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 primary objective of the course is to provide an ambiance where Chicanas can get together to discuss and understand their mutual condition. Most rewarding has been the end of each semester when women are able to state that they feel a new confidence growing within. It is through self-knowledge and self-understanding that this confidence begins to emerge. Chicanas have had little opportunity for self-development. They have been too busy conforming to the strict and arbitrary roles imposed by our culture and devoting themselves to the group consciousness that *la familia* fosters.

It is interesting to note that as Chicanas move toward the development of self, white women move toward group consciousness. Each is going where the other has been. Does the answer lie somewhere at the midpoint? I do not know, but the Chicano movement must make way for the new Chicana, and the women's movement must allow her to progress within her own particular circumstances. This approach may seem too slow, or even futile to white feminists. For brown feminists I see it as the least alienating possibility. The Women's Studies Collective at the University of New Mexico has recognized our needs and has never demonstrated a patronizing attitude toward our slow struggle.

Erlinda Gonzales Berry