



Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement

Maylei Blackwell

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The first book-length study of women's involvement in the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, *Chicana Power!* tells the powerful story of the emergence of Chicana feminism within student and community-based organizations throughout southern California and the Southwest. As Chicanos engaged in widespread protest in their struggle for social justice, civil rights, and self-determination, women in el movimiento became increasingly militant about the gap between the rhetoric of equality and the organizational culture that suppressed women's leadership and subjected women to chauvinism, discrimination, and sexual harassment. Based on rich oral histories and extensive archival research, Maylei Blackwell analyzes the struggles over gender and sexuality within the Chicano Movement and illustrates how those struggles produced new forms of racial consciousness, gender awareness, and political identities.

Chicana Power! provides a critical genealogy of pioneering Chicana activist and theorist Anna NietoGomez and the Hijas de Cuauhtemoc, one of the first Latina feminist organizations, who together with other Chicana activists forged an autonomous space for women's political participation and challenged the gendered confines of Chicano nationalism in the movement and in the formation of the field of Chicana studies. She uncovers the multifaceted vision of liberation that continues to reverberate today as contemporary activists, artists, and intellectuals, both grassroots and academic, struggle for, revise, and rework the political legacy of Chicana feminism.

Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement Details

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From Reader Review Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement for online ebook

Vileana says

Fascinating.

Heather Montes Ireland says

Blackwell provides a well-documented, fascinating, and much needed history of women's participation in the Chicano movement and the contributions of Chicanas to feminist thought. She theorizes the notion of "multiple insurgencies" of Chicana feminist activism which I found very instructive, and has been quite useful in my own work. After reading this work, I am a big fan of Blackwell and this book. Would be great to assign in courses on women's activism and resistance, Chicana/Latina studies, or feminist theories.

Especially interesting to readers interested in social justice, women's history, feminism, ethnic studies, and racial justice movements.

David Leonard says

Some forty years after the "height" of the Chicana/o movement, there still hadn't been a full accounting of the contributions and involvement of Chicanas. This changed in 2011 with the publication of Dr. Maylei Blackwell's *Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (University of Texas Press). Challenging readers to think beyond the binary, Blackwell documents the day-to-day contributions, the activism, the theoretical work, and the struggles faced by Chicanas inside and outside the movement. Offering a book that privileges the voices of Chicana activists, that chronicles the work carried out by Las Hijas and countless other organizations, Blackwell documents that many ways that Chicanas spotlighted, intervened, challenged, refashioned, and built upon the "conflict between American ideals and our social reality" (Imani Perry); she also makes clear the efforts to expose and curtail the conflict between the ideologies and rhetoric espoused within some spaces of the movement and the social reality."

The book is not invested in simply filling the historical cupboards that have neglected to tell the stories of Chicana activists, those who challenged racism, sexism, homophobia, and the structures of violence, segregation, inequality, and white male hegemony in multiple locations. Dr. Blackwell pushes readers beyond this binary. She argues that Chicana feminism wasn't merely a response to the sexism of Chicano nationalism or the racism of the women's movement. Highlighting the many iterations of feminism, and the "adoption of different strategies to be heard" (p. 66) Maylei Blackwell brings many stories, many strains of history, and many spaces of resistance together in an effort to not only reimagine this historical moment but to challenge the ways that we construct narratives within the historical imagination.

She demands that readers of history account for the multiple points of entries, the multiple spaces of consciousness, and the conditions that led to action. For example, whereas history books, which have long privileged white feminist national organizations, have imagined Chicana feminism as emanating from the writings, organizational influence, and teachings of white feminists, Maylei Blackwell highlights the longstanding history of feminism within Chicana movement that can be seen in the home, in indigenous

institutions (p. 47), and in spaces that are autonomous to white feminist influence.

Moreover, she argues that to understand the Chicana feminist ethos of the 1960s and 1970s requires not simply looking at the contested politics of the Chicano movement and the entrenched misogyny and patriarchy, but white supremacy, classism, and the daily realities facing Chicana women. “Women activists learned to name the structures of exclusion and inequality they faced and how to negotiate complex relationships of power within and outside their community,” notes Blackwell (p. 61). “Familial bonds, female friendships, and relationships with political comrades were the sites through which they gained new forms of consciousness, named inequitable power relations, and strived to create new forms of solidarity, as well as a different organizational culture.” In other words, their experiences as students, as activists, as members of multiple communities, as daughters, friends, and partners all shaped their consciousness, political ethos, and repertoire of available tactics. This was not defined by experiencing sexism in one location as often argued.

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sdw says

Maylei Blackwell offers one of the most satisfying feminist histories I’ve read in a long time. The book is ostensibly “the first book-length study of women in the Chicano movement” (3). Yet, as Vicki Ruiz points out Blackwell’s use of critical theory is “deployed with such insight and verve.” Blackwell uses the historical narrative to transform not only the accepted genealogy of the Chicano Movement and the rise of Women of Color Feminisms, but to challenge the way we conceptualize oral history (a memory performance she calls it), and to theorize the ways that social movement participants create new forms of oppositional consciousness.

One of her most important contributions is the concept of retrofitted memory, “a form of countermemory that uses fragments of older histories that have been disjunctured by colonial practices of organizing historical knowledge or masculinist renderings of history that disappear women’s political involvement in order to create space of women in historical traditions that erase them” (2). Retrofitted memory creates new forms of subjectivity in the gaps of the uneven hegemonic narratives fracturing these dominant narratives and forms of political subjectivity.

It is also important to note how Blackwell reconceptualizes the narratives of the rise of women of color feminism. She rejects the narrative that sees Chicana feminism as a late reaction to patriarchy in the last years of the movement. Rather, Chicana feminism emerged at multiple locations and in multiple ways in the Chicano movement and was present from the earliest moments in the movement. As she explains, “Understanding that these Chicana groups were not separate or separatist is crucial for historical accuracy, because the emergence of Chicana feminisms is often narrated as occurring outside of and after the Chicano Movement rather than within it. They functioned as a parallel counter public within the movement as Chicana activists multiplied the subjects enlisted in the Chicano Movement’s project of liberation” (90).

Consequently, she argues that we need to recognize “multiple feminist insurgencies” to recognize the “multisited emergence of women of color as a historical political formation” (21). This “requires historical to look toward other social movements and other, unexpected social locations for feminist roots and practices” (21).

Thus, in the textured narratives Blackwell weaves, she succeeds in providing an excellent example of her

own argument that “a multiple insurgencies model is not only an analytical framework for interpreting social movement histories and interrogating the politics of historiography; it also serves as a basis for theorizing and producing new forms of feminist knowledge and epistemology” (27).
