Katherine Carter

Dr. Meyers

November 1st, 2022

Module Three Essay – Mexican Feminism

Immigration is a focal point of the Western United States. Many of these migrants had and continue to have Mexican origin or roots. The migrant women face hierarchies and roles placed on them through tradition and the larger social environment. These struggles continued as the second generation of American born Latinas entered a colliding social scape. Mexican American women faced the implications of their race both in their own community and in larger society. They also faced the traditions of their culture with a new culture and environment of employment.

In early California there were many identities and a complex social structure based on race and colorism. In the portions of land colonized by Spain in the Americas, there was vast intermarriage resulting in many racial identities.[[1]](#footnote-1) There were *gentiles* – the unbaptized indigenous, *neófitos* – the baptized indigenous, *españoles* – mixed persons who saw themselves in this identity, *californios* – mixed immigrants that settled in California, and *pobladores* – settlers.[[2]](#footnote-2) Some identities overlapped and new identities were formed as migrants created roots and people with different identities had children. With the vast diversity seen in the area, there were also conflicts that came with the social statuses; This included women participating in violence against women of their community and the indigenous people in the area.[[3]](#footnote-3) There was forced labor of indigenous people based on their ability to pay fines from vagrancy ordinances enacted in the 1830s and 1840s.[[4]](#footnote-4) Although Mexico outlawed slavery, New Mexico and angele*ñ*os still practiced the capturing and domestic enslavement of indigenous peoples.[[5]](#footnote-5) In Mexican Los Angeles, the economy was made up of ranchers, those who owned either small or large ranch holders which held upper- and middle-class roles, and the workers, often natives or recent arrivals to the area, which held a lower-class status.[[6]](#footnote-6) During one trial of a recent arrival of lower-middle-class status murdering her native servant there was discussion of how social class was implicated.[[7]](#footnote-7) One prosecutor discussed the fact that no matter the status of one person that justice must be served, and she was deemed guilty.[[8]](#footnote-8) When taken to a higher court, the case was maintained guilty, but the sentence was changed from 3 years of seclusion to 1 year in the port of San Diego, still in proximity to her family.[[9]](#footnote-9) Although the trial revealed that in local law there was equality given, there was still immense issues stemming from social status and race. In early migrancy the lack of homogenous groups and history of how groups were perceived created tensions.

In the early 1900s Mexican migrants had unity through common identity but still had issues in society based on social status and skin color. Tradition also affected Mexicana women heavily during the 1920s and on as culture shifted. There was an increasing population of Spanish speaking migrants as Mexican immigrants came north.[[10]](#footnote-10) When families immigrated from Mexico as middle-class, they would be considered working class in the States.[[11]](#footnote-11) Those Mexican Americans that were middle-class remained in the same area of other Mexicans because of restrictive real estate covenants, resulting in those families believing they were being housed with inferiors.[[12]](#footnote-12) The children of Mexican immigrants often considered their mothers as homemakers even though many women may have been working.[[13]](#footnote-13) The views of their mothers show the traditional household these women were raised with, where gender based domestic labor was common. Mexicans were among the most impoverished groups in California, this is mostly due to the limited ability to leave blue collared work, often considered by Mexican American women to be the fault of lacking education and dark skin.[[14]](#footnote-14) Young Mexican American women believed that if they would work hard they could earn the things they desired, although in reality it was near impossible.[[15]](#footnote-15) Rather than being able to leave the working class, Mexican Americans were able to move up within that limitation.[[16]](#footnote-16) Skin color was implicated in what work they could perform, especially in office work.[[17]](#footnote-17) This would result in lighter skinned women being able to obtain higher wages and enjoy more of the ‘American Dream’. Although some believing education would allow upward mobility, many women stopped their education at the 8th grade and entering domestic and factory employment.[[18]](#footnote-18) These working wages offered a sense of independence and working with other teenagers and young women offered them a place to discuss pop culture and consumer items.[[19]](#footnote-19) Community knowledge is spread through communication and is affected by cultural contact.[[20]](#footnote-20) The women that are in factories are experiencing a new form of traditional knowledge sharing but are experiencing it a new way with new types of information. Instead of doing traditional crafts that they would be participating in just a few decades ago, instead these women are earning a wage and communicating about celebrity gossip instead of local affairs. One display of the consumerism and the extreme care for appearance had by Mexican American women were beauty pageants that were sponsored by many different organizations; Another being the opening of beauty parlors.[[21]](#footnote-21) Women rebelled by bobbing their hair, wearing popular swimsuits, bloomers, and short skirts, also wearing makeup.[[22]](#footnote-22) Many families resisted the new culture forming around their daughters, but some encouraged adult education and acculturation.[[23]](#footnote-23) One traditional value that Mexican women could not avoid were the implications of being seen with young men, although there were many social events, they were all heavily chaperoned and being seen alone with a boy would be cause for punishment.[[24]](#footnote-24) Although Hispanic women were held to high standards and white women were seen as morally loose by the community, on the screen Mexican women were portrayed as oversexualized and hot-blooded.[[25]](#footnote-25) Movies allowed women to experience a higher-class lifestyle unattainable to most, not only providing entertainment but a desire for consumer goods such as clothes and make up.[[26]](#footnote-26) The representation of cultures is often done through art, incorporating new techniques with traditional.[[27]](#footnote-27) The Mexican Americans who went to see these films did not get to experience how they view themselves and their culture, but rather stereotypes held by a white majority. Even with the films not displaying how they viewed their world; Some young women would walk around Hollywood with their friends hoping to be spotted for acting.[[28]](#footnote-28) Women are often considered important in keeping the culture and retaining the Chicano family of the time by scholars.[[29]](#footnote-29) Cultural ties remained due to proximity to Mexico and speaking Spanish at home, there was also a nostalgic aspect towards their heritage due to stories told from their parents.[[30]](#footnote-30) The common experience and identity were held on to by Mexican women despite some aspects of their lives being extremely different based on skin color and the level of traditional ideals held by their parents. Another employment Mexican Americans were often seen in, due to the blue-collar limitations, was farm labor. Mexican farm workers have been seen as the result of the family farmers demise with stereotypes flooding the narratives.[[31]](#footnote-31) In the 1930’s a worker strike was crucial in changing the conditions for workers.[[32]](#footnote-32) The story of Mrs. Valdez - a striker, wife, and mother - is one of many and she depicts what many Mexicana farmers faced, working in cotton fields after immigrating with her parents during the Mexican revolution and participating in the farm strike.[[33]](#footnote-33) When Valdez was interviewed she always focused on two major things, caring for her family, and her role as a striker.[[34]](#footnote-34) Leading up to the strike, women faced many issues while attempting to care for their families including not having heat in houses, not having stoves resulting in cooking over fires in oil barrels, foraging for food or having to just sustain off of flour and water.[[35]](#footnote-35) Women were on average collecting 200 lbs of cotton in a 10-hour day.[[36]](#footnote-36) The structure of these farms was based on a racial hierarchy with white managers and foremen, the strikers – majority Mexican workers and organizers – were kicked out.[[37]](#footnote-37) With this strike there is a clear influence of race, this act resulting in a moving picket line.[[38]](#footnote-38) Half of the strikers where Valdez was, were women, they ran camp kitchens, cared for children, and marched picket lines.[[39]](#footnote-39) Women were also the ones who confronted those that broke the strike, not men.[[40]](#footnote-40) When they would go confront strike breakers they were armed with lead pipes and knives, one man was even threatened to be poisoned[[41]](#footnote-41). Valdez had a strong connection to her Mexican origins, which played to the historical struggle with relations with Anglo-Mexican hostility.[[42]](#footnote-42) The area of the strikers also once belonged to Mexico, which furthered the anger of Valdez.[[43]](#footnote-43) It was not only Valdez who held a connection to her origins, the workers were all united by a common Mexican identity, regardless of where in Mexico they were from or their gender.[[44]](#footnote-44) When remembering the strike, the men thought of wages and conditions where as women remembered the food, an example of the gendered labor and their focus during the strike.[[45]](#footnote-45) Both the women living in cities and working in factories and the farm workers faced racism from white Americans and limited mobility. Both experiences had heavy influence from Mexican tradition and new American identities. Both women may have bobbed their hair or use their wage towards independence, but they also faced social expectations from their families and communities.

Mexican American women face a unique situation of usually being mixed with several different identities. They are varying in looks and experiences but are united by traditions and history. These women also were often unable to change their status from working class, living together no matter what their status in Mexico was. From early migration to now, women hold an important role in their communities. They have been homemakers, spreaders of community information, and breadwinners. The culture shift they faced in America may not have allowed their full potential to be reached but it encouraged independence. This information is important because it continues to affect Latinas to this day. The balance between tradition and new culture is ever evolving rather than having reached a stark end. Migration also continues, and those women are facing a different problem, being separated from their families, and facing an often openly hostile America. If I were to continue this research I would have continued into today, analyzing how the challenges have shifted. I noted the differing challenges between the first migrants and those of the early 20th century but the 21st century also sets new challenges for migrants and their children.

Citations

Chávez-García, Miroslava. “Race, Culture, and Justice in Mexican Los Angeles.” Essay. In *Unequal Sisters: An Inclusive Reader in U.S. Women's History*, edited by Ruíz Vicki and Ellen Carol DuBois, 4th ed., 259–270. New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2008.

Pineda, Irma. “Saberes Ancestrales, Arte y Mujeres Indígenas/Ancestral Knowledge, Art and Indigenous Women.” Zoom. University of Oregon Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies, 2021. https://uoregon.zoom.us/rec/play/eYkeBPg88XFZYfrTSSxXleqq0iikA9OcPsCwhc1CUA4dtT7xoFV8zBlawqlfGDr09kLi8oOURiF9HMQO.mqztYGOjOuCwk5vD?startTime=1619136045000&\_x\_zm\_rtaid=heA-aRK8Qke-RWbfSNDWfw.1667489509354.247757e1d1f2317a8a82b2d3937e66f8&\_x\_zm\_rhtaid=689.

Ruiz, Vicki L. “‘Star Struck’: Acculturation, Adolescence, and Mexican American Women 1920-1950.” Essay. In *Unequal Sisters: An Inclusive Reader in U.S. Women's History*, edited by Ruíz Vicki and Ellen Carol DuBois, 4th ed., 259–270. New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2008.

Weber, Devra Anne. “Raiz Fuerte: Oral History and Mexicana Farmworkers.” Essay. In *Unequal Sisters: An Inclusive Reader in U.S. Women's History*, edited by Ruíz Vicki and Ellen Carol DuBois, 4th ed., 259–270. New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2008.

1. Miroslava Chávez-García, “Race, Culture, and Justice in Mexican Los Angeles,” in Unequal Sisters, ed. Ruíz Vicki and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 2008), 108-109. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Chávez-García, “Race, Culture, and Justice in Mexican Los Angeles,” 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Chávez-García, “Race, Culture, and Justice in Mexican Los Angeles,” 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Chávez-García, “Race, Culture, and Justice in Mexican Los Angeles,” 108-109. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Chávez-García, “Race, Culture, and Justice in Mexican Los Angeles,” 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Chávez-García, “Race, Culture, and Justice in Mexican Los Angeles,” 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Chávez-García, “Race, Culture, and Justice in Mexican Los Angeles,” 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Chávez-García, “Race, Culture, and Justice in Mexican Los Angeles,” 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Chávez-García, “Race, Culture, and Justice in Mexican Los Angeles,” 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Vicki L. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” in Unequal Sisters, ed. Ruíz Vicki and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 2008), 363. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 364. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 367. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 372-373. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 374. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Irma Pineda, “Saberes Ancestrales,” (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 369. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 368-369. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 367. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Pineda, “Saberes Ancestrales.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 368. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’,” 367. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Devra Anne Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” in Unequal Sisters, ed. Ruíz Vicki and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 2008), 417. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 417. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 417. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 419. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. (Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. (Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 418. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 418. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 419. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 419. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 422. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Weber, “Raiz Fuerte,” 420-421. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)