

## **Interview Descriptions: Consuelo Nieto Oral History, May 8, 1995**

### **Record Information**

<b>Collection</b>	The Virtual Oral/Aural History Archive
<b>Subcollection</b>	Women's History
<b>Series</b>	Chicana Feminists
<b>Interviewer</b>	Julie Bartolotto
<b>Interviewee</b>	Consuelo Nieto
<b>Date</b>	05/08/1995
<b>Collecting Institution</b>	California State University, Long Beach

### **Original Interview Description**

This single interview with Consuelo Nieto was conducted as part of an MA thesis project on the history of the women's studies program at CSULB. Nieto was a willing and helpful narrator.

NOTE: another short interview with Nieto that was conducted at the 1977 IWY Conference in Houston is included in the Los Angeles feminist series.

### **Original Audio Segment Descriptions**

#### **File: Consuelo Nieto Oral History (05/08/1995) - Part 1**

- (0:00-3:05) While Consuelo Nieto was a teacher at California State University, Long Beach, in 1979, many students voiced an interest in a new course that reflected the changing roles of Chicana women. Because of her academic and personal experience with Chicano culture, Nieto was selected to teach the new course. Although she did not teach through the Chicano Studies Department, she was granted permission to teach outside her own department.
- (3:05-9:24) Nieto's course on Chicana women used historical documents, poetry, and fictional literature to explore the roles of Chicana women in the past and present. Chicana women were unique from the general feminist movement because they experienced a type of discrimination that fused sexism with racism. Chicana women pursued their own agenda, and were sometimes criticized by other feminists when they focused on specifically Latino issues.

- (9:24-12:45) Because of their European and Indian roots, Nieto and other Chicanos often heard insults, such as being called "half-breeds." Some Mexicans emphasized their European ancestry over their Indian ancestry because of racism. However, rather than being ashamed, many Mexicans began to refer to themselves as "La Raza" ("my people") out of a sense of unity and pride for their mixed heritage.
- (12:45-16:55) In her courses, Nieto explored the meaning of the term "Chicano," which signifies not only people of Mexican heritage born in the United States, but also a political and cultural identity. This identity is not individualistic and emphasizes a unity through family and community. At times, this can put pressure on Chicana women who desire to be independent rather than follow "traditional" roles.
- (16:55-18:18) Nieto taught that in order to understand what it is to be Chicano, it is necessary to understand how other people view Chicanos. While teaching high school, a fellow teacher from Scotland described a student as "foreign-looking," despite the fact that the student was native-born. Chicanos found great difficulty in being accepted as US citizens by other Americans.
- (18:18-22:37) Nieto also experienced Chicano men trying to manipulate Chicanas by accusing them of "acting like White women." While participating in an organization election, Nieto was criticized for not backing out of the race because she was running against a Chicano man. She was also criticized for "challenging" a Latino man in front of Anglos.
- (22:37-28:10) In her "La Chicana" course, Nieto assigned her students to tell the story of an older Chicana women to learn the experiences of a previous generation. Most of her students were Chicanas, with a few males and non-Latina women. At times, students who are the ethnic minority of a class tend to feel uncomfortable because they fear they might be criticized by their classmates. Nieto felt that her course provided a "window" for students to explore themselves and their relationships with others.

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**File: Consuelo Nieto Oral History (05/08/1995) - Part 2**

- (0:00-3:10) Consuelo Nieto and interviewer Julie Bartolotto briefly discuss Adella De La Torre and Rudy Torres, who were hired to teaching positions. Nieto taught courses in Education and Chicano Studies. Before Nieto began teaching in Chicano Studies, Genevieve Ramirez was the only woman in the department. However, the amount of male and female students in the department was more balanced.

- (3:10-7:24) While working on her doctorate at Claremont Graduate School, Nieto taught some courses at California State University, Los Angeles, but was told she absolutely would not have the opportunity for a permanent position. When she was offered a tenure-track position at CSULB, the administration at CSULA offered her a tenure-track position. Feeling betrayed and lied to by CSULA, Nieto accepted the position in Long Beach.
- (7:24-12:15) Nieto felt that Gloria Molina was a great model of a Chicana feminist. Molina, who had no college degree, was a strong woman who worked not only for women's issues, but also for the greater community. Molina found support from women of various ethnic backgrounds. At times, she felt pressure from fellow Democrats for standing up against having a prison built in her community.
- (12:15-16:26) Nieto described herself as a feminist and a liberal in that she believes all people are equally important, yet have unique life experiences. Even among Latinos, men and women have different experiences. Nieto felt that flattering women by complimenting their beauty is a type of discrimination in that women are being judged by their appearances rather than their intellect and character qualities.
- (16:26-20:21) Among her Chicana activist peers, Nieto felt that the finest feminists were driven by communal issues rather than strictly women's issues. She admired women who worked for the greater community, such as establishing welfare rights. Nieto observed that younger women followed feminism in the style of Gloria Steinem instead of the local community activism. The older Chicana feminists did not understand and were suspicious of White feminists because they had experienced so much racism.
- (20:21-25:16) Nieto believes that the gap between Chicana and White feminists was due to the segregation common in society. At this time, schools needed bussing programs in order to integrate schools. Nieto had to meet with White teachers to prepare for integration and felt very uneasy when she traveled to the predominantly White community in the San Fernando Valley. Only after having more experience in a new social setting did she become more comfortable.
- (25:16-28:15) Nieto felt that as Chicanas gained access to more education, they would have greater abilities to interact with other cultures. Nieto was involved in expanding the educational opportunities for Chicanos and other Latinos by creating new courses at CSULB. When Nieto began teaching, her students were mostly Mexican American. As the school enrolled more non-Mexican Latinos, the Chicano Studies Department changed its name to Chicano/Latino Studies.

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