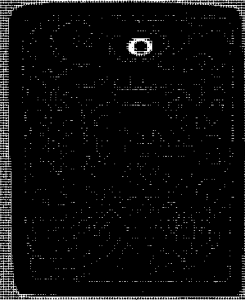


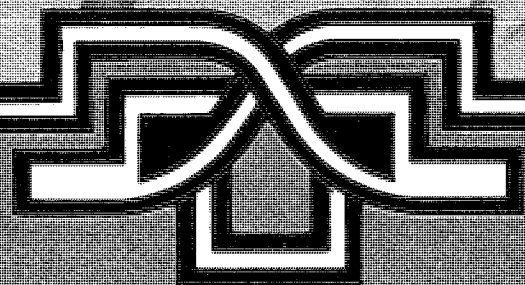
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la hispana





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Contents

EDITORIAL

La Década de la Mujer 2
Marta Sotomayor

THEME STATEMENT

La Hispana: The Struggle Within a Struggle 3

THE NATION

Hispanic Women in Double Jeopardy 4
Pilar Saavedra-Vela

Sterilization is Not an Alternative in Family Planning 8
Esther Talavera

Abortion—A Right or a Privilege? 9
Antonio José Guernica

The Equal Rights Amendment 11
Marguerite Rawalt

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

TELACU—Community Change Through Economic Power 14
Antonio José Guernica

RELIGION

The Catholic Church Reacts to Carter's Proposal
on the Undocumented Alien 17
Donald G. Hohl

HEALTH

Alcohol Related Problems and the Hispanic 21
Louis S. Garcia

EDUCATION

La Pedagogía en el Barrio 24
Roberto Pérez Díaz

MEDIA

Chicano Group to Get Its Own TV Station 28
Antonio José Guernica

IN A NUTSHELL 31

THE MARKETPLACE

Some Thoughts of a Macho on the Chicana Movement 35
Eduardo (Ed) Terrones

ON THE HORIZON 36

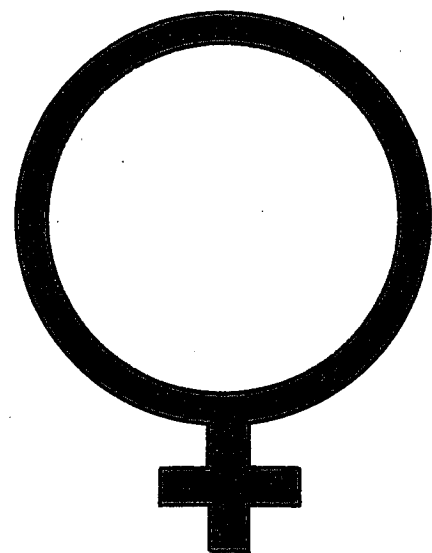
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La Década de La Mujer

by **Marta Sotomayor**
Vice Chairperson
Board of Directors
National Council of La Raza

La Década de la Mujer—the specific meaning of this phrase is still uncertain to the majority of Hispanas. For involved women the meaning is as diverse as the various orientations and perspectives that characterize our communities. For some Hispanas, for example, the decade of women is best embodied in the Equal Rights Amendment which clearly speaks of the legal framework for the exercise of some basic human rights. In the issue of abortion that concept of human rights more often than not becomes diluted in the simplistic dichotomy of being either *for* or *against* abortion. For other Hispanas the feminist forum and agency (as varied as it is) provides one more arena to exercise their political skills regardless of the substance of the issues—the process, it is claimed, is what matters. For still another group of Hispanas the main issues revolve around a reevaluation of the roles, boundaries, and rules that have given a specific flavor to the transactional field between men and women.

The struggle becomes too easily translated into, and clouded by, the notion of *machos y hembras* which is usually dealt with in the power arena.

One can go on to mention other perspectives of the feminist agenda but the truth of the matter is that Hispana leadership has yet to identify carefully and systematically the issues that could be meaningful and useful to engage the majority of Hispanas in the *barrios* and *colonias* in the process of self change. While it is true that the majority of the issues being discussed by women in general are relevant to those Hispanas who have access to alternatives and choices, it is doubtful that those same issues, at this point, can be successfully utilized to organize the majority of average Hispanas and enable them to join that one other facet of the movement for liberation.

ERA, for example, as meaningful and important as it is, remains simply a legal strategy to guarantee certain rights to women; abortion, as crucial as it is in some instances, is merely a symptom of more severe and complex conditions that need to be understood, separated, and dealt with in a variety of approaches. While process is indeed important and political skills are indeed necessary to create change, process remains only the *context* and skills are only the *tools* to accomplish certain objectives. And while male and female relationships are quite basic and fundamental, and ascribed roles are often devastating for both sexes, a true reform movement must go beyond these sets of relationships.

It is true that certain principles are involved in the law, but the fact that a law exists does not necessarily mean that laws are enforced and that they will create basic attitudinal change. All of us, I am certain, are painfully aware that civil rights legislation of the last 25 years has not created the basic changes that are so needed in this society to increase the life chances and open more doors of opportunity to the minorities of color.

Available data does not indicate that more Hispanas are graduating from professional schools, or entering managerial positions, or becoming entrepreneurs; some do but not enough to make a dent. However, available data, as crude as it is, indicate that Hispanas continue to show a greater incidence of uterine cancer and tuberculosis; have large unplanned families, and not enough money to make it from day to day; live in unsanitary and dilapidated housing that breeds all types of disease, which do not help in significantly lowering the infant death rate.

Available data also shows that while some Hispanas are beginning to venture into the work world, the most they will be able to find is inadequately paid menial or domestic jobs, and that the majority of Hispanas do not finish high school and thus do not acquire sufficient skills to allow them to enter a competitive labor market. There are many barriers that Hispanas face from day to day that seem to have been there from generation to generation. All are symptoms of the way that society is organized and structured, of the rules of the game that exclude others and provide special privileges to the few.

But those forces that oppose change seem to be gaining momentum, as evidenced by the events that have taken place in a number of state conferences sponsored as part of the International Women's Year. Those Hispanas who as delegates engaged in a process of change faced in Houston a series of disruptive tactics, well organized caravans, and well disciplined organizational machinery that includes husbands, brothers, sons and anyone who can be mustered to openly attack the values and changes that all of us have been working for.

Those Hispanas who were elected as delegates, and who identify themselves as Hispanas for our cause, will not have an easy task in the future for they will have to deal with overt expressions of bigotry and racism. They must, however, formulate a meaningful Hispana agenda based on the nature of their positions as leaders. They will have to identify those issues with which *la mujer en el barrio* can identify, and develop strategies for change that are applicable and appropriate to the decades of the 70's and the 80's.

But equally important is the fact that these women can provide role models for many young Hispanas that will follow in the years to come. It will not be an easy task, but it is a most crucial and necessary one. ■

La Hispana: The Struggle Within A Struggle

The woman of today—who is she? What does she want? Where is she going? These questions have been asked of women, and by women of themselves, for more than a decade. The answer to these questions are not yet clear; if anything, they are becoming more and more murky as standard definitions and stated goals are blurred by individual preferences.

The woman of today is learning, above all, that she is an individual and as such cannot expect to fit precisely into any specific mold, or attain to any stated goal, or even agree with all aspects of the women's movement. Women come in all sizes and shapes, both physically and motivationally, and there is no one answer that can fit all.

Within the large general category of women, there exist many groups whose basic needs and problems are not considered or discussed by the general movement. Hispanic women are in this category. As one of the groups most tied to ethnic and traditional culture, they face problems and fight battles not always recognized by the general structure.

Agenda recognizes their struggle as an especially difficult one, and by concentrating this issue on some of the problems they face, hopes to offer encouragement and support for the future. ■

Hispanic Women in Double Jeopardy

by Pilar Saavedra-Vela

The National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas, took place on November 18 to 21, 1977. This was the first time that a national women's meeting was sponsored by law (P.L. 94-167) and funded by the Congress of the United States. Convened by the President's National Commission on the Observance of Women's Year, the Conference is the culmination of 56 state-and territory-wide meetings held by women this year. Guided by regulations provided by the Commission, the state conference participants elected delegates to the Houston Conference, which were to reflect the different segments of each state's population. They also passed resolutions that make up a National Plan of Action to be adopted in Houston, and State Plans of Action for the improvement of the status of women, to be implemented at the state level.

Although several state delegations were not demographically representative of their areas (see box), most delegations included members of their various racial, ethnic, religious and economic groups.

Hispanic women represented by 149 delegates, including at-large delegates named by the Commission, were actually overrepresented in proportion to the national population, according to Commission spokespersons. At the 45-member National IWY Commission, Hispanas have three representatives in the persons of Carmen Delgado Votaw, Rhea Mojica Hammer and Cecilia Preciado Burciaga.

At Houston, the Hispanic delegates formed a caucus with other minority women to see that the issues of particular interest to them were fully discussed, considered and passed with due regard to the point of view of each group.

The issue of adequate representation has always been a problem for Hispanas. Historically, Latin women have been unsung participants in the continuous struggle of Hispanics for the improvement of their communities. They have fought in the Revolutions, they have participated in the labor movement, they have toiled in the fields and helped organize their fellow farmworkers into a union, and the few who managed to attend a university have shone in their endeavors and created for themselves brilliant careers.

Yet a great many Hispanic women feel frustrated at the limited role played by women in Hispanic organizations at the national and local levels. On the other hand, Hispanas formerly have been reluctant to participate in the feminist movement because they have encountered racist discrimination within the movement, or at least a general insensitivity to minority women's issues.

The double discrimination which Hispanic women have denounced has led them to organize their own vehicles for change in ever-increasing numbers. Today there are close to 40 independent Latina organizations at the local and national levels. While

their goal is one—the well-being of the Hispana—they approach it from many different roads. The six organizations that are discussed below are generally representative of the variety of these approaches.

National Groups

The Mexican American Women's National Association (MANA) and the National Conference of Puerto Rican Women (NACOPRW) are two of the most prominent organizations with national membership. They share the common goals of advocating for each of their groups, not only before governmental institutions, but also before organizations where issues of their concern are discussed, or where policies affecting their own communities as well as other Hispanic communities, are made; and of providing a forum for Chicanas and Puertorriqueñas whereby they might develop and promote leadership, and political awareness and participation.

MANA was established in 1974 by a group of Chicanas residing in Washington, D.C. MANA has members in 16 states and is in the process of forming local chapters. At the present time MANA's main services include annual training conferences, the issuance of position papers on Hispanic topics of concern, and the representation of the Chicana point of view at the Forum of

National Hispanic Organizations, professional women's associations and other coalitions in support of political and social changes beneficial to Hispanic women and the community as a whole.

Stemming from their discussions on the status of Puerto Rican women in the United States, a small group of Puertorriqueñas decided in 1972 to associate and form NACOPRW. The organization consists of five chapters in Washington, D.C.; Hartford, Conn.; Chicago, Ill.; New York, N.Y.; and Miami, Fla. In addition there are individual members across the country. NACOPRW's decentralized structure allows for each chapter to provide services that will deal more directly with the needs of its members and will better accomplish the organization's larger purposes. This means that services will be quite different from chapter to chapter, according to that community's economic, educational and cultural realities. The national board of NACOPRW takes care of the advocacy functions and other representation functions at the national level, presenting testimony before Congressional committees, preparing position papers and coordinating annual training conferences.

Local Groups

HEMBRA, a Chicana feminist organization from Denver, Colorado, was formed in 1975 by a group of Hispanas who saw the women's movement as a base and resource that would aid Chicanas to reach a level of awareness, as 20th century women, of the role they are to play. The goals of HEMBRA are to improve the socio-economic status of Hispanic women, to improve their educational level, to raise the consciousness of women who have been living within the traditional system, and to offer mutual support systems through the organization. HEMBRA offers indirect educational services as part of the monthly meetings and also serves as an advocate for the rights of Chicanas within the Denver community.

Like HEMBRA, the Hispanic Women's Council (HWC) of Los Angeles, California, is a local organization which offers indirect educational services to Hispanic women by granting scholarships to women over the age of 25. The HWC also pays for the transportation and child care needs of the recipients. HWC, an affiliate of the National Council of La Raza, was founded in 1973.

In 1976 HWC established the scholarship fund after a research study found that, due to tradition, older Hispanic women had a very low educational level. The goals which HWC wants to accomplish are to develop leadership and group participation among Hispanas, and to improve their welfare through education.

The Puerto Rican Organization of Women (PROW), of San Francisco, California, and

Mujeres Latinas en Acción (MLA), from Chicago, Illinois, are two organizations which offer primary, direct community services within a barrio structure.

PROW serves the Mission District of San Francisco, where it runs a women's center that is mainly attended by nonmember Central American and Puerto Rican women. Among the services provided by PROW are a free lunch program, job counseling, personal counseling, emergency housing for all women in need, and immigration counseling. PROW was founded in 1974 by 25 Puerto Rican women who set their goals to make Hispanic women proud of themselves, to uplift their status, and to train them to take leadership roles.

Working in the Mexican barrio, one of several in the Chicago area, MLA provides skill-building classes, women's rights awareness sessions, and a sports program for teenage girls. They also help find bilingual/bicultural foster homes for run-aways who have refused to return to their families. MLA offers counseling services for abused women, and support systems that may be required by the community women and by senior citizens. Aside from these services, MLA represents the views of Chicana feminists at women's organizations, other local Hispanic organizations, and local and state institutions whose policies affect the Hispanic community.

Most of the funds that support these organizations are private donations and membership contributions. While some of them have applied for grants that would cover staffing and the publication of conference proceedings, most of the women see private funding as a means to philosophical and economic independence for their groups.

Male Dominated Leadership

One of the common complaints of Hispanas in these organizations is that national Hispanic groups tend to relegate women to a secondary status where their needs are subordinate to the list of priorities drawn up by the organizations' male-dominated leadership. According to Anita Espinosa-Larsen, Co-Chairwoman of HEMBRA, "We feel that [Chicano organizations] have not really addressed any of our needs nor have we had any real representation on the part of the leadership of those organizations. ... We need to recognize that we're not exactly a priority to our own Chicano organizations."

The statement applies to other Latino groups as well, according to Paquita Vivó, former President of NACOPRW and a Washington, D.C., delegate to the Houston Conference. She voiced this feeling at a meeting of the Forum of National Hispanic Organizations when she was still leading NACOPRW: "I said that I looked forward

to a day when it would not be necessary to have special seats for MANA and NACOPRW. But every Executive Director there was a male."

This is, as stated earlier, one of the reasons for the formation of Hispanic women's groups. Elisa Sánchez, the newly elected President of MANA, sees the exclusion of women from the Chicano movement as a sudden turn that has taken place during the last decades. "Up to contemporary times, like the 'fifties and 'sixties,'" she said, "[Hispanic] women were very much involved in the movement and during the last 20 years there has been a tremendous struggle on the part of men to exclude us from the structure that makes things happen for our community."

Whether this exclusion has indeed been a sudden trend or not, its adverse effects have left a gap between the opportunities and programs available to men and those available to women. Luz María Prieto, Director of MLA, points out that in the past neighborhood programs for youth have been geared to provide sports and other recreation to boys. She gives the example of Centro de La Raza, a Chicago community center, where they had what Prieto thought was one of the best recreational facilities in the area, but these were used strictly by boys.

On a wider scope, this gap is present in median income and employment education and political participation. Espinosa-Larsen and Vivó cite statistics that show Puerto Rican women making half the salaries of men with the same education, Hispana heads of households with a median income of \$4,800 in 1974, 51 percent of whom had incomes below the poverty level, and so on.

Hispanic women's organizations have consequently tried to fill the gap by either exerting pressure on community groups to start making their services available to the other half of the community, as happened with MLA, or by creating financial resource bases which women can utilize to improve their situation, as in the case of HWC. In the view of Myrna Márquez Torres, President of HWC, "women ought to start pushing men because they work better when they start feeling threatened by women."

Some women perceive an increased effort on the part of Hispanos to incorporate women to the policy-making bodies of national organizations by having equal numbers of men and women in the boards of directors. This, however, does not satisfy other women. Paquita Vivó thinks that "in recent times there has been an increased awareness [on the part of the men] but I think it is still at the lip-service level. There has been no truly dramatic change in national Hispanic organizations to give women truly equal participation opportunity."

For the last 15 years, Espinosa-Larsen says, women have been doing the hard



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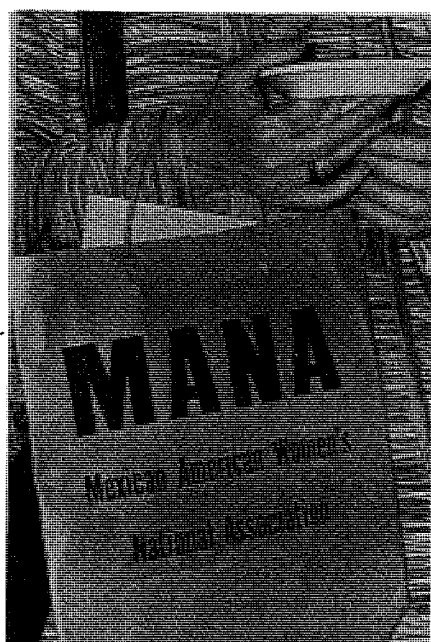
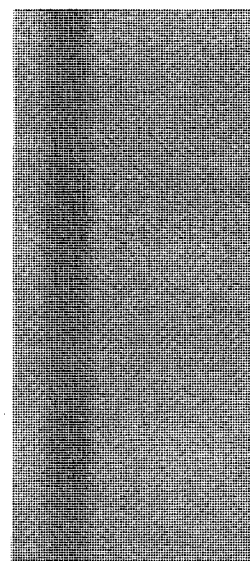


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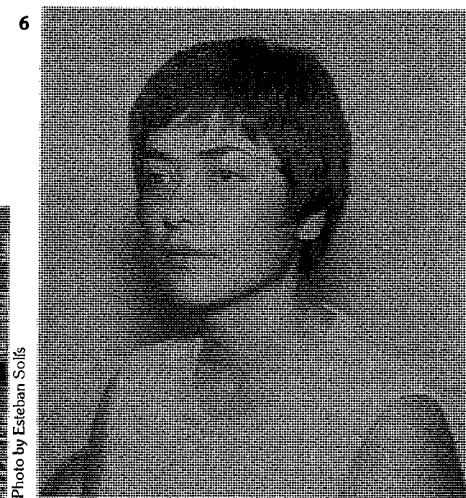
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1. Elba Iris Montes, President, Puerto Rican Organization of Women, San Francisco, California. 2. Officers of the Hispanic Women's Council of Los Angeles, California. Left to right: Mirna Márquez Torres, President; Cecilia Scamolla, Executive Secretary; Anita Sloan, Treasurer; Lily Ferrell, Vice President. 3. Paquita Vivó, former President, National Conference of Puerto Rican Women. 4. Taken at the First National Training Conference of the Mexican American Women's National Association, "Focus on Washington, A Chicana Perspective," Washington, D.C., September 15-16, 1977. 5. Left to right: Ana María Perera, President, National Association of Cuban American Women; Elisa Sánchez, President, Mexican Women; Carmen Delgado Votaw, President, National Conference of Puerto Rican Women; Elba Iris Montes, President, Puerto Rican Organization of Women. 6. Anita Espinosa-Larsen, Co-Chairwoman, HEMBRA, Denver, Colorado.

work behind the lines while the men have "gone around patting each other on the back and politicking.... That's got to change. I see the women taking over the leadership role in the community." In fact, say some of the Hispanas, the unity and cohesion among Hispanic groups would be greater if women were equal participants in the common struggle.

Traditional Barriers

Latinas do not blame the men entirely. Rather, they point to the system and traditional barriers as great contributors to the second-class status of Hispanic women. Unlike Anglo women, and Black women too, Hispanas were not encouraged to leave home in order to receive an education and fend for themselves. Traditional roles held them back. There is very little room for comparison between the educational opportunities given to Hispanas and to Black women, says Sánchez, because Blacks did have their own higher education institutions, even if they were kept out of White institutions, whereas Hispanics had none.

Elba I. Montes, founder of PROW, in explaining the goals of the organization, points out that poverty and the lack of education and participation in the greater society has reinforced an inferior self-image among low-income Hispanas. This conditioning is being broken little by little. "It is very pleasing,"

says Márquez Torres, "to see women who 20 years ago never would have dreamed of an education, going out and starting a career at a mature age."

Not all the organizations represented here consider themselves feminist. HWC has been described by Márquez Torres as an organization where most of the members are "more traditional, family women." In addition, it would be false to say that Hispanas have embraced the women's movement wholeheartedly. It was mentioned earlier that, while this seems to be changing, Hispanas have been discriminated against by White women in the movement, or at best, the particular needs and issues of minority women have not been considered.

Luz María Prieto thinks that the reason why so many Hispanic men and women question Hispana feminism is that they, like a large segment of the general population, have misunderstood feminism, perceiving it as the bra-burning stereotype fostered by the media.

By the same token, Prieto and Sánchez think that the role of Hispanas within the feminist movement is to "knock down the stereotype that our machos are worse than anybody else's." It is also to make it known to other women that the needs of minority women, especially Hispanas, are different from those of the majority of women. The needs of the Hispana are more basic. They consist of food, clothing, education, and health care. In the view of Hispana feminists,

these "bread-and-butter issues," issues of survival, are more important to disadvantaged women than "one woman's rise through the corporate ranks" or abortion on demand. Hispanic women do not possess the economic independence or political sophistication of the White women in the movement; they simply are not there yet.

For this reason, Hispana feminists' interpretation of the movement directs them to work within the frame of their culture, with an understanding of their reality, their status, the particular goals they want to achieve and a clear view of the impediments they face. The majority of the Hispana leaders from these six organizations agree that those who question their participation in the women's movement when Hispanas probably see the movement as anti-men. "The struggle," says Prieto, "is against men and their systems—the same systems and men who are oppressing the minority man."

The goals and activities of Hispanic women's organizations reflect the issues that are of greatest interest to them. Many Hispanas support issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment and the right of reproductive choice. Therefore, Hispanas expected their concerns to be voiced and supported at the National Women's Conference in Houston. An assessment of their accomplishments during this historic event will be included in the March/April issue of *Agenda*. ■

Challenges to the election of several state delegations were presented to the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year. The Commission denied the challenges due to a lack of evidence of election fraud, which was the only type of challenge allowed by the law governing International Women's Year.

However, the Commission expressed outrage at the unrepresentative composition of several state delegations, citing this as the result of right wing action. "This control contradicts the spirit of the law calling for a delegate balance at the National Conference according to racial, ethnic, religious and age and income groups."

Mississippi, a state whose population is 36.8 percent Black, elected an all White delegation, which included five men. The Ku Klux Klan took credit for controlling that election. The delegation from Alabama consisted of 24 persons, 22 of whom were White, representing a state where Black people are 26.2 percent of the population.

"These outcomes," stated the Commission, "seem to be one of the results of a concentrated effort by right wing groups to discredit (I.W.Y.) through factually inaccurate misrepresentations in the press, and to pack meetings with people hostile to the legislation's goal of equality for women."

Through the appointment of delegates-at-large the Commission was empowered to balance the demographic composition of the national delegate body.

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The Col. Forum has a separate Women's Chair and Vice Chair. MALDEF has a Secretary/Treasurer.

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