

El Movimiento de la Mujer Chicana: The Fight Against Sexism, Racism, and Oppression from  
Advocacy to Academia  
by  
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For my family, friends, and my boyfriend who have always been there and pushed me to be the best version of myself. Si se pudo.

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## Abstract

In my thesis, I evaluate the history of the Chicana movement in order to understand the way sexism, racism, education, artwork, and academia functions around the Chicana feminist movement. Chicana women had to create their own spaces, teach each other their history, and demand a change in the rigidity of academia.

In my first chapter, I dive into what the Chicana movement was about and the spaces that were created within the movement; many of which excluded the women. I analyze spaces that actively excluded Chicana women and the new spaces that were created to grapple with these exclusionary practices. It is important to first understand the movement and its origins in order to understand what it is today.

In my second chapter I analyze the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, who is considered one of the mothers of Chicana feminism, in order to understand the dynamics that academia has set in place that limit Chicana feminism. Anzaldúa critiques the rigidity academia tries to enclose scholars and creative writers in. She enables a new consciousness to embody a new Mestiza. This new Mestiza creates a new scholar that is not limited or enclosed by academia but rather someone who is in the middle of a confusing grey area. This is to demonstrate the way academia excludes and hinders creativity and the embodiment of activism and academia in one.

In my third chapter, I analyze work done by Anna Nieto-Gomez to understand the spaces these women had to create for themselves because they were excluded by men, academia, and racism. Nieto-Gomez was a part of the generation of the Chicana movement that was very much focused on activism but also focused heavily on the academic side that Anzaldúa is trying to understand. In this chapter, I analyze some of the spaces created by women to become more educated and politically active in order to gain more momentum for the Chicana movement to reach a new Mestiza consciousness that continues to be revolutionary.

In my fourth chapter, I interviewed two women, Maria Cotera and Maria Salinas, who are both very prominent Chicanas. Maria Cotera followed in her mother's footsteps and continued work around Chicana feminism through her work in an academic setting. She has continuously published and now hopes to move to a more hands on and interactive involvement with the Chicana feminist movement. On the other hand, Maria Salinas is an activist in southwest Detroit who was in an academic setting, but turned into a more grassroots activist approach to make her mark in the Chicana feminist movement. I interviewed both of these women to get a better understanding of where the movement is heading. Through their experiences I was able to get a better understanding of what is being done and how the work done before affected these generations. I do this in the hopes of better understanding the future generations that may be impacted by the work being done now.

All of these women have impacted the future generations of Chicana feminists. I hope that through my thesis I am able to get an understanding of the way Chicana feminism has changed and continues to do so in order to reach a new consciousness.

Keywords: Chicana, academia, racism, feminist

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## Introduction

Growing up in a poor neighborhood in Detroit, I attended Detroit Public Schools for most of my education. In these spaces, I was able to experience some of the things the Chicana feminist movement was trying to change, although, at that time, I was unaware. I attended schools located in the Mexican-town area of Detroit, and thus the student body was predominantly composed of Latinx individuals. The small classrooms meant for 25 students often housed over 35 students; being late usually meant having to either stand or sit on the floor. Our makeshift cafeteria was the gymnasium. The books we received were worn out, ripped, and written on. Yet, even then, our teachers had to scribble who took what book number meticulously. Although I did not know any better at that time, these educational conditions were not adequate, and I slowly became aware that these were not the same experiences of every typical student. Our education was immensely impacted by the disproportionate educational opportunities students of a low-socioeconomic status and a Latinx background obtain compared to those of a white background and a high-socioeconomic status.

Once I arrived at the University of Michigan, I dove into English classes because I had a great passion for reading and writing. During my first English seminars, I never thought to question why I never really heard of Chicana feminists, or any Chicana figure in general, other than the typical mention of Cesar Chavez every once in a while. However, that dramatically changed when I took my first women's studies course, and I was assigned *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. As I read poems and essays that not only resonated with me in ways that the literature, I was exposed to had failed to, but I also became more conscious. I began to question why I was not often seeing names like Gloria Anzaldúa, Anna Nieto-Gomez, Maria Cotera, or any of the other very vital feminist writers in these English

classes. This then opened up my interest in the Feminist Chicana Movement and what it accomplished; this is the stem of my thesis idea. My thesis is very close to who I am as a person and the future work I plan to do as I continue my education. Creating a space for those that look like me on a professional and grassroots level is vital. The best way to accomplish this is through research that can explain how the past, the Chicano movement, has impacted the present, current Chicana activism to create more change. I will be doing this by analyzing the Chicana Feminist movement and diving deeper into how the sexism in the Chicana movement and the exclusion of Chicana women in feminist circles and academia created a need in the Chicana Feminist Movement that continues today. Academia and activism go hand in hand. Although circles around academia want to create a defined line between the two, it is time to understand that they co-exist and complement each other rather than being two different things. To create a space for Chicana feminist writers, there needs to be a space for a new consciousness that includes activism and academia. There is a robust and vital connection between these two things because they complement each other. Chicana feminism arose from activism that was very involved in creating educational spaces. They were able to do this through literature written by the Chicanas in the 60's and '70s and the spaces they created.

In my thesis, I am looking to explore how Chicana literature is read, understood, and taught in relation to the Chicana feminist movement and how it affects Chicana women growing up in the United States. While at the same time taking into consideration the activism and educational implications that go hand in hand in the Chicana feminist movement. To accomplish this, I will be referencing two very prominent Chicana feminist scholars who have shaped this movement and continue to revolutionize and cultivate our history, education, and advocacy spaces. Scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa and Anna Nieto-Gomez watered the seed of Chicana

feminism. I want to explore what is being cultivated from this and how we continue to grow and change this seed for it to prosper. In my first chapter, I will give a background of the Chicana movement to explore the sexism and constraints that this movement had and the committees, scholars, ideas, and activists that emerged from this vital movement in U.S. history. In my second chapter, I focus on Gloria Anzaldua, and I explore literary works of hers that contribute to our understanding of the Chicana movement and the way in which this movement was challenged and was able to be shaped by some of her writings. To do this, I focus on her struggle with academia and its lack of space for open interpretation of education and activism. The exclusion of Chicana feminist scholars was a significant issue during Anzaldua's time. She died writing essential literature that addressed these issues and how crucial a change in academia was needed; sadly, this continues to be something that lacks representation and inclusion. Academia continues to create a rigid space that does not include both an understanding of scholarship and grassroots organizing but instead tries to cage them into either scholarly or activist; this was a colossal battle Anzaldua had with the academic world. In my third chapter, I focus on Anna Nieto-Gomez. I analyze many of the newspapers and activism that took place during the '70s in connection to her work to explore how the Chicana movement was embedded with sexism that was not supportive of the Chicana feminist movement. At the same time, her work and activism respond to issues that Anzaldua is bringing up in her works; Nieto-Gomez approaches it differently than Anzaldua. In my final chapter, I bring it full circle and include interviews with two very prominent Chicana feminist figures; Maria Cotera, a Chicana feminist scholar, and Maria Salinas, a very prominent Chicana activist in Southwest Detroit. Conducting an interview will help us better understand the impact that some of the work done in the Chicana movement continues to have on the work that Chicana activists do and the way this movement is morphing.

In my thesis, I analyze those things for which the Chicana feminist movement was fighting that have yet to be accomplished in the present. Along with the works of two Chicana activists, Gloria Anzaldua and Anna Nieto-Gomez, to help us better understand current Chicana activism and its role in academia. To do this, I first analyze sexism and the response that is created in the feminist movement. Instead of silencing the Chicana feminists, it started a reaction of more activism from these women, who began to create spaces for themselves. I analyze these changes by using the prominent works of Chicana Feminists like Gloria Anzaldua and Anna Nieto-Gomez. By analyzing these authors and their works, I hope to understand better how their work continues to influence and shape current Chicana activism in academia, education, and el Movimiento itself. By doing this, we will understand the impact of the Chicana Feminist movement in contemporary activism and the work being done now in academia by Chicana Feminists like Maria Cotera.

There are many terms that I use throughout my thesis that some individuals may not be familiar with. I have added a glossary at the end of this thesis, but I want to highlight and discuss some of these terms before continuing. One of the terms I use often is “Chicanx,” and it refers to someone who is Mexican American (Mexican parents), is Mexican and has grown up in the United States or has any Mexican descent. The Chicana is the feminine version so it would be for a female of Mexican origin or descent (who can be born somewhere else but grew up in the United States). A Chicano is the masculine form and refers to a male of Mexican origin or descent (who can be born somewhere else but grew up in the United States). The term Chicanx is the genderless way of calling someone of Mexican descent or who is Mexican. These terms can be used depending on gender, and I use them often throughout my work.

## **El Movimiento Social de Las Mujeres / The Social Movement of Women**

The new Chicano Feminist Movement wave that came in the '60s and the '70s was a response to the experiences that Chicana activists were enduring during that time. During the rise of the Chicano Movement, the Chicana Feminist Movement worked to combat the sexism that was embedded in the Movimiento. Although the Chicano Movement consisted of Mexican American individuals fighting for change, they often left out Chicana women. This Chicano movement forgot the struggles for equality and representation of Chicana women. I started to make connections with the lack of Chicana activist representation in the movement and the lack of Chicana representation now.

However, I want to clarify that it is vital to understand that my thesis is not blatantly against Chicano men. Chicano men are victims of institutional oppression and systematic racism in similar ways as Chicanas. The roles Chicano men seem to bring upon themselves in the hopes of creating change in the Chicano movement have caused them to bulldoze over Chicana issues. They, too, are oppressed; they try to "make up for it" and continue this system of oppression for the Chicanas in the movement. Our brothers in the Chicano movement need to be reminded that to reach liberation, they too have to leave the chains of sexism in the past and fight hand in hand for Chicana issues in the same way they wrestle against Chicano oppression. I will analyze this sexism in the Movimiento to better understand the response that Chicana feminism had. Like Chicano men, our non-Chicano counterparts can also work to change the institutions' racism, bias, and stereotypes that continue to hinder Chicano individuals from reaching liberation. It is my hope that by the end of my thesis, there can be a more transparent way in which one can do this.

### **El Movimiento Educacional / The Educational Movement**

To accomplish the goal of my thesis, I must also analyze the Chicana activists in academia. They have created huge strides in academia with authors like Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez, but academia is still a very elitist institution. With my thesis, I hope to analyze why academia works in a way that often makes Chicana feminism appear as something stagnant that ended in the '60s and '70s. Authors like Anzaldua have noticed trends like these in academia and have called this out; she has even asked for her books that are often taught in women studies courses to supplement more recent writings by Chicanas in academia who are doing great work. I want to analyze this exclusion of Chicana women from academia to show the bridge between the struggles of the Chicana Feminist Movement in the '60s and '70s and the struggles now concerning activism and academic works in the present. At the same time, I will analyze how they weaved together art, education, and academia to reach the new Chicana "consciousness" that allowed for freedom of expression, the beauty of learning one's history, and the joy that came from organizing for a much-needed change systematically and locally. To do this, I must dive into the history of Chicana feminism in education and the work that is being done now.

## **Chapter 1: The History of the Chicano Movement: Mexican Americans in the United States**

Many people are unaware of the deep-rooted history of Mexicans in the United States. However, it is a history that has always been there and continues to impact people in the United States today significantly. Mexicans lived in territories under Spanish control in what is now the western part of the United States. It was not very populated, so the Spanish decided to populate it more than it was. They created Catholic missions to colonize these areas with mestizos (mixed race; usually refers to Indigenous and Spanish mixture) and Mexico's indigenous people. After Mexico gained its independence from Spain, the northern part of Mexico was still not as populated as they wanted, so they allowed Americans who agreed to be Catholic and governed by the Mexican government to live in these territories. Soon after, it became heavily inhabited by Americans who quickly rebelled against the Mexican government and began what is known as the Mexican American War. This war ended with the defeat of Mexico. They agreed on what is known as the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, where Mexico ceded 55 percent of its territory, including parts of present-day Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah, to the United States (Reeves 1905). They then allowed any Mexican who resided in these territories a year to either leave "back" to Mexico or to remain in this new American land and keep their land and become full citizens of the United States. However, this treaty proved to be disregarded. These new Mexican Americans were often forced out of their lands, and their rights were repeatedly violated; their land was taken, and they were treated as second-class citizens. Mexican Americans were often lynched and had their rights violated, even though they were supposed to be seen as being "fully" American citizens (San Miguel 1995).

## The Chicano Movement

Activism by Mexicans and Mexican Americans has been occurring for a long time, especially in the Southwest part of the United States. However, it was during the 1960s when Chicano activism reached an unprecedented peak. This movement allowed young students to raise their voices and take the name Chicano/a/x as a revolutionary term. Chicano individuals were the target of racist attacks, lynching, and fewer educational opportunities. Although many of these people lived their whole lives here or were born in the United States, they were treated as inferior and often depicted as thugs, gangsters, and criminals. It is said that "Chicano/a history emerged as a product of the Chicano Movement because of our people's social and psychic need to gain self-knowledge" (Chavarria 44), especially living in a place where they often felt like they did not belong. It was a movement that allowed the unity of Mexicans and Mexican Americans towards a better lifestyle for themselves in a country that claimed them as citizens but did not treat them as such. Chicanos "are colonized people in the United States, (Chavarria 44)" a fact that has brought to question how race and class work together to keep this group marginalized. Mexican Americans' educational gap was also a fundamental issue that the Chicano movement was trying to wrestle. They were not obtaining the same education as their white counterparts and were in schools with little to no resources; this creates systemic oppression for Chicano individuals. Many Chicano students, therefore, decided to participate in this movement for education equality. Thus, in the '60s, a wave of Chicano activism emerged with new ideas of knowing one's history, educating others on it, and contributing to its emergence. This way was different because students led it, and often they were very vocal and inspired by other civil rights movements of the time (unlike the older wave, which was less known and was more sporadic). The Chicano movement happened because Mexican Americans,

who make up 62% of Latinx individuals in the United States (Noe-Bustamante), wanted their voices heard, their history acknowledged, and a new wave of activism.

The Chicano movement was also significantly impacted other social movements happening at that time. The struggles of Chicano individuals were very similar to those the African American community was facing, so it was often seen that these two movements worked side by side. Other movements and groups that impacted and influenced the Chicano movement were the Young Lords, the Brown Berets, and the Black Panthers, all with very similar ideals as the Chicano movement.

### **Women in the Chicano Movement**

Women's role in the Chicano movement is often overlooked, but these Chicana women have been and continue to fight for a space that upholds their voice, their rights, and their autonomy. The Chicano movement has always been seen as a male-dominated space. Many Chicanas have called out sexism and the lack of women's representation in the movement. Chicana feminism acts as an agent to fight the typical traditions and stereotypes in Mexican households that perpetuate sexism and machismo. It was one of the reasons that Chicanas demanded more representation in the movement. They no longer wanted to have the stigma of being a "traditional Mexican woman" whose whole life revolves around taking care of her household, husband, and children. Many Chicana activists in the movement are often forgotten and ignored in historical conversations. One example is Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. One of the most known people in the Chicano movement was Cesar Chavez, a farmworker who helped create the United Farm Workers Organization in Delano, California. Dolores Huerta, who co-founded the United Farm Workers Organization, is often forgotten. Chavez is frequently the only one attributed to this accomplishment and for the very successful nationwide strike on

grapes that demanded better working conditions for farmworkers. Chicana women were often ignored in academia and grassroots movements. Issues like these oiled the wheels for a movement of feminism by Chicanas that continues to this day.

One event that helped bring light to the Chicana feminist movement was the 1969 Chicano Youth Liberation Conference held in Denver, Colorado. This conference allowed Chicana women to bring light to the machismo and sexism in the movement and Mexican households. They forced their way into these male-dominated conversations and began a revolutionary change to the Chicanax movement and the feminist movement that is still being felt today in academia. Chicanas struggled with "the sexual discrimination that ethnic Mexican women experienced in the academy, and in general, caused Chicanas to look for the roots of this triple oppression" (Chávez 510). This triple oppression was caused by sexism (which stems from anti-woman beliefs), racism (being anti-brown or anti-anything that is not white), and racialized sexism (which encompasses anti-brown-womanness) as our white counterparts, sexist Chicanaxs, and institutions ignore the demands brought forth by Chicana feminists. Often activists in the field were questioned about their ability to create academic writings that were deemed fit for the academic world.

### **Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA)**

During the '60s and '70s, there were a lot of social justice movements. The Chicanax movement grew in momentum and support during these times alongside social justice movements like the Civil Rights Movement, the Brown Berets Movement, and the Black Power Movements. In April 1969, the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education held a meeting where they invited individuals to "formulate a plan to reform institutions of higher education in their state" (Licion 76), where MEChA and the Chicano Plan for Higher Education

were born. From this, the MEChA movement arose in the hopes of "representing the rights of Mexican Americans and continues to struggle for social equality within the university setting" (Valle 2). Fortunately, it is also "one of the few organizations of the Civil Rights era that has not only survived but managed to grow. It has increased its membership and expanded its area of influence to include the high schools, while continuing to maintain its presence in colleges and universities throughout the nation" (Valle 2), allowing for a continued growth that is vital to the Chicana movement. During these times, student activism reached an all-time high and created a safe space for students to unveil their activism; in this activism, MEChA played a huge role in opening up discussions for Mexican Americans about inequality, scholarship, activism, and re-defining being a Mexican American. One specific chapter of MEChA that I want to focus on is one in Arizona; this chapter created a lot of Chicana resources for their student body (which heavily identifies as Chicana), and "many of the previous generations of Chicano activists help run these organizations" (Valle 11), which shows how deep their connection to MEChA and its mission was. This created a space for Chicana activists to uplift some of their struggles. Still, unfortunately, they found that "when forging movement goals and practices, leaders, as well as the rank-and-file, failed to interrogate the role of patriarchy and sexism within Mexican American communities and US society as a whole" (Licion 77), which again showed that there were struggles within the movement that excluded the issues Chicana women were experiencing. Although Chicanas pushed for "social and political change for all Chicanas/os" (Licion 77), they wanted also to address and work to solve issues that were affecting them as Chicana women. Even in a group created to fight for social justice change, Chicana women were being sidelined and had to push very hard for their issues and struggles to be seen as an issue for the Chicana community as a whole.

### **Third World Liberation Front**

In 1968 members of color at San Francisco State University created the Third World Liberation Front. This was a movement that fought for ethnic studies programs in the United States. They held the longest student strike ever held—five months—which resulted in the creation of the first College of Ethnic Studies in the United States. This "represented a culmination for historically oppressed communities in their effort to achieve liberation in one area of their lives - education" (Delgado), which was one of the most significant issues in the agenda of the Chicano movement. This was a huge win for many since it began a change in how the whole country saw and understood education. It now included the vital history and impact of other ethnicities. It "led the way and inspired other young revolutionaries and activists to fight for culturally and politically relevant curriculum" that has been excluded from the educational system. Although not all problems were fixed, this win "represented a moment of victory for the historically marginalized in the *longue durée* of American oppression and resistance" (Delgado), which the Chicano movement took great strides to help accomplish.

The Chicano movement is a movement that has many waves; it occurred on multiple campuses that were looking for a change. One of these was at the University of California, Berkeley, where they tried to have a curriculum that included "racial formation theory, internal colonialism, critical analysis of race, ethnicity, and gender in politics, law, economics, literature, and multicultural epistemology" (Cook 4), which directly fights for better education regarding Chicano and ethnic studies. Although this seems like a very standard and needed program in all universities, during these times, the Third World Liberation Front had to do great grassroots

work to establish a curriculum that was more ethnically diverse and representative of all-American ethnic groups that have all significantly impacted history.

### **Foreshadowing Anzaldua**

From these movements, much activism and scholarship continue to arise. One of the very prominent writers who emerged and participated in these movements was Gloria Anzaldua. Her contributions still shake the core of the Chicana movement regarding Chicana power, activism, scholarship, and feminism.

## Chapter 2: Anzaldua

### The New Mestiza: An Analysis of Gloria Anzaldua in Relation to Triple Oppression and Academia

"The white man speaks: *Perhaps if you scrape the dark off of your face. Maybe if you bleach your bones. Stop speaking in tongues, stop writing left-handed. Don't cultivate your colored skins nor tongues of fire if you want to make it in a right handed world.*

Man, like all the other animals, fears and is repelled by that which he does not understand, and mere difference is apt to connote something malign."

Gloria Anzaldua

In the second chapter of my thesis, I want to analyze some of Gloria Anzaldua's works. She is considered one of the mothers of Chicana Feminism, and she is one of the most known Chicana scholars. Anzaldua pushed back against the idea of academia and scholarship; she broke away from those rules because her work was both scholarly and literary. As she often explains in her writing, she embodies a new Mestiza with a new consciousness that is "in-between," not really in a certain space with certain rules. Although many would argue that she is not a scholar but rather a creative writer, I argue that she is an example of where academia needs to begin to shift. Through work like "Towards a New Consciousness," she explains how she is "norteadá" or "lost" in all the voices around her, which includes the voice of academia that limits and hinders the use of creative expression to be used and be considered scholarly work. It gets labeled as literature or creative writing and given less importance and less recognition. She no longer wants to be in this place brought on by academia that limits her; instead, she "has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries the borders and walls that are supposed to keep

the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns are the enemies within" (Borderlands 79). The limitations that are placed on Chicanas, and many other "creative writers," by academia hinder creative expression that is necessary. Anzaldua has also been known as a scholar who has written against the sexism in the Chicano movement and the triple oppression caused by white men, white women, and the men in the Chicano movement, making her a very important scholar to analyze when trying to bring light to the issues that have inherently affected Chicano activists and continue to do so in both everyday life and when it comes to works of literature accepted by academia. She focused a lot on scholarly work that aimed to change the view of Chicanas and the Chicano movement and reconnect us with our indigenous roots. I will analyze her work in the hopes of shining light on how she felt as someone alive and active during some of the uprisings of the Chicano movement and as a scholar and literary figure until her death. I will analyze one of her writings and one of her interviews to better obtain a picture of what she believed in and how she implemented these beliefs into her work.

### **Towards a New Mestiza Consciousness**

It is important first to define some words that I use to describe my authors and how academia seems to label them. A scholar is considered to be someone who is in a particular branch of study where they are a specialist. However, a scholar is deemed to be someone who sticks to academia's rules when it comes to what is considered scholarship. On the other hand, there is also the label of being a creative writer who writes literature which in some senses seems to hold less importance in academia which has very strict rules on what is considered scholarship and what is considered literature. Anzaldua challenges this rigidity and calls for a more fluent acceptance of both terms because there should not be limits on educational expressions. Like Anzaldua, many Chicana activists and "scholars" did not want to be molded into these ideas of

academia but rather wanted to work to expand them in order to both have more freedom of expression and allow it to reach as many people as possible—not only to those with the privilege of an education. Chicanas who are now seen as the mothers of Chicana feminist academia, like Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga, were often, and at times continue to be, questioned on whether their forms of writings could be seen as literature. Many question if their work could be considered scholarship or literature or neither; this exemplifies why a new consciousness needs to be implemented where there are no rigid lines defining these things. Calling these works testimony or personal essay is problematic because it does not give it the importance it deserves and, in a way, devalues what they are trying to say. It can also be problematic because the creation of these writings has a purpose and an audience they are trying to reach and if they are called a testimony or a personal essay, they might not reach these audiences and thus it limits them. Their works were often created in forms that are not typical of the academic world, but they are still vital works that hold power and education necessary to understand Chicana feminism. Anzaldua has a very different approach to language than that of the typical scholar since she tends to mix Spanish and English and uses a lot of slang. She does it in a way that does not diminish her work's academic validity; rather, she makes her reader an active reader who has to become educated about what she is talking about. Not only are her ideas and evidence complex, well-constructed, and well-supported, but through her language, she also demonstrates the scholarly nature of these essays. She may write "chingado" in one sentence, only to be followed by high diction such as "dominant paradigms," "pseudo-liberal," "doppelganger," or "metamorphoses alchemically" (Castillo-Garsow 6). Typically, the canon is reserved for works by white men who held power and were well educated. Their form of writing was very standard, and it was, and certainly continues to be, exclusive of women of color. Anzaldúa's use of mixing

languages makes her distinctive as a scholar and allows for us, as readers, to immerse ourselves in the form of literature that is not typical but necessary and revolutionary.

Analyzing the work Anzaldua has done is vital because he is pushing against the typical scholarship model; many people in the academic world do not want to consider her work scholarly. They claim there is a very defined line between scholarship and literature, and if one writes one or the other, they label you as a scholar or as a creative writer. Anzaldua challenged this; she challenged this rigid system that wanted to label her work, limit her imagination as an individual, and cage her as a scholar or creative writer. They refused to understand that her work included both but at the same time excluded both. There is a false separation that academia and scholars try to make and do not realize that there is no such thing as non-artistic, non-educational art, non-educational creative writing that could also be scholarship. When she and many other Chicanas like Anna Nieto-Gomez found themselves in the world of academia, they tried to force them into an environment where they had to negotiate their entities of being Chicanas, activists, scholars, creative writers, etc. However, they pushed back against these labels. This is a very difficult in-between that they wanted to bring to academia because Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez embody the contradictory and enable a unique consciousness and worldview that academia has been unable to accept. Anzaldua wrote a chapter in her book *Borderlands / La Frontera* called "La conciencia de la Mestiza / Towards a New Consciousness," in this chapter, she explains how she is in-between two worlds where she has to balance the labels society places on her and what she knows. Anzaldua seems to be in the middle of a new form of consciousness that is very difficult to explain and navigate (*Borderlands*). She focuses on embracing the contradictions and dwells on both sides of the border at once, which is very much how she sees this world of literature and scholarship in academia. However, although this is a difficult and unknown place

to be in, she does not run from it; instead, she embraces it by creating literature that is also scholarship, and it needs to be treated as such by the academic and activist worlds because they go hand in hand.

**The Triple Oppression: white men, white women, and the men in her own community**

Even when literature by scholars like Anzaldua finally began to be accepted, there seemed to be a pushback against this new consciousness as Chicana scholars. It became a norm to teach literature written by the typical Chicana authors like Anzaldua and Moraga as if Chicana feminist activism has become stagnant. Anzaldua wrote,

I got tired of hearing students say that *Bridge* was required in two or three of their women's studies courses, tired of being a resource for teachers and students who asked me what texts by women of color they should read or teach and where they could get these writings. I had grown frustrated that the same few women-of-color were asked to read or lecture in universities and classrooms or submit work to anthologies and quarterlies. Why weren't other women-of-color being asked? (Anzaldua, *Making Face* xvi)

This is a vital comment made by a pioneer in the Chicana feminist movement that highlights the flaws that continue to ostracize Chicana women when it comes to the world of academia. It is important to acknowledge that "until astonishingly recently, Anglophone Chicana literature has been institutionally homeless, perceived as marginal, or second rate, thus not respected within English Department circles" (Castillo-Garsow 3). Anzaldua made it into what some call the "English canon" which is a great accomplishment but at the same time a loss. This is because although she is now taught in some Chicana classes, there wasn't a big enough shift in

academia in the way she envisioned and guided her work towards. Instead academia has been unable to find the balance between activism and education that is necessary to begin to understand the new Mestiza consciousness Anzaldua was trying to embody. Anzaldua did not have the goal to be canonized and be allowed into this elite space academia creates, but rather it was to expand it and exterminate the rigid rules surrounding it. She resists these labels and instead focuses on the very difficult task of trying to find herself in this grey area of academia and create a space that is "in-between" both. However, it is vital to realize that it seems like academia wants to remain with the same authors, who get taught in every Chicana Feminist class, and often forget that this is a movement with new faces, new ideas, and new forms of literature and theory that also deserve to be acknowledged, respectfully read and analyzed, and used for educational purposes.

One very crucial and challenging work written by Gloria Anzaldua is called *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers*, which was included in the revolutionary book, which Anzaldua co-edited, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Anzaldua believed in the idea of the triple oppression caused by white men, white women, and the men in her community, and this piece of literature is vital to understanding her ideas and to whom she may be speaking since it is written in a letter form. The rigidness in academia has these labels of scholarship and literature that do not allow Anzaldua and many other writers of color to open up more spaces and to exceed the boundaries that institutions and racism set in place in an attempt to hinder them. In this work, Anzaldua believed that a conversation about unchaining oneself from this oppressive system was difficult to have and heavily debated on how to write this. She finally settled on writing it as a letter because she wanted to write it in a form that allowed for intimacy and immediacy (Anzaldua 163). She writes this letter that is addressed

to "my dear hermanas (163)" in which she tells them that "the dangers we (women of color) face as women writers of color are not the same as those of white women though we have many in common" (Anzaldua 163) in order for her to emphasize that although they have a similar struggle because both are women, they are still very different and have different problems. She refers to not having as much to lose, not having friends in high places, and being invisible and inaudible as women of color in the world of writing. This is something that Anzaldua described as speaking "in tongues like the outcast and the insane" (Anzaldua, *This Bridge Called* 163). Anzaldua points out that there are these huge differences between them, women of color in academic and the already marginalized white women. Their struggle to get recognized as a part of the academia world is a much harder process, and it is because, as Anzaldua describes it, "white eyes do not want to know us, they do not bother to know our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit." This can be seen as the same unwillingness in academia to understand the new consciousness that is both academic and activism.

### **Education and Resources: Feelings of Alienation in Academia**

Another very important goal that Anzaldua fought for to free oneself from this oppression is the improvement of educational resources for Chicana individuals. The resources that predominantly white schools offer are not the same because "the schools that we attend or did not attend did not give us the skills for writing nor the confidence that we were correct in using our class and ethnic language" (Anzaldua, *This Bridge Called* 163). This is very important because it highlights something that the Chicana movement tried to advocate for: better education and opportunities for Chicana individuals. Yet this oppressive phenomenon is still happening as we see in big cities like Detroit and Chicago, where the public education system continues to fail and harm students of color. Many Chicana scholars, like Anzaldua, majored in

subjects like English to spite "arrogant, racist teachers who thought all Chicano children were dumb and dirty" (Anzaldua, *This Bridge Called* 163) in order to try to dismantle these erroneous and harmful beliefs which lead to the lack of representation and acceptance of Chicanas in the world of academia. The belief that Chicana women do not belong in academia has bled into the lives of generations of Chicana women, and it continues to seep through as Anzaldua questions her validity as a Chicana writer. "Who am I, a poor Chicanita from the sticks, to think I can write?" (Anzaldua, *Speaking in Tongues* 166) This lack of resources and education, as well as the otherness attached to Chicana, continue to create a gap that results in the lack of representation and acceptance in the world of academia that has been caused by the triple oppression from white men, white women, and the men in our community.

Anzaldua also warns against the dangers that educated Chicana women can run into when having a degree and becoming "La Vendida" (Anzaldua, *This Bridge Called* 165), or a "sell-out" in our community, by accepting the limitations that are set by academia. However, she urges the younger Chicana women to accept their tongue and their fire and create something of value to women of color. Anzaldua believes that "we cannot allow ourselves to be tokenized. We must make our own writing and that of Third World women the first priority" (Anzaldua, *This Bridge Called* 166) even if these different types of writing are not what some educated individuals see as something scholarly.

Anzaldua's approach was an academic one. She looked to tackle these institutional hindrances against Chicana scholars by immersing herself in the world of academic writing while at the same time bringing a new consciousness that includes both activism and academia. This is a very interesting move because, during this time, most of the work being done around the movement had a more activist aspect to it. This then led to a change in the movement, which

caused a divide between academia and activism that was based more around grassroots activism. But the question arose to Anzaldua and many other Chicana feminist scholars of why we should not embrace both activism and academia and create a new consciousness. As Anzaldua worked in academia, she challenged these norms and questioned the work being done in these spaces and for whom this work was being done. With a background in art, Anzaldua also tried to be more inclusive in her work to individuals outside of academia by including a lot of visuals and artwork in her publications.

Anzaldua also did many interviews during her life that shed a lot of light on the work she was doing, and the obstacles Chicana women were and continue to face in academia and everyday life. One of these interviews was conducted by Debbie Blake and Carmen Abrego called "Doing Gigs: Speaking, Writing, and Change." Interviews are interesting to analyze because, as Anzaldua said when asked if she "exposed" herself during interviews: "Yes, I discover what I'm trying to say while I'm being interviewed just like I discover what I'm trying to say when I write. I don't sit down and say, 'I'm going to write a certain thing.' Instead, I say, 'I'm going to explore this idea and see where it takes me'" (Keating 200). This is less edited than your typical form of writing and can help shed better light on these issues. In this interview, they discuss many things, but one of them is writing and academia. Anzaldua says that believes "academia wants to sever the dreamer's connections; it doesn't want to connect the personal and the academic, the spiritual and the intellectual, or the emotions and body. Maybe others find the kinds of connections we make in our writings hard to read and comprehend. I don't know." (Keating 144). This in itself is the new understanding of "literature" that has to be acknowledged in academia.

Chicana women, like Anzaldua, create works of literature that involve their intersectionality and thus create something that has not been accepted or recognized enough in both academia and life. The idea of severing "the dreamer's connections" is vital to understanding Chicana feminism, especially in academia, because too often, it has deep connections to roots, history, and experiences that tend to be glossed over by academia. This idea that some forms of literature, like Anzaldua's, cannot be read or comprehend because one cannot find the connections made is the epitome of why the understanding of what literature and scholarship is has to drastically change in order to include works by Chicana scholars. Anzaldua wrote that "rhetoric that presents its conjectures as universal truths while concealing its patriarchal privilege and posture. It is a rhetoric riddled with ideologies of racism which hush our voices so that we cannot articulate our victimization" (Anzaldua, *Making Faces* xxiii). This shows the embedded sexism and in academia that she and other Chicanas have worked to overcome. Although academia has changed in some ways to include some Chicana feminist scholarly education, it is still lacking and continues to hold ideologies of racism and sexism that hinder a better understanding of how activism and education go hand in hand.

#### **Artwork as an educational tool in Anzaldua's work**

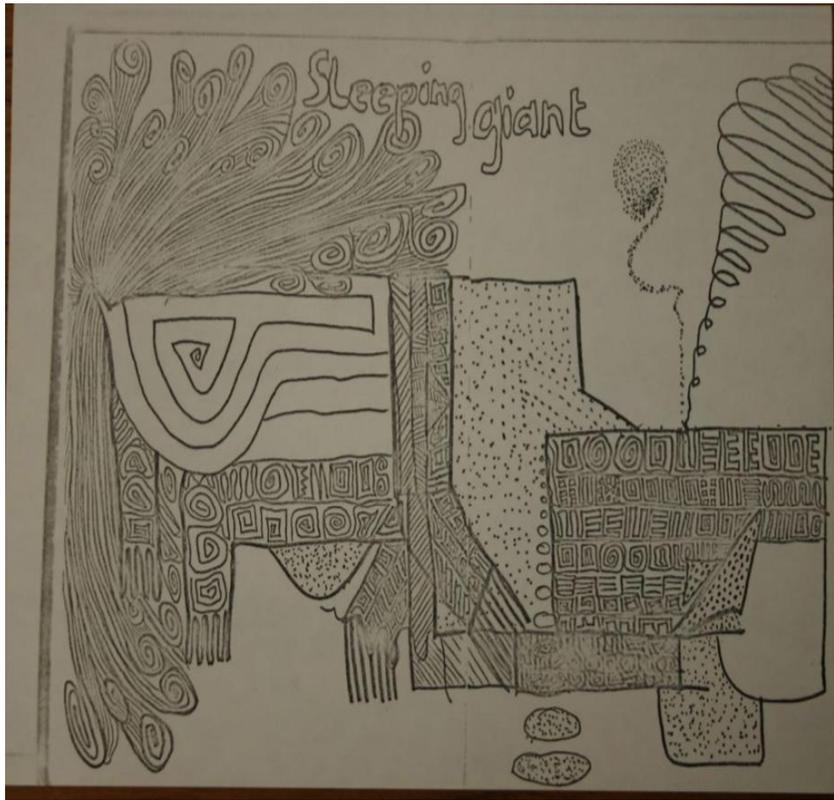
Anzaldua strongly felt that artwork and illustrations were vital to understanding Chicana feminism, and she often drew things out herself and even wrote children's books where she worked very closely with the illustrators. When she was working on *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, she wanted more pictures to accompany the writings to better complement the book but was unable to due to the cost of printing and other obstacles. She had a background in art and wanted to use that as much as possible to develop her thoughts and ideas.



One of these works is the figure shown above. In this figure above, we see a story very similar to what she said in her academic work. It appears as if these two figures are of a woman on the left and a man on the right. The man is taller than the woman and seems to be talking while the woman has her mouth closed; this could be a sign to demonstrate men silencing women. They are also attached with a chain which is very interesting because she has often made references to women being in chains or tied to men and colonization, as we see below.

The dark-skinned woman has been silenced, caged, gagged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century....she has been a slave, a source of cheap labor, colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, and by her people (in Mesoamerica her lot under Indian patriarchs was not free of wounding). For 300 years, she was

invisible, she was not heard....Every increment of consciousness, every step forward, is a travesia, a crossing....Every time she makes "sense" of something, she has to "cross over," kicking a hole in the old boundaries (Anzaldua, *Borderlands* 23). Her illustration depicts this very well, and it also drives home the point of who can access and understand this information because, with artwork, it can be much simpler to get a message across to a more broad audience rather than through academic work.



The image above also tells a message that Anzaldua worked to portray in her academic work: addressing colonization and reconnecting with one's indigenous roots. It is titled "Sleeping Giant," and it was created between the years 1976-1984. In this artwork, she is reconnecting with her indigenous roots as she draws a figure that resembles figures honored by indigenous people.

Although not much information is given with the image, I made connections to reuniting with this culture ripped from us as our indigenous ancestors were colonized, raped, killed, and forced to assimilate to the colonizers' culture. It is especially important that it is titled "Sleeping Giant" because it can refer to the power that is "sleeping" inside us, as Chicana individuals, awakened by the education and activism some individuals and institutions work heavily to prevent and keep in slumber.

### **Let us not forget the men / Que no se nos olvide los hombres**

Men in our own community are also a part of this triple oppression against Chicana women because they have prejudices and beliefs that have remained since the Chicana movement and continue to be ignored. Anzaldúa makes many connections to how these men contribute to the view of women. She says, "tu no sirves pa' nada--you're good for nothing. Eres pura vieja" (*Borderlands* 83). This translates to saying if one is a woman, then one is good for nothing. Sexist beliefs like these were both embedded in the Chicana movement and the everyday life of Chicana women. Many men in the Chicana community believe that women must remain in the household and be good wives for the men. During the Chicano movement, they often used the women to do the clerical work and treated them as subordinates instead of uplifting and understanding their struggles as Chicana women.

### **Different ways of creating a change in education and academia**

Chicana women still struggle very much with these obstacles and ideas. Although we have women like Anzaldúa at the forefront of the fight for the acceptance of what is considered literature and works of art, there are also a lot of more recent forms of art and literature that need to be recognized, taught, and utilized in order for the cycle of oppression for Chicana women in the world of academia to be more well understood and respected. Anzaldúa was a Chicana

feminist scholar who worked towards a change in academia and education that heavily relied on more acceptance of Chicana feminism and acknowledgment of Chicana feminism in academia, education reform, and reaching back to our ancestral beginnings. On the other hand, at the same time, Chicanas like Nieto-Gomez were doing grassroots organizing, which relied heavily on teaching other Chicanas their history and being politically educated and active to create change in academia and education. Anzaldua allowed for a new consciousness to emerge that did not leave behind the activism that developed in the early years of the movement, but rather she nurtured the idea of having both an activist and an academic consciousness.

### **Chapter 3: Anna Nieto-Gomez: Academia Embedded in Activism**

“Hijas de Cuauhtémoc, son las flores de nuestra nación, dieron luz a nuestra gente azteca, fueron sacrificadas al Dios Huitzilopochtli, fueron violadas por los españoles y dieron luz a nuestra gente mestiza. Hijas de Cuauhtémoc, fueron las Adelitas de la Revolución, luchadoras por la libertad, les damos gracias a ustedes, nuestras madres, que nos han dado el sagrado privilegio de ser también, Hijas de Cuauhtémoc, luchadoras por la libertad no sólo para nuestra raza, pero para nosotras, las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc que somos las reinas y madres de nuestra nación.”

Leticia Hernandez

#### **La Malinche: Chicana Feminist Icon**

Have you ever heard a woman called a Malinche? If one is not from a Latinx background or has no knowledge of Mexican history and Chicana feminism, the odds of knowing about la Malinche are very low. The highly educated daughters of Aztec chiefs were often sold as slaves when those chiefs fell from power. This was the case for Doña Marina, also known as Malintzin, who later became known as the Malinche. When Spanish Conquistador Hernan Cortez arrived to colonize Mexico, he realized that he needed someone to help him translate in order for him to take over the native people. When he arrived at Tabasco, the Aztec chief offered Cortez a pick of the young slaves he had; Malintzin was included in this group of women since her father had lost power and she had been sold into slavery by her mother to this chief. She stood out to Cortez, and he saw her as the perfect translator (Isis). She became crucial for Cortez because she was not

only a great translator, but she was also very talented and strategic in creating political connections. She helped the conquistadors many times, even saving them from indigenous conspiracies against Cortez. She has since then been seen as a villain in Mexican history because she is believed to have betrayed her people and helped the conquistadors (Isis). Yet many defend her, arguing that [and say she is vilified even though] "La Malinche was bred to serve and to obey" (Fehrenbach 55). Many also fail to acknowledge that she was sold into slavery by her people, and thus the question of whether she was turning her back on her people or if they had already turned their back on her becomes very vital. She is now seen as a figure of Chicana feminism because women have been vilified in Mexican history and blamed for conquistadores' conquest. Among these Chicanas who celebrate La Malinche as a feminist figure are people like Martha Cotera and Turi Luziris. Prominent Mexican authors like Octavio Paz have created narratives about La Malinche that portray her as "both sexual and political in nature; sexual in that her liaison with Cortés was consensual (if that is possible for a slave) and political in that she betrayed her own people by advising and translating for Cortés during the enterprise of conquest" (Tate 84). She became heavily sexualized and thus has become a figure for Chicana feminism through the rewriting of her story to exemplify how she, too, was a victim.

In this chapter, I will discuss aspects of the Chicana Feminist Movement that were designed to bridge the gaps within both academia and civil rights circles that excluded and undermined Chicana women. I will be doing this by analyzing the works of the prominent Chicana writer Anna Nieto-Gomez; her work has influenced current Chicana activism in academia, education, and el Movimiento itself. Anna Nieto-Gomez was born in California, and she is a third-generation Chicana who received her education at the California State University. She is famous for her criticism of the sexism in the Movimiento and for the academic work that

she has done over the years in the field of Chicana studies. She embodies the new mestiza consciousness Anzaldua was referring to. In her writings, Nieto-Gomez demonstrates how powerful La Malinche can be for Chicana feminism. Unlike Anzaldua, although Nieto-Gomez was a scholar, most of her work had more hands-on, grassroots, and activist factors that enabled her to create spaces within the movement for Chicana women to voice their concerns and create an educational movement that is still happening today.

Like Anzaldua, Nieto-Gomez tackled the issue of sexism within the Chicana movement; in her groundbreaking essay, *Sexism in the Movimiento*, Nieto-Gomez addresses this head-on. In her essay, she explains how she understands sexism working:

Men are defined as "naturally" stronger, more logical, and economically provide for others. Women are defined as "naturally" dependent, childlike, and therefore always in need of authority. Her primary functions are to secure others as a wife and a mother since her primary abilities are to conceive, procreate and nurture. Therefore, man is defined "naturally" as superior to women since man is independent and aggressive, and women are dependent and passive. (Nieto-Gomez, *Sexism in the 97*)

This is a very powerful definition that also demonstrated, as she mentions in her essay, that sexism is like racism in that they are both capitalistic ideas that are meant to support white supremacy. This is because men are seen as privileged white people, and women are seen as poor people of color that can be controlled and further marginalized. Looking at the sexism in the *Movimiento* through this lens allows both the men and the women in the *Movimiento* to analyze this and explore this better. She makes it clear that all privileges, like white supremacy and

sexism, must be eradicated in order to obtain true freedom—and that includes a change in structure, understanding, and education in the Chicana movement.

### **The Pushback**

Anna Nieto-Gomez has discussed how Chicanas have had to rewrite their narrative as they too developed new ideas and movements within the Chicana feminist movement. The idea of being a feminist has been too often associated with turning "Anglo," and that in itself can insinuate that Chicana women are unable to create their own thoughts and that somehow everything said by Chicana activists "is either his idea or the white Anglo 'her' idea" (Nieto-Gomez, *Chicana Feminisms* 23). Chicana women often are called "sell-outs or "vendidas" among their own Chicana groups because of these erroneous ideas and beliefs of how a Chicana should act. This fails to take into consideration the work Chicana activists have and continue to do. Often the feminist movement gets attributed to white middle-class women, giving all of the acknowledgment to these women. However, feminism is not only a worldwide event, but it also began with figures like La Malinche and Sor Juana, who are not white and middle class, and even then, the many feminists that existed in Pre-Columbian times fail to be acknowledged. Chicana women worked to create spaces for Chicanas and women of color to actively participate in activism and social change and obtain the autonomy and authority they were being denied. Nieto-Gomez stresses that although it is vital to understand that there was a lot of sexism in the Chicano movement, it is also paramount to understand that Chicano men are not the ones with power either: "otherwise there would not be a Chicano Movement" (Nieto-Gomez 2018, 24). With this lack of power, sexist Chicano men "try to compensate for the lack of power with the use of 'male privilege' coming down with the double standards" (Nieto-Gomez 2018). Anna

Nieto-Gomez hits at the core of the sexism in the Chicano Movement. Those perpetuating the sexism in el Movimiento believe they have to compensate for the missing power, and in doing so, they enable sexist ideas that prevented Chicana women from having a voice and space, and thus, spaces within the Chicana Feminist movement began to pick up momentum. I will analyze movements within the Chicana movement like The League of Mexican American Women, the Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional, and *Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*, among other spaces created for Chicana feminists in order to better understand the issues and the forms of resistance that was occurring to combat the sexism and oppression happening in the movement.

### **The League of Mexican American Women and the Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional (1958-1975)**

One of the movements within the Chicana feminist movement was creating the League of Mexican American Women, which later turned into the Comisión Femenil Mexicana. Although the Mexican American movement "struggled to gain civil rights and attain socioeconomic equality, racism was condemned, but sexism was preserved" (Nieto-Gomez, *Chicanas Movidas* 33)." They failed to acknowledge the struggles of women in the movement. Once the men realized they needed Chicana women too, they included them but "once women joined the movement, they were usually steered into subservient roles performing only lower-level decision-making duties and doing the grunt work" (Nieto-Gomez, *Chicanas Movidas* 34). This is bluntly sexist and adds to the stigma that women should remain at home and that their duties are below a man's duties. The movement failed to address these issues, which are still very relevant. The same sexism in the Latinx world that includes machismo and the belief that women were to do their duties seeped its way into the movement. Organizations like The League of Mexican American Women were spaces created by Chicana Feminists where they "provided a primary

social and political space that acknowledged the value of women's work in the movement" (Nieto-Gomez, *Chicanas Movidas* 25), and the creation of these spaces allowed for more cultivation of Chicana Feminism that still lingers today. This group was very effective in creating a much-needed space for these women to express what they were feeling and experiencing during this time. It became a space for them to create political cartoons and other important topics that needed to be addressed in order for the sexist ideas in the Movimiento to change.

### **Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc 1971**

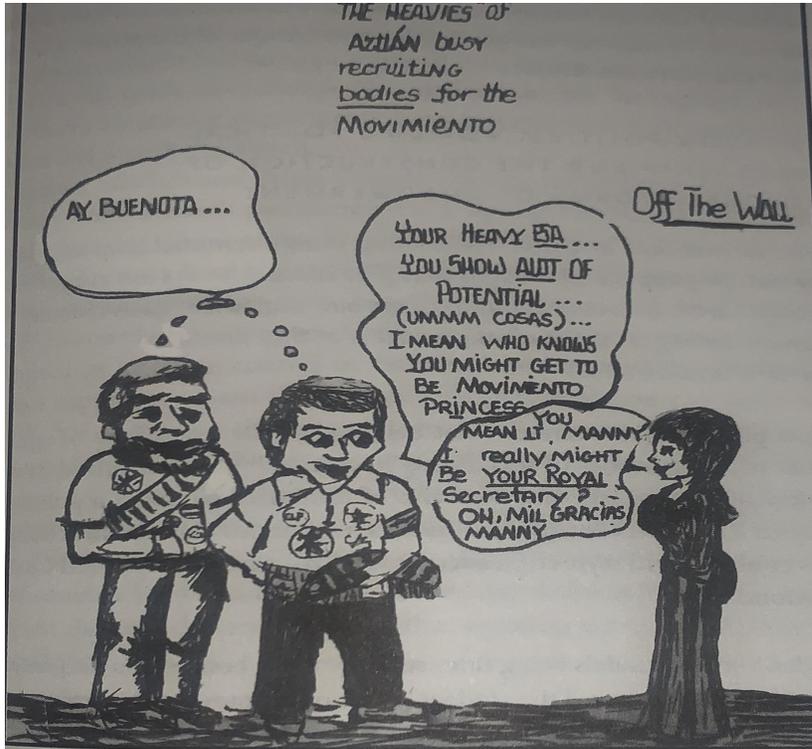
In 1971 Anna Nieto-Gomez and other Chicanas published the newspaper *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*, a historic moment in the development of Chicana feminism. According to Maylei Blackwell, a Chicana whose work was greatly impacted by Nieto-Gomez, "despite the enduring legacy of the political interventions Chicana feminism within the Chicano movement has remained, until recently, largely an untold story" (Blackwell 59). Chicana feminism has existed for a very long time, but it has been through works like *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* that more spaces like these that shed light on the issues that the Chicana Feminist movement wanted to address.

One of these was the constant portrayal of the heroes of the Chicano movement. This reinforced the false impression that the movement was led by men and shunted aside the Chicana women who stood at the forefront of the movement. For example, they highlighted cases such as that of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, where Huerta was often not recognized for her contribution to the Chicana labor movement in the way that Chavez is. *Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* started as a student activist-led group known as the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) at California State University, Long Beach. This opened up a space for Chicanas to speak about their experiences by writing in the newspaper and using it as a tool to spread more information and advertise their conferences. In these conferences, important conversations about the

movement were happening. It is vital to understand that the Chicana movement was very political at this time, and it had much of its work based on conferences and grassroots organizing that also became academic. This group then developed into the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA).

*Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* became a beacon for Chicana women and other women of color to become more politically engaged and create more education opportunities. However, in contrast to Anzaldúa--who focused on the lack of space for Chicana scholars to embody the new consciousness that included academia and activism--, Nieto-Gomez dives deeper into the education needed to understand the Chicana feminist and the activism that is needed to accomplish this. She states, "in order to truly understand the needs and problems of La Raza, we must include the Chicana in our study (Nieto-Gomez, *The Chicana* 131). This is vital because if one does not understand the roots of the movement and why it is still very prevalent, one cannot continue to fight for a change. Chicana feminism is not taught in school, and the only way one can get exposed to this very different yet very powerful type of literature and activism is through higher education programs like Chicana studies and Latinx studies. Educational reform to include works that current Chicana activists write is necessary to move into a time where Chicana feminist education gets taught along with American history and the civil rights movements. At the very core, these Chicana Feminists are American and have impacted American history. They have created a change that can no longer be silenced and seen as a stagnant movement that ended in the sixties, but rather a new consciousness that is both scholarly and academic.

To better analyze the impact of a newspaper like the *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*, I wanted to analyze this image that was in an unpublished issue of the newspaper.



In this image, we see a typical representation of the men in the Chicano Movement that have the typical vest of ammunition and have medals that make them look more "macho." Facing them is a woman who has very explicit curves. Both of the men are thinking "Ay Buenota" which is something men say to women when they are looking good. The man on the other side talks to the woman and uses terms often associated with Mexican lingo like "esa." As he tells her that she has many potentials, he does it in a way that means her potential is her looks, and so she can be a princess of the movement; the woman is shown to be extremely thankful for being able to serve them as a secretary. This image clearly shows the things that all these Chicanas have been trying to fight; the sexism in the Movimiento that sees women as a possession or as something good to look at which is not only harming the movement, but it is also hindering the growth of these

individuals. The wording at the top says, "The heavies of Aztlan busy recruiting bodies for the Movimiento" which is interesting because these men see these women as nothing other than bodies, and instead of thinking about what they can contribute to the movement, they are thinking of how pleasing looking at these women can be. This political cartoon very well examines how the Chicanos did not give their fellow Chicanas the respect they deserve as intellectuals and women. At the same time, it is very interesting that the woman in this cartoon has a very accepting response. Instead of being offended, she seems hopeful and excited that she may get to be their "royal secretary." These types of stereotypes are very often used and are very harmful. As Nieto-Gomez points out, "racist sexual stereotypes also work as social barriers. From the educational system to the employment force, the image of the Chicana is still that of the nurturing, passive, and submissive woman" (Nieto-Gomez, *Chicanas in the Labor* 1-2). These sexual stereotypes that are often put on the Chicana woman placed them (and continue to) in a space where they had to negate these stigmas to be treated as an equal.

### **Addressing the issues head-on**

Where is Chicana Feminism heading in the coming years, and what impacts current Chicana feminist activism? Anna Nieto-Gomez has created works that hope to address this. In her essay "Chicana Feminism" that was published in 1997 and later republished in 2014 in the book *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* by García Alma Garcia, she writes:

Today, Chicana Feminism is trying to rally enough women and get them to come out from behind the doors so that everybody can hear us say, "We're a legitimate body. No one can deny that anymore. As us about our political stance, not our validity, as women fighting for women's rights within the Chicano community. Right now, we are in the process of making the Chicano

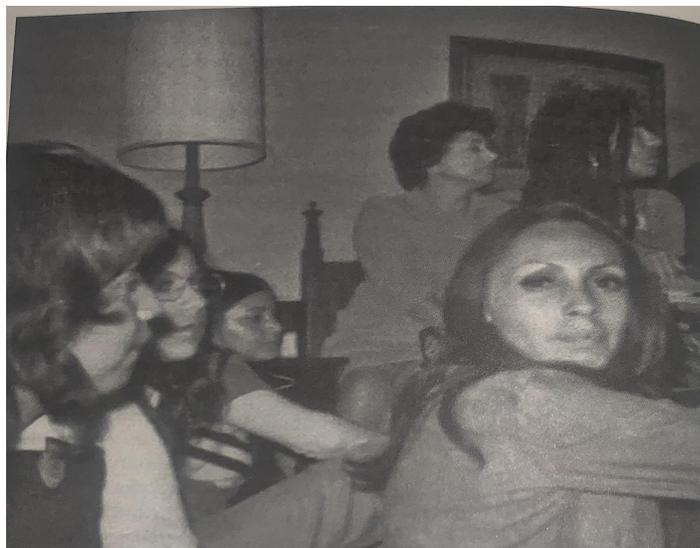
Movement responsible for Chicana issues, making it support issues that involve race, welfare rights, forced sterilization- making the Chicano movement address itself to the double standard about male and female workers and making it live up to its cry of carnalismo and community responsibility. (Nieto-Gomez, *Chicana Feminism* 55)

Chicana feminism has been questioned since it began to rise, and Chicana scholars like Nieto-Gomez have worked tirelessly to create this new narrative where Chicana issues become Chicanx issues and need to be addressed by the Chicanx community as a whole. There were many instances where the Movimiento Chicano left behind the women who played a pivotal role. Nieto-Gomez created a lot of work that revolved around the sexism embedded in the Chicano movement. The Chicana Feminist Movement continued to change and develop as waves of political change happening across the country. It has created a wave of new Chicana Feminism that works to address these same problems of being left out of academia, education, and el Movimiento as new faces and new ideas give rise to a new generation of Chicanas bring activism to the forefront. As Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez have stated, the feminist movement rose to its highest levels when the Chicano movement was in decline, and since then, it has been a movement that continues to move forward. Chicana feminism has not become stagnant; instead, it has grown and expanded to create change in academia, education, and the Movimiento Chicano itself.

### **The Resistance Continues**

Although we have seen through the work done by Nieto-Gomez that great advancements have been made with the creation of all these organizations and committees, there is still much that needs to be addressed. Education among Chicana students is still lacking, creating a deficiency and adding to the systemic oppression that these students experience as they attend underfunded public schools. There is still a very big gap between the level of education that a Chicana student tends to receive compared to that of a student that is white and from an affluent background. Although Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez had very different approaches, one through academia and one through grassroots organizing, they both wanted the same end goal: more inclusion, respect, and acknowledgment of Chicana women in society and academia.

I have selected some images that were used in *Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*; this was done in published issues and unpublished issues that demonstrate how these women worked together to create a much-needed space for Chicana women. They are as follows:



This is an image that shows a meeting for the women that were involved in the *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*; from left to right, we have Cindy Honesto, Sylvia Castillo, Sonia Lopez, unknown,

and Martha Lopez. I chose this image because, at this time, a group of Chicana women working together to create these resources was a new concept that many were unable to accept. However, due to the intense work that all these women and Nieto-Gomez did, this is now seen more often. The work that they were doing was revolutionary because they were creating these spaces where individuals had been actively excluding them from.



This is an image that at the Women's Antireelection Club, the Hijos de Cuauhtémoc, are meeting at Francisco Madero's house in Mexico City in 1911. Although this is way before Nieto-Gomez, this is a group of women who gave her the inspiration for the newspaper's name. This was a group of women working in Mexico towards voting rights for Mexican women and worked to create spaces for them in the workforce and society in a similar way in which Nieto-Gomez did.



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This is an image of the front cover of the newspaper of *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*. I want to analyze the cover because, like everything Nieto-Gomez did, it holds a message behind it. The cover is of an eagle that seems to be embracing and protecting a woman who is holding a sword. The sword is pulled back, and her arms cover her face-- I think this is done to demonstrate the force this woman is exerting in her movement of the sword, which could potentially be used to destroy the obstacles hindering the education of Chicanas that could be represented by the mesh covering her body. She is wearing huaraches, which may be tied to indigenous roots, and seems to be on the verge of getting enough strength to destroy this trap keeping her in place. It is a cover that demonstrates the newspaper's ideas, which included educating Chicanas about their history, breaking away from colonization, and regaining our strength through education and activism.

**A moment in the Chicana movement that depended on grassroots organizing and educating**

Much of the work that Nieto-Gomez immersed herself in was to create these much-needed spaces for Chicanas. Along with other Chicanas, she realized this lack of representation and decided to create these spaces even though they got great pushback. She has an important role in educational institutions because her work opened the doors to many more Chicana activists and scholars who wanted similar things. Although institutions like academia tried to keep people like Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez from inhabiting these spaces, their plans backfired as these individuals created the spaces themselves by educating and advocating for these rights. She implemented activism and education in order to drive home the idea that the Chicana feminist can be both; the same consciousness that breaks from the rigidness often placed upon Chicana women.

In my next chapter, I want to analyze the connection between the two scholars (Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez) with current Chicanas working in the fields of education. To do this, I will conduct two interviews with two prominent Chicanas. One is with Maria Cotera, an associate professor in the Mexican American and Latino Studies Department at the University of Texas. She is very prominent in the field of Chicana studies and Chicana feminism. I also interviewed a Chicana, Maria Salinas, who does grassroots work around Southwest Detroit in connection to educational gaps between schools with Latinx students compared to those with white students. I want to analyze their work to understand the changes that have occurred in the Chicana feminist movement and how they impact Chicanas growing up during this time.

## **Chapter 4: Interviewing Two Prominent Chicana Feminists Maria Coteria and Maria Salinas**

“Racism, classism, and sexism will disappear when we accept differences and if we continue to resist loudly and clearly all racist, classist and sexist efforts on the part of other persons to enslave us.”

Martha P. Coteria, *The Chicana Feminist* (1977)

I decided to conclude my thesis with some interviews I conducted. These interviews were both very eye-opening, and I saw the fruits of much of the work done by the Chicanas in the '60s and '70s.

My first interview was with Maria Salinas, a community organizer in Southwest Detroit who dedicated her life to activism and education surrounding Chicana individuals. She was born and raised in Southwest Detroit and came from two immigrant families. As a proud Chicana, she is a very prominent figure in our community. To this day, she created the only, Latinx youth council in Michigan and created a non-profit organization called Congress of Communities, which has a mission geared towards being a resource for residents when it allows for education around political representation, quality education, and activism. I decided to interview her because, as an undocumented young girl, I had no hopes of attending college until I was introduced to CoC, and I began to learn more about my rights as an undocumented Chicana. They also guided me through college applications and having a community of Latinx peers that were in similar positions. Through educational workshops and engagement in our history, I began to question things and understand my power as an undocumented Chicana feminist, which

has guided me through this journey. The space that Maria created through her organizing was similar to the spaces that Anna Nieto-Gomez wanted and created for Chicanas.

Southwest Detroit is a very rich area that is predominantly Latinx, and there is a lot of culture and passion for art and music. There is no way one can drive around Southwest Detroit and not see the artwork, murals, and graffiti art. In my interview with Maria Salinas, we were able to dive deeper into art as a form of education in similar ways in which Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez were invested. She was able to recount to me the emergence of graffiti art and its very much planned shift to mural art. Maria attested that “during the late 80s early 90s, all these gangs started sprouting up and started tagging,” and the activists in the community were looking for ways to shift this. They then very “intentionally started to create some projects that would involve the young people in these conversations and see if they were interested in helping paint over and do graffiti art,” which started a very interesting movement that allowed for this form of education to become accepted in Southwest Detroit. This is very interesting because usually, these types of trends were more likely to happen in southern states like California and Texas, which have higher numbers of Chicanos.

### **Education through artwork**

So how did this small area in Michigan create these very same spaces and add its twists? This was a nagging question that I wanted to explore more with someone like Maria that reminded me so much of Anna Nieto-Gomez's work. According to Maria Salinas, “Southwest Detroit is nationally one of the first communities that structured graffiti art and murals in that way and because we were small as you can see you can go all over Southwest Detroit and you look up and there’s a story to be told” which has very much spread across other areas of Detroit and nationally. Below I have attached some mural artwork that evolved from teaching our

residents their education and giving them spaces to enrich them and their skills. This is vital because, through Maria and others' work in this community, these rising graffiti artists were now paid to do the art that they illegally made before.



I selected this artwork in southwest Detroit because I think the connection to our indigenous roots was always something that Anzaldua talked about. There was a broken line between our ancestors caused by the colonization of our people. This mural is a homage to indigenous people's work because it calls attention to the land that the colonizer took. This is a big and common occurrence in Anzaldua's writing; she once said, "this land was Mexican once, was Indian always and is. And will be again." This reflection of educating ourselves about our roots and transferring it with artwork because artwork is a very important and powerful form of education. It requires no Ph.D. to understand the academic language, and it doesn't limit the imagination. This is the type of project in which Maria Salinas is involved because she, like Anzaldua and many other Chicana feminists, realized the power of images and artwork. It is

important that through activism these graffiti artist became more educated and were able to use their expressions and ideas to create something beautiful. The same way scholars in academia can flourish if academia were less rigid and understood the complexities that come with different identities.



Figure 8 Saner. *Untitled*. Springwells St. Southwest Detroit.

Again, I see this image with a very strong connection to our indigenous roots. The individuals in the image are wearing masks that look like Aztec or indigenous omens. The middle person is holding a heart, and it seems as if they are gathering around it as the moss and flowers around them grow. I chose this image because it reminded me of the work and drawings that I saw from Anzaldua. This is a universal way of teaching; it's a visual representation of a culture taken, and it reminds me of retaking that culture. It reminded me of this quote by Anzaldua:

The struggle is inner: Chicano, indio, American Indian, mojado, mexicano, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working-class Anglo, Black, Asian--our psyches resemble the border towns and

are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. (Anzaldua, *Borderlands* 87)

These people are wearing these masks; the same masks are sometimes worn to hide our “inner battle” as Chicanas trying to navigate the system. It tells a very powerful story that Anzaldua, María Cotera, and many other feminist writers have been telling in their published works for years: one both of reconnection to our past and of the masks that we may use to conceal our inner struggles. Maria Salinas mentioned being forced to “play the game being cool, not being an agitator” to make it through her twenty years working with their public health team. She had to play by the rules that were set in place to get to the position she is in now and in which she can help young Chicax individuals. Now, after spending her whole life advocating, she no longer has to follow those limits placed on her. Anzaldua captures this inner battle beautifully.



I selected this image for many reasons. The monarch butterfly has been associated with being undocumented, and a very large number of undocumented individuals are Chicana, making this also a homage to them. The hands in different shades of brown and black hold up a book representing the power that education allows for. This book represents the power of both education and advocacy; there isn't one without the other. The book, which represents scholarship, education, literacy, also very much represents activism, community, and organizing. However, we can see a book in a work of art that is not a book but rather a form of education created in southwest Detroit through murals. Education has been a power ingrained in these Mexican and Latin American immigrants' children as we see the flags surrounding the hands and sign saying empowerment; it is empowerment achieved through both education and activism. Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez were trying to explain this because one cannot appear or function without the other. This artwork signifies our history as Chicana and Latin Americans and the interconnections between education and activism, vital for activist scholars like Anzaldua, Salinas, Nieto-Gomez, and Cotera.

Artwork was only one way in which Maria Salinas followed in other Chicanas' footsteps like Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez. Unlike those two, who were in states and areas with higher Chicana populations, Maria remembers her "first taste of Chicanoism coming when she was working mainly to create wages for migrant workers that were working the fields, because Michigan is a very agricultural state and people don't understand that going up north involves seeing a lot of fields of cherries, potatoes, grapes and, you know, different things that existed," and that is a very different angle although still reaching towards the betterment of the lives of Chicana people. These migrant workers "mainly from Mexico were being unjustly treated," and that was when the activism sprouted for Maria. The moments of the huelga, a strike, regarding

the grapes boycott started by the National Farm Workers Association and some other work that Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez were involved in was not the same in a state like Michigan. Maria doesn't "remember in the 80s there being a movement in regards to Chicanos"; instead, she "felt like it was shifting to a more academic side," not what she remembered as a young girl when she was helping her brother and visiting the Cesar Chavez houses in Michigan. She, too, got swept into the academic life because they told her it was the only way to create a change. Her parents told her that she had to be in school for 16 years and get an education, and then she could do whatever she wanted. She, too, was boxed in this rigid system, but she could obtain her degree and use it to do more grassroots work that now requires an education. Before with Nieto-Gomez, it was easier to create these spaces without a degree and only the love and passion for organizing. Maria Salinas is an example of some of the fruit that arose from the organizing that took place during the '60s and '70s, and now she sees that fruit that she was able to plant and develop in my generation and other generations of Chicanxs she helped.

### **The creation of educational spaces**

One way she worked on this was by being involved in "many many projects that were helping the Latino population like Reach Detroit, LaVida, Community Action Against Asthma [she] was the project manager for all them in the metro area or the city of Detroit mainly Southwest Detroit and so [she] was involved in putting things into place" because as leaders they were putting things into place structurally to make sure that the Latinx and Chicanx community was being serviced. She remembers thinking that as activists during these times, they were "moving the needle by making sure Chass Center was built for our community which is a federally qualified health center," which Maria was a big part of it getting; she did great organizing to build that brand new building. She was also a board member there for 18 years and

with LaSED and SerMetro, the main big organizations that existed to service the immigrant, Latinx, and Chicanx populations in Southwest Detroit. She experienced these eras very differently because she was in Michigan where in “the 80s the 90s and early 2000s activism kind of was frowned on, but education became a big factor you had to get an education because without an education” she was often told that she would not be able to be an activist and “can’t be at decision-making tables because you’re they’re going to shut the door on you,” since it is not a space that is meant for Chicanxs.

Maria has also seen a shift in the last ten years where there is “a little bit of more uprising of young activist and young people that are going to college are coming out of college more in their early 20s that have taken more of an interest of Chicanoism.” We see that change in terms like “going from Latino to Latinx and Hispanic versus Latino versus Mexican American versus Chicano” which Maria saw a trend in because “all those acronyms, all those labels, arose mainly through academia” and as a faculty at the university she first hand participated in this which is something that she doesn’t feel proud of. They would send her and her peers from the University of Michigan to survey the Detroit population and use the numbers and statistics to get more funding for the university and research, but the population never got much back. This academic cycle that was rigid, as Anzaldua describes it, also sucked in Maria, and she worked very hard to break away from those chains. She recalls being a “challenger,” which she is very proud of because she was able to lead a group of researchers who refused to continue the “data collection for you [University of Michigan] to get a lot of money to do more research and more publications.” This is the same struggle that Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez experienced as they navigated their roles as Chicanas involved in academia and activism. It shows this disconnect that the university setting wanted to place on them. Through her work as a Chicana activist,

Maria has kept the roots and the gains of the Chicana movement alive, and it has been implemented for the new Chicana generations.

### **A new generation**

I also interviewed with Maria Cotera, who is a very prominent Chicana scholar; she has made many contributions to the study of Chicana feminism. I wanted to interview her to get a better angle of the academic world now. I believe that Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez entered academia in the hopes of changing it; however, I believe that it has not yet reached what they hoped. As the daughter of Martha Cotera, another very important Chicana, Maria Cotera followed in her mother's footsteps and recalls, "I became involved in this because I grew up as her daughter; back in the day, you know, parents took kids everywhere—to marches, to meetings, to conferences—and so, you know, my brother and I were usually with her in all of this." She experienced the struggle that her mother had as a rising Chicana. By seeing her mother struggle to claim a place in academia where she "led the initiative, she was one of the women, along with Eve Chapa and Virginia Muzquiz and others who led the initiatives to orchestrate women" in order to mobilize them. They worked to educate others "to participate fully not just as voters but also as running for elective office through the Razas Unidas party...they helped people run for elected office, to challenge the stranglehold of the democratic and republican parties in Texas, and so as part of that process she began to bring women together to discuss their history, their consciousness, where feminism came from." This is very interesting because her mother was a part of generations like Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez trying to raise the education being given to their counterparts and enable access to it by creating these spaces for them.

However, she recalls the pushback that her mother was given, specifically by the Chicano men in the Movimiento, who "claimed that feminism was an Anglo import; a colonizing trick"; it was a

whole discourse that “it was a betrayal to be a feminist,” and her mother realized that in order to combat this and change this narrative she had to help teach Chicanas their history. So then Maria’s mother, Martha Cotera, realized “a better way to reach women beyond the Razas Unidas Party, beyond Texas, was to start writing, and so she wrote an article in 1973,” which was her first article focusing on Chicana feminist history. Martha became involved in more academic circles, and in her time, there were no “academic” forms of writing Chicana feminism; it was all taken from articles or activism. The sexism that existed during her mother’s time in the Chicano movement hindered the women. She recalls that the men during her mother’s time tenured themselves through the activism and the work they had done in the Chicano movement and then fell into the same rigid rules academia sets in place and excluded the women by demanding a Ph.D. or a degree to obtain this tenure. The women like Anzaldua and Nieto-Gomez were working against this rigidity and hoped to become less rigid and more accessible.

The generations after them, like Maria Cotera, became more academic and less hands-on and grassroots-organizing. Now it is typical for someone invested or studying Chicana feminism to have to follow academia's ladder. You would have to start as an undergraduate, then your master's, and then, to be a professor, now you need a doctorate. In order to obtain the doctorate, you would write a dissertation and “you try to find a job, and then in your first job or whatever job you take, the expectation is that within a certain period of time—usually around 5 to 6 years—you will produce a book, usually based on your dissertation; from that book, you’ll get tenured, which is a guaranteed position for life, all of which is disappearing. After you get tenure, then the next thing is that you go from associate professor to full professor.” This is a very rigid outline that academia sets in place that was not how things had happened with the generations of Chicanas in the ’60s and ’70s. This very same system that Anzaldua and

Nieto-Gomez tried to make more accessible are struggling with this same feat. The struggle to create a less rigid space continues; one must first understand that there are no clear lines or names for what is being created by these Chicana feminist writers. It is a space that is both educational and activism and embodies a new consciousness that needs to be more amplified in academia. The work around Chicana feminism is far from where we would like it to be.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis serves many purposes. It is a documentation of the change in the Chicana movement from the 1960s to the present day. It serves as a tool to analyze and understand the shift and dialogue between advocacy and academia during the movement. It is also a vital tool during the present age because the Latinx population, which Chicanx individuals fall under, has been under heavy political attack recently. I hope this thesis can shed light on the history of Chicanxs in the United States and their irrevocable right to this land and its politics. At the same time, during a time when women's rights are being attacked, shedding light and encouraging future generations to stay educated on the history of Chicana feminism and its morphing allows for an indispensable knowledge of feminism the effect it has had. I argue that Chicana feminism has a history rooted in the civil rights movement and that it has changed its approach to break away from sexism, racism, toxic power dynamics, and unequal educational and academic opportunities. In this change, we see a shift in grassroots organizing as they make, it is not something easily given or inclusive, academia becomes a source to educate and speak out against

the problems and injustices faced by Chicana women and as it showcases the complexity of not only being a woman but being a woman who is of color in a society that is still struggling with its sexist and racist past.

Some claim that feminism is a white Anglo theory that women of color should not use. Although white women share a similar struggle, it is not the same as Chicana women's. Feminist qualities, although not called that at that time, were being established long before this time by Black, Asian, Mexican, Indigenous, and Mexican American women. This pushback is a clear form of guilt-tripping and tactical intimidation of associating feminism with an oppressor, in this case, white women, implemented very often by the machismo and sexism embedded in the hierarchies of the Chicano movement. The fear of making the Chicano movement a feminist movement created spaces for this sexism, but it backfired, and it fueled women like Nieto-Gomez and Anzaldua to approach academia, education, organizing, artwork, and feminism in their way and create a pushback. Anzaldua broke away from all the titles, regulations, and expectations of academia and created work that was not solely scholarship but also literature, a balance of both that had not been established or accepted by academia. She bent those roles to explain and demonstrate her confusion and repugnance against the chains embedded deeply in academia's foundations and expectations. Chicana women, as Anzaldua explained, are in a messy line or border where they are creating a new Mestiza consciousness, but this new Mestiza consciousness is not one easily established or reached because

I am in all cultures at the same time,  
*alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,*  
 (soul in between two, three, four worlds)  
*me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio,*

(my head buzzes with the contradictions)

Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan

(I am lost because of all the voices that talk to me)

*Simultaneamente.*

(simultaneously)

(Anzaldua, *Borderlands* 77).

This shows how Chicana women are struggling with understanding themselves and their role in this society that has all these expectations from Chicana activists and scholars.

Nieto-Gomez approached this dilemma through grassroots organizing and creating spaces for women to become educated and aware of their history. With creations of newspapers (like *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*), conferences (La Conferencia de Mujeres for la Raza), and many other spaces created a space to organize future generations of Chicana feminists. This was also accomplished through the demand for political education and representation in order to create institutional change. Institutional change is necessary to advance the quality of life, rights, and representation of Chicana women.

Current Chicana scholars and activists continue la lucha against sexism and racism to advance Chicana women's rights. Although academia still has these steps and processes to establish who can be a scholar, Chicana scholars have worked to change how it is done by creating work like Anzaldua in various languages, with different grammar and structures that do not fit their expectations. There have also been some that fed into these expectations from academia and society but do so to have the means, like have a tenure position, to create more institutional changes. On the other hand, some have similar origins to the type of moment that was happening in the '60s and '70s that had more power in activism that is fighting to bring back

that side in a fuller force and create a better balance between academia and activism in order to advance the Chicana movement. Both of these approaches are valuable because although they work to reach the same end goal, the liberation of Chicana women, they do it in different matters, and it has created a new generation that is growing up in moments like the civil rights movement where marches and uprisings play a significant role. This activism is vital because it has led to a space for future generations who will have the tools, which are granted by access to the world of academia and scholarship, that allow Chicanas to tell their stories themselves instead of an outsider who is not in these settings and does not understand its roots. As the Chicana feminist movement morphs, it is morphing the future generations of Chicana women. Through my thesis, I was able to investigate the harvest, the generation of Maria Cotera and Maria Salinas, that grew from the seeds planted by the work of Chicanas like Nieto-Gomez and Anzaldua. Their work then planted the next seed, which is my generation, and we are now starting to see their harvest as activism and academia morph to create a new Chicanx consciousness.

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