

## FIRST NATIONAL CHICANA CONFERENCE

*Workshop Resolutions*

1971

*In the early days of the new feminist activism, many expected that gender would be the great unifier, bringing together women from all walks of life. Those most likely to proclaim universal sisterhood were white, middle-class women who assumed their experiences and values were universal. Minority women, however, challenged their concepts of gender. In 1971, at the First National Chicana Conference, La Conferencia de Mujeres por la Raza, in Houston, Texas, six hundred young Mexican American women discussed their experiences and stated their concerns. The resolutions that came from the conference are notable for being sex-positive among a group that was subjected to conservative Catholic teachings about sex, Anglo complaints about high Chicana birth rates, and exploitative reproductive-control experiments.*

**Sex and the Chicana**

We feel that in order to provide an effective measure to correct the many sexual hangups facing the Chicano community the following resolutions should be implemented:

I. Sex is good and healthy for both Chicanos and Chicanas and we must develop this attitude.

II. We should destroy the myth that religion and culture control our sexual lives.

III. We recognize that we have been oppressed by religion and that the religious writing was done by *men* and interpreted by *men*. Therefore, for those who desire religion, they should interpret their Bible or Catholic rulings according to their own feelings, what they think is right, without any guilt complexes.

Reprinted in Mirta Vidal, ed., *Chicanas Speak Out* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971), 13-15, and in Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, eds., *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 166.

IV. Mothers should teach their sons to respect women as human beings who are equal in every respect. *No double standard.*

V. Women should go back to the communities and form discussion and action groups concerning sex education.

VI. Free, legal abortions and birth control for the Chicano community, controlled by *Chicanas*. As Chicanas we have the right to control our own bodies.

VII. Make use of church centers, neighborhood centers and any other place available. . . .

Chicanas should understand that Chicanos face oppression and discrimination, but this does not mean that the Chicana should be a scapegoat for the man's frustrations.

With involvement in the movement, marriages must change. Traditional roles for Chicanas are not acceptable or applicable.

## RESOLUTIONS:

I. We, as *mujeres de La Raza*, recognize the Catholic Church as an oppressive institution and do hereby resolve to break away and not go to it to bless our unions.

II. Whereas: Unwanted pregnancies are the basis of many social problems, and

Whereas: The role of Mexican American women has traditionally been limited to the home, and

Whereas: The need for self-determination and the right to govern their own bodies is a necessity for the freedom of all people, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED: That the National Chicana Conference go on record as supporting free family planning and free and legal abortions for all women who want or need them.

III. Whereas: Due to socio-economic and cultural conditions, Chicanas are often heads of households, i.e., widows, divorcees, unwed mothers, or deserted mothers, or must work to supplement family income, and

Whereas: Chicana motherhood should not preclude educational, political, social, and economic advancement, and

Whereas: There is a critical need for a 24-hour child-care center in Chicano communities, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED: That the National Chicana Conference go on record as recommending that every Chicano community promote and set up 24-hour day-care facilities, and that it be further resolved that these facilities will reflect the concept of La Raza as the united family, and on the basis of brotherhood (La Raza), so that men, women,

young and old assume the responsibility for the love, care, education, and orientation of all the children of Aztlán.

IV. Whereas: Dr. Goldzieher of SWRF has conducted an experiment on Chicana women of westside San Antonio, Texas, using a new birth control drug, and

Whereas: No human being should be used for experimental purposes, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED: That this Conference send telegrams to the American Medical Association condemning this act.

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JOHNNIE TILLMON

*Welfare Is a Women's Issue*

1972

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*The radical ferment of the 1960s encouraged even the most vulnerable Americans to organize, among them poor mothers who relied on public assistance to raise their children. Founded in 1966, the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) used direct-action protest to win decent incomes from the federal safety net program called Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). NWRO also fought the agency's intrusion into the personal lives of welfare recipients, such as midnight raids to see if any men who might be able to support them resided in the house. As welfare rights activists resisted the degrading aspects of AFDC, they developed an explicitly feminist politics, as this piece illustrates.*

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I'm a woman. I'm a black woman. I'm a poor woman. I'm a fat woman. I'm a middle-aged woman. And I'm on welfare.

In this country, if you're any one of those things—poor, black, fat, female, middle-aged, on welfare—you count less as a human being. If you're all those things, you don't count at all. Except as a statistic.

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*Liberation News Service 415 (February 26, 1972): 15–16. Reprinted in Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverby, eds., *America's Working Women: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976).*

I am a statistic.

I am 45 years old. I have raised six children.

I grew up in Arkansas, and I worked there for fifteen years in a laundry, making about \$20 or \$30 a week, picking cotton on the side for carfare. I moved to California in 1959 and worked in a laundry there for nearly four years. In 1963 I got too sick to work anymore. Friends helped me to go on welfare.

They didn't call it welfare. They called it A.F.D.C.—Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Each month I get \$363 for my kids and me. I pay \$128 a month rent; \$30 for utilities, which include gas, electricity, and water; \$120 for food and non-edible household essentials; \$50 for school lunches for the three children in junior and senior high school who are not eligible for reduced-cost meal programs.

There are millions of statistics like me. Some on welfare. Some not. And some, really poor, who don't even know they're entitled to welfare. Not all of them are black. Not at all. In fact, the majority—about two-thirds—of all the poor families in the country are white.

Welfare's like a traffic accident. It can happen to anybody, but especially it happens to women.

And that is why welfare is a women's issue. For a lot of middle-class women in this country, Women's Liberation is a matter of concern. For women on welfare it's a matter of survival.

Forty-four percent of all poor families are headed by women. That's bad enough. But the *families* on A.F.D.C. aren't really families. Because 99 percent of them are headed by women. That means there is no man around. In half the states there really can't be men around because A.F.D.C. says if there is an "able-bodied" man around, then you can't be on welfare. If the kids are going to eat, and the man can't get a job, then he's got to go. So his kids can eat.

The truth is that A.F.D.C. is like a supersexist marriage. You trade in *a man for the man*. But you can't divorce him if he treats you bad. He can divorce you, of course, cut you off anytime he wants. But in that case, *he* keeps the kids, not you.

*The man* runs everything. In ordinary marriage, sex is supposed to be for your husband. On A.F.D.C. you're not supposed to have any sex at all. You give up control of your own body. It's a condition of aid. You may even have to agree to get your tubes tied so you can never have more children just to avoid being cut off welfare.

*The man*, the welfare system, controls your money. He tells you what to buy, what not to buy, where to buy it, and how much things cost. If things—rent, for instance—really cost more than he says they do, it's just too bad for you.