

## **Interview Descriptions: Leticia Hernandez Oral History, July 30, 1992**

### **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>	Maylei Blackwell
<b>Interviewee</b>	Leticia Hernandez
<b>Date</b>	07/30/1992
<b>Collecting Institution</b>	California State University, Long Beach

### **Original Interview Description**

This is the second of three interviews with Leticia Hernandez conducted as part of a project on Hijas de Cuauhtemoc. Hernandez was very forthcoming and helpful in the interview, which was recorded in her office at the CSU headquarters.

### **Original Audio Segment Descriptions**

#### **File: Leticia Hernandez Oral History (7/30/1992) – Part 1**

- (0:00 - 3:10) Leticia Hernandez was involved in launching the Hijas de Cuauhtemoc newspaper and is dismayed by the fact that many of the same struggles facing Chicanas still exist after so many years. She felt the women's movement was hindered by men who would not treat women as equals and who perceived the movement as a gay/lesbian issue. The Hijas women also dealt with internal disagreements with each other.
- (3:10 - 7:03) Hernandez became tired of the constant fighting among the Hijas. She felt that women could address many of their own problems if they had the proper education about the world and their own bodies. Hernandez witnessed women who fought for feminism, yet still followed the traditional role of doing what men wanted. After the women's conference in Houston, she quit MEChA and Hijas to work with the Ballet Folklorico.
- (7:03 - 11:04) In addition to the in-fighting within Hijas, there were disagreements between other women's groups in California and around the nation. Hernandez identified the women from Texas in particular as very critical

of Californian women - saying they were too radical and wanted to be white women. The hostility at Houston was very damaging to the emerging Chicana women's movement, fracturing rather than uniting groups.

- (11:04 - 14:55) Hernandez felt that the problems within Hijas stemmed primarily from jealousy and personality conflicts. Although the women largely shared ideologies, working together was difficult because egos got in the way. Rivalries between schools arose, and Hernandez likened their behaviors to gangs fighting over turf.
- (14:55 - 17:43) Hernandez was not involved in UMAS until the end of her first semester in college. After she returned to school the following term, UMAS students decided to form MEChA because they did not want to be known as "Mexican-Americans" a "hyphenated people." She became more involved with MEChA under the influence of a man she loved, who was politically active and encouraged her to be active as well.
- (17:43 - 21:34) Hernandez recalled the troubles in MEChA that arose when some of the women began to challenge the domination of men in the group. Anna NietoGomez in particular was seen as a threat to male leaders, especially after she won the election for MEChA president from 1969-1970 against Armando Vasquez. Most members supported NietoGomez, but Vasquez and a few men who were among the most active continually tried to undermine her authority.
- (21:34 - 26:15) Although MEChA had a large membership, Hernandez felt that only a few students were dedicated to planning and organizing events. Such a small core group made MEChA vulnerable because conflicts between a few students could affect the entire organization. The in-fighting within MEChA grew as a result of conflict over NietoGomez's leadership. Vasquez even hanged and burned her in effigy, and tried to influence other women to fight against her.
- (26:15 - 30:51) Vasquez and Dolores Ramos finally triumphed over NietoGomez and they became co-chairs of MEChA in the early 1970s. NietoGomez, Hernandez, and other women who had become fed up with MEChA, joined together to create a newspaper specifically for Chicanas. The women were not interested in taking over for men, but wanted recognition and equal treatment instead of having their voices ignored and being relegated to secondary support roles within the movement.

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- (0:00 - 3:29) Leticia Hernandez was involved with La Raza and the Chicana feminist movement to fight against the social problems that faced their community. Many men expected women to mirror their mothers and stay subservient in the home while men lead the world. Hernandez's own grandmother embraced this traditional role in which a woman was supposed to serve men and put their needs first.
- (3:29 - 5:35) Hernandez recognized many naïve women in college who believed they could find a man to marry, whereas the men were usually looking for a good time. Women who did not have sex with men on demand were accused of being lesbians or manipulative. Hernandez said that some men would pretend to support feminist issues only to trick women into bed.
- (5:35 - 8:37) According to Hernandez, Armando Vasquez never left Long Beach and never became a leader. Other men in MEChA who were reluctant to include women faced problems later in life and did not rise as community leaders despite their activity in student organizations.
- (8:37 - 11:43) In this brief aside, Hernandez describes what her former colleagues are doing in their contemporary lives.
- (11:43 - 15:29) Hernandez and other women activists were not originally focused on women's issues in MEChA. It was not until they realized that the men ignored their ideas that they decided to organize on their own. Hernandez was not directly involved in the founding of Hijas or establishing the historical connection for women's activism. She was approached by other women to write articles for the newspaper.
- (15:29 - 19:49) Hernandez retraces the women involved in raising the funds to support the Hijas newspaper. In 1970, some of the Hijas women joined Chicana Caucus at the Council of Higher Education for Chicanos conference in San Diego. Hernandez became ill, so AnnaNieto Gomez presented the argument to reorganize Chicano Studies as Chicano/Chicana Studies to include the role of women.
- (19:49 - 21:55) Hernandez and the other Hijas women advocated women's issues, but still wanted to be involved in the greater Chicano Movement within MEChA. They attended the MEChA meetings, but still felt they were not valued as much as men. Hernandez decided to focus more on women's issues and was involved in organizing the Chicana conference at California State University, Los Angeles.
- (21:55 - 26:07) Hernandez admired AnnaNieto Gomez and felt she could have been a great political leader because she had the ability to work well with others. NietoGomez was instrumental in laying the ground work for women activists to follow. She, Hernandez, and other Chicana feminists faced ridicule and accusations of being divisive and emulating white women. It

was also difficult to find support among women new to the campus because they still believed college was a place to find a husband.

- (26:07 - 30:46) Hernandez and the Hijas women did not call themselves feminists and did not want to be like white women. They wanted to be women and embrace their identity as Chicanas, but wanted to be accepted as equal partners. While Hernandez was at CSULB, she got to know some men and women released from jail. Some seemed to have great promise, but unfortunately many of them ended up on drugs, back in jail, or dead.

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**File: Leticia Hernandez Oral History (7/30/1992) – Part 3**

- (0:00 - 3:25) While at CSULB, Leticia Hernandez became friends with a woman named Rosa who had a baby. Rosa and her family had problems with the law and Hernandez felt bad for the baby. Hernandez wanted to help other students and worked as a counselor for high school students in Upward Bound.

- (3:25 - 7:11) Hernandez took issue with the word “Hermanidad” in the second edition of Hijas because she felt the word was incorrect. Some of the other women felt it projected a more feminist image. When the women disagreed, they did not use consensus to settle the issue; instead, it was decided by “whoever could talk loudest.” Hijas suffered from other problems, and the paper never spread statewide.

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