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Doing Dignity Work: Alicia Escalante and the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization, 1967-1974

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Chicana and Chicano Studies

by

Rosie Cano Bermudez

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June 2019

The dissertation of Rosie Cano Bermudez is approved.

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June 2019

Doing Dignity Work: Alicia Escalante and the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization, 1967-1974

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by

Rosie Cano Bermudez

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I dedicate my dissertation to four very important people in my life, foremost is my mama Amparo Alvarez who never gave up on me and has been my greatest source of strength and support. My homegirl and spirit sister Crystal Rose Alvarez, we did it! To Dr. Yolanda Retter Vargas, who made me promise her that I would get my PhD back when I was an undergraduate student at UCLA. May Crystal and Yolanda rest in peace and forever be in my heart. And last but certainly not least, Alicia Lara Escalante, whose story inspired me to write a history about her lived experiences and to continue the fight for human dignity.

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Although financial support has been pivotal to the completion of my dissertation it is also important for me to acknowledge my spectacular dissertation committee chair, advisor, and mentor Professor Miroslava Chávez-García for her unyielding support and encouragement. It has been an immense pleasure to receive her guidance and mentorship. Further, my fabulous committee member and mentor Professor Edwina Barvosa has been a blessing ever since I began working with her as a research assistant my first summer at UCSB. She has been a wellspring of both academic and personal support. Many thanks also to Professor Eileen Boris for believing in my project from the beginning of my program at UCSB and her financial support. Lastly, I would like to recognize Professor Mario T. García for his support of my research topic and publishing my first publication in an anthology in conjunction with his Bi-annual Sal Castro Conference on the Historiography of the Chicano Movement.

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June 2019

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Welfare Rights
Economic Justice
Oral History
Multi-Racial Activist Coalitions

ABSTRACT

Doing Dignity Work: Alicia Escalante and the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization, 1967-1974

by

Rosie Cano Bermudez

"Doing Dignity Work," examines and analyzes the struggle for economic justice and human dignity waged by single, Chicana mothers in East Los Angeles. For Escalante, being able to lead a dignified life as a single mother receiving welfare entailed having adequate nutrition, clothing, a decent home, medical care for the family, and an honest job with a livable wage. It also meant being respected for the labor of raising children and caring for the elderly at home and not being subjected to demeaning, racist, and sexist policies and practices, as she and many others had experienced continuously at the welfare offices. As a political biography of gender and leadership and a social history, "Doing Dignity Work" excavates a grassroots genealogy of Chicana feminisms rooted in the struggles of single Chicana welfare mothers, sheds new light on the development of social and political consciousness among urban poor women of color, and disrupts the historiographic compartmentalization of social movements by bringing to the fore the multiple insurgencies and inter-organizational dynamics of this era.

Employing the oral histories of Alicia Escalante and six of her activist contemporaries in conjunction with rich archival analysis, "Doing Dignity Work" forces us to reconsider women's activism in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. What is significant about

the activism that Escalante practiced was that it was broadly based and multi-issued and cut across multiple constituencies. Escalante understood that to fight for economic justice and self-respect, you had to fight racism, classism *and* sexism. She realized, too, that these interlocking systems of oppression did not just affect low income, single Chicana and Mexicana mothers, but all impoverished women and people generally. Building on the integral research of scholars who have centered Mexicanas, Mexican American women, and Chicanas as workers, cultural producers, organizers, activists, and intellectuals, my work calls attention to the class perspective and militant dignity politics of poor Chicanas in Los Angeles.

My research attends to an understudied aspect of Chicana/o history and the development of a militant grassroots Chicana feminism rooted in struggles for economic justice and human dignity that went beyond *la familia* and the Chicano community. Escalante embraced poor, single, unmarried, often divorced and abandoned, mothers who suffered shame and invisibility in larger struggles for *la causa*, the Chicana/o people. She brought their voices and struggles to the forefront when few others dared. By making room for unrecognized complex historical actors and organizations who do not fit neatly into established histories of the welfare rights movement and the second wave of feminism, my research contributes, too, to the fields of women's history, women and gender studies, and social movements by moving beyond black-white binaries. It explores how impoverished, Spanish-speaking women came to the fore and in solidarity with other women of color and poor women to transform the social and political agendas of the welfare system.

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Introduction

In 1967, Alicia Escalante, a poor, single Chicana mother of five, founded the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization. Fed up being ignored, silenced, and deprived of her and her family's most basic necessities, Escalante organized a group of impoverished women like herself to fight for economic justice and human dignity. For Escalante, being able to lead a dignified life as a single mother on government assistance, or welfare, entailed having adequate nutrition, clothing, a decent home, medical care for the family, and an honest job with a livable wage. It also meant being respected for the labor of raising children and caring for the elderly at home and not being subjected to demeaning, racist, and sexist policies and practices, as she and many others had experienced continuously when dealing with welfare officials and offices. Escalante sought to better the circumstances of impoverished, single Chicana and *Mexicana* mothers through grassroots community organizing and advocacy at the local and national levels—work that I refer to as "dignity work." "Doing Dignity Work: Alicia Escalante and the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization, 1967-1974," a political biography of gender and leadership and a social history, sheds new light on the development of social and political consciousness among urban poor women of color and excavates a grassroots genealogy of Chicana feminisms rooted in the struggles of single Chicana welfare mothers. Equally important, "Doing Dignity Work," disrupts the historiographic compartmentalization of social movements by bringing to the fore the multiple insurgencies and inter-organizational dynamics of this era.

"Doing Dignity Work" forces us to reconsider women's activism in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. What is significant about the activism that Escalante practiced was that it was broadly based and multi-issued and cut across multiple

constituencies. Escalante understood that to fight for economic justice and self-respect, you had to fight racism, classism *and* sexism. She realized, too, that these interlocking systems of oppression did not just affect low income, single Chicana and Mexicana mothers, but all impoverished women and people generally. Building on the integral research of scholars who have centered Mexicanas, Mexican American women, and Chicanas as workers, cultural producers, organizers, activists, and intellectuals, my work calls attention to the dignity work and militant dignity politics of poor Chicanas in Los Angeles.[1] More than a history that deepens our understanding of the complexity of the interrelated social movements that fought for civil, feminist, and human rights, Escalante's political biography has the potential to inform current struggles for human dignity. She teaches us the critical role of individual as well as collective, grassroots leadership, the essential need to build bridges across difference, and the forging of coalitions in furthering movements for racial, class, and gender equality and social justice.

My research attends to an understudied aspect of Chicana and Chicano history, the development of a militant grassroots Chicana feminism rooted in struggles for economic justice and human dignity that went beyond *la familia* and the Chicano community. Escalante embraced poor, single, unmarried, often divorced and abandoned, mothers who suffered shame and invisibility in larger struggles for *la causa*, the Chicana/o people. She brought their voices and struggles to the forefront when few others dared. By making room for unrecognized complex historical actors and organizations who do not fit neatly into established histories of the welfare rights movement and the second wave of feminism, my research contributes, too, to the fields of women's history, women and gender studies, and social movements by moving beyond black-white binaries. It explores how impoverished,

Spanish-speaking women came to the fore and in solidarity with other women of color and poor women to transform the social and political agendas of the welfare system.

Origins of the Project

When this project on Alicia Escalante and the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization began to unfold, it was my last year as an undergraduate student at UCLA and I was taking a course on Chicana feminisms with Professor Maylei Blackwell and a senior seminar on the historiography of the Chicano movement with Professor Juan Gomes-Quiñones. For Professor Blackwell's course I read an article by Escalante titled, "Canto de Alicia," published in 1973 in what is considered the first Chicana feminist journal, *Encuentro Femenil*. I immediately became enthralled with her story. In this article Escalante provided testimony of her process of politicization, which was rooted in her mother's as well as her own experience as single mothers living in poverty. Holding a copy of her essay in my hands, I found myself hanging on to every word she wrote, as I identified with her story personally. After reading her article I recalled seeing her name in a few of the leading texts I read as part of my Chicano movement historiography seminar. When I made this connection, I was not satisfied with what I had learned. Rather, it only piqued my curiosity and interest in the topic further. When I brought up Escalante in my Chicano movement historiography course as a potential area of research, Professor Gomez-Quiñones expressed enthusiasm and encouraged me to pursue this topic in my graduate studies.

Prior to becoming a Chicana/o studies double major, I entered UCLA as a transfer student from East Los Angeles College as a history major. I enjoyed learning social and political history and it was not until I transferred to UCLA that I became exposed to my

history, Chicana/o history. Despite being raised identified as Chicana, I had no idea what that actually meant historically. A whole world was opened to me when I took my first history of the Chicano people course with Professor Gomez-Quiñones my first quarter at UCLA. It was in his course that I first read about Mexican women's history in the United States. *From Out of the Shadows* by Chicana historian Vicki L. Ruiz became my bible. I was hungry for the historical representation of my lived experience and that of my mother and grandmother, and I found it in Ruiz's work. I became enamored with Chicana history and dedicated myself to become more deeply knowledgeable of the field and did so by completing an honors thesis focused on Chicana activism in Los Angeles.

Following the completion of my studies at UCLA, I entered a master's program at California State University, Dominguez Hills and focused on Escalante and the ELAWRO for my master's thesis. Through the research process I discovered only traces of Escalante and her story in the scholarship on the Chicano Movement, the Chicana feminist movement, and the welfare rights movement. In response to this I turned to local archives located at the UCLA, UCSB, and the East Los Angeles Public libraries where I discovered a wealth of information about Escalante and her activism, but many questions remained. I wanted to know the details the documents could not tell me about her battles and victories. I wondered what led this single Chicana mother on welfare to become such a determined and vital leader in the struggle for social and economic justice. What life experiences had shaped her political consciousness that was centered on poor women's dignity and access to the economic means to sustain their families? These questions were only partially answered in my master's thesis at CSUDH. After completing my thesis in 2010 many unanswered questions remained, and I

knew that Escalante's voice could help me find the answers. I longed for an opportunity to meet her and conduct an oral history.

A year later, at the 2011 Mujeres Activas en Letras Y Cambio Social (MALCS) Summer Institute, held in Los Angeles, I was introduced to Professor Maria Cotera by my mentor Maylei Blackwell and I was invited by Professor Cotera to serve as a consultant on an interview with Escalante for the Chicana Por Mi Raza Digital Oral History Project (CPMR). Professor Cotera and her research team had read my master's thesis on Escalante in preparation for the interview and was excited to introduce me to Escalante. This collaboration with CPMR not only opened the door for me to meet Escalante in early 2012 but also transformed me personally and intellectually. Following that initial encounter with Escalante, I built a connection and rapport with her and I interviewed her that Fall. Since then I have conducted several follow up interviews with her at her home in Sacramento and we have developed a mutual relationship of respect and trust. These interviews have breathed new life into my interest and passion for this area of research.

As I have come to know Escalante's story, I have drawn many parallels between our lives, even though I was born nearly fifty years later. In her mother, Guadalupe, I see the struggles of my own grandmother, Antonia, who endured a difficult marriage and was stripped of some of her children. In Alicia, I see the struggles of my mother, Amparo, who raised four children alone on welfare. Very much like Escalante I grew up in poverty and had to witness the indignities my mother endured. These connections are testimony to the realities that continue to face poor single mothers on welfare across the generations. Poverty and economic inequality, both of which contribute to the stripping away of the humanity of

poor people, has both persisted and accelerated into the twenty-first century. This reality has instilled in me a sense of determination and dedication to my dissertation project.

Research Questions and Interventions in the Historiography of Social Movements

"Doing Dignity Work" continues the legacy of the fields of Chicana history and Chicana studies, which have centered women's lived experience and orality as critical sites of knowledge production and social, economic, political, and gendered organizing and activism. My dissertation asks and answers the following questions: 1) What were the social, political, and economic conditions during the post-WWII era through the 1970s that propelled Escalante as well as Chicana and Mexicana single mothers in East Los Angeles to action? 2) How did Escalante respond to these socio-economic and political conditions, and what strategies did she employ to grapple with them? 3) How did Escalante and the ELAWRO navigate within and among contemporary social movements such as the welfare rights, Chicano, and Chicana feminist movements? 4) How does Escalante and the ELAWRO represent a critical link between the past and present in the struggle for human dignity for poor people of color in the United States?

A central aspect of my dissertation is a political biography of gender and leadership focused on Alicia Escalante. Tracing the development of Escalante's political consciousness and activist formation at the intersection of race, class, and gender provides a window into the larger historical context of Mexican American and Chicana women's economic, social, and political position within U.S. society between the WWII era and the mid-1970s. In addition to a political biography of gender and leadership, my dissertation is also a social history focused on the human dignity struggles waged by Escalante and the ELAWRO.

Social movements have often been historicized as siloed by rigid boundaries of ethnic or racial identity, class, gender, and sexuality. The history of Escalante and the ELAWRO provides an opportunity for a paradigmatic shift to the nexus of these movements and their inter-racial and inter-organizational dynamics.

Through Escalante's political biography of gender and leadership I have been able to trace the *dignity work* that she and many others undertook in order to advocate for the human dignity of those on the margins of society locally and nationally. This dignity work centered the basic human needs of poor people and took many forms including direct action tactics such as demonstrations, pickets, marches, vigils, and disrupting the day to day business of welfare offices and county administrators, among other state officials. Dignity work also included the difficult task of building and sustaining political coalitions across racial, gender, and class lines. It encompassed, too, the services provided to the Spanish-speaking community via the ELAWRO. Those services included informational community meetings about recipients' rights, the translation of bureaucratic policies and documents, assistance with and representation at fair hearings at the welfare offices, and legal aid referrals. Letter writing campaigns and Escalante's leadership as a spokesperson and representation of poor single Chicana mother's experiences, concerns, and issues were provided as well. Doing this dignity work and more necessitated the practice of a *militant* dignity politics. Escalante's dignity politics were militant because of the constant threat and attack on the livelihood of welfare recipients that she and countless other poor mothers and families faced at the hands of the welfare system, federal and state policy and the need to fight against ideological and institutional injustices. The militant dignity politics practiced by Escalante included, as well, being a staunch advocate of the human dignity of poor people, building bridges across

difference, and forging political solidarity with the multiple movements that advocated for the recognition of the human dignity of those on the margins of society.

Central to my utilization of a political biography of gender and leadership is the recovery and analysis of Chicana leadership at the nexus of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Chicana leadership within the historiography of the Chicano movement has gone by and large unrecognized until very recently with Chicanas leading the way in this important historical recovery work. Influential to my approach has been the important work of Chicana scholar Dolores Delgado Bernal. Using the oral histories of eight women who played central roles in the Chicano student movement, Delgado Bernal proposes a "paradigmatic shift in the way we view grassroots leadership [that] not only provides an alternative history…but also acknowledges Chicanas as important leaders in past and present grassroots movements."[2] Through a paradigm of "cooperative leadership," Delgado Bernal argues we can disrupt the way we understand and study leadership and create room for Chicanas to emerge as leaders.[3] By centering the lives of working-class women of color and recognizing the multiple dimensions of grassroots leadership, Delgado Bernal moves beyond traditional notions of leadership—such as holding and speaking into the "mic" at rallies—and is able to trace the many ways that the women she interviewed who were active in the East Los Angeles High school walkouts or blowouts practiced a new form of leadership. Women, she found, for instance, created and sustained the networks necessary to carry out the political organizing central to the movement.

According to Delgado Bernal, there are five components of the grassroots leadership practiced by the women in her study: Networking, organizing, developing consciousness, holding an elected or appointed office, and serving as an official or unofficial spokesperson.

Grassroots leaders need not participate in every component to be considered a leader. Importantly, Delgado Bernal argues that, in her reconceptualization of leadership, there is no separation between the task of organizing and leading. This reconceptualization of leadership is important because, although Escalante can be viewed as a leader in the traditional sense for she often served as the face and the voice of poor single Chicana mothers in East Los Angeles, she nevertheless challenged this notion of leadership, as she also participated in various forms of non-traditional leadership that Delgado Bernal identifies.

My dissertation intervenes in the historical narratives on the welfare rights, Chicano, and Chicana feminist movements. Scholars of the welfare rights movement, Guida West, Felicia Kornbluh, Premilla Nadasen, and Annelise Orleck have made significant contributions to our knowledge of the experiences of African American women in the struggle for economic justice and welfare rights.[4] Their scholarship has largely focused on the welfare rights activism on the East coast and Midwest with the exception of Orleck's important work on Nevada. Although significant, they provide a limited exploration of other racialized groups of women involved with the national welfare rights movement. More specifically, the role of Chicana and Mexican American women who represented some of the poorest, disenfranchised women in the United States. Though they did not participate in the same numbers as did Black women, they nevertheless made significant contributions to the struggle for welfare rights, especially in California.

More recent scholarship on welfare rights has taken account of this regionalism and has looked to California as a critical site of the welfare rights movement. Emerging scholar Allison Puglisi has contributed to scholarship focused on California and the welfare rights struggle but continues to situate that activism within the Black and white binary.[5] My work

seeks to fill this gap by focusing on Escalante and the ELAWRO and exploring their position within the struggle for welfare rights and what it meant for them as poor, single Chicana and Mexicana mothers living in East Los Angeles, a historically ethnic, working class community. While Escalante and the ELAWRO's development began as an affiliate of the NWRO, Escalante chose to claim autonomy from it to fill their unmet needs specific to their racial, ethnic, class, and cultural experiences. As my work shows, the history of the ELAWRO disrupts the Black and white binary that exists within the historiography of the welfare rights movement and creates room for new historical actors and interpretations of that social movement. This history provides an opportunity to examine what welfare rights activism looked like outside of the NWRO and in other locations besides the East Coast, and brings to light other important California welfare rights activists, namely, Alicia Escalante, that we have yet to fully explore.

Recently scholars have produced sophisticated analyses of the complexity of the Chicano movement, enabling my work to build upon their findings. These works have pushed the geographic boundaries of *Aztlán* (the Chicano mythical homeland) outside of the southwest and the periodization of the movement beyond 1965 to1975. In the process, they have created room for alternative historical actors and leaders, especially, Chicanas.[6] Further, several important works have contributed to the study of inter-racial coalitions and movement building.[7] In particular, scholarship on Chicanas and Chicana feminism in the various movements of the 1960s and 1970s have made tremendous strides recently recovering the "heterogeneity of collective forms of praxis generated within, between, and outside of various movements for social change."[8] I am proud to have been able to contribute to the this recent scholarship and new direction of engagement with the Chicano movement

and the movement era.[9] Outside of my recent scholarship and that of Maylei Blackwell's *Chicana Power!* the literature of the Chicano movement and the Chicana feminist movement has not focused deeply or thoroughly on women in the struggle for welfare rights, economic justice, and human dignity. Importantly, historicizing Escalante as a leader of the Chicano *movimiento* leads to an interrogation of the kind of leadership she practiced and the centering of welfare rights as a Chicano movement and Chicana feminist issue.

To do so, my project frames welfare rights as a key issue in the Chicano movement. I argue that, although generally neglected as a central platform in the movement and relegated to "women's issues," economic justice and human dignity were integral goals of the Chicano movement. This is evident in many of the Chicano movement periodicals of the era, where the issue of welfare rights is represented quite extensively. Further, my project centers Escalante and the ELAWRO's activism, including their gains and losses, by tracing Chicana feminism as it was articulated and practiced by poor, single Chicana mothers living in the housing projects of East Los Angeles. Although Escalante did not identify as a "Chicana feminist," her activism and advocacy on behalf of Chicana and Mexicana single mothers on public assistance speak to a feminist vision. Through her writings, activism, and leadership she practiced, Escalante and the ELAWRO reconceptualized notions of family, motherhood, work, leadership, and feminism. I argue, that Escalante's ability to challenge the gendered and racialized stereotypes of Chicana welfare mothers and to center the needs and life experiences of women who experienced the full brunt of their marginalized status as racial, ethnic, and classed women formed an early expression of Chicana feminism.

Methodology

My concept of dignity work also applies to my methodology. Through the use of the feminist practice of oral history I seek to dignify the historical agency of Escalante and her role as a leader in the struggle for human dignity by centering her voice and lived experience.[10] My use of oral history as a methodological approach is rooted in its "role as a tool of advocacy for groups marginalised and excluded from formal channels of power."[11] What better tool is there to engage this complex history of struggle other than the voices of those who were on the ground and put their lives on the line to create dignified lives for themselves, their community, and those on the margin? Oral historian Horacio Roque Ramirez asserts that, "[f]or communities excluded, outcast, and marginalized, voice can speak to power: it is literally a weapon of evidence against historical erasure and social analysis that fails to consider the experiences of individuals and communities on their own terms."[12] Escalante and the ELAWRO have been subject to this historical erasure described by Roque Ramirez, given that they have fallen outside of the margins of the historiography of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. However, as oral historian Paul Thompson has illuminated, oral history "can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of enquiry; it can break down barriers between teachers and students, between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside; and in the writing of history…it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place."[13]

Within my practice of oral history I have attempted to grapple with the unevenness of power that exists in the production of oral history and the interpretive process of publication and have been drawn to Michael Frisch's concept of "shared authority." And, although there

will always remain an unevenness of power and benefits, Frisch's concept, as Horacio Roque Ramirez has argued, "deserves appreciation and careful application as we aim for more egalitarian projects."[14] Indeed, I do stand to benefit much more than Escalante, but I have worked to reciprocate. I have conducted research on Alicia Escalante and the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization for over ten years. I have spent years, too, building a relationship with Escalante and her son, Alex, who manages many of her affairs, that is based on mutual respect and reciprocity. This reciprocity has meant sharing about myself and my subjectivity. My approach of shared authority with Escalante is not limited to our intersubjective engagement or the mutual relationship of trust and respect we have built. It is also based on the care and attention I have paid to make sure that Escalante has received copies of all the interview transcripts of the interviews I conducted with her for her review and edits. She has read final drafts of both of my publications before they went to press. The confidence that I have built with Escalante over the past decade has also led to the deposit of her personal collection at the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives (CEMA) at UCSB.

In addition to oral history, I have done extensive archival research in multiple collections locally in southern California, including Escalante's personal papers, mentioned earlier. Prior to their deposit at CEMA, Escalante's son Alex maintained and organized her papers for decades and did so efficiently and thoughtfully. Through a generous research grant from UC MEXUS and other funding sources I have been able to conduct an ample amount of research at multiple archival depositories. At the California State Archives in Sacramento, California, I consulted the administrative records of the Department of State Welfare. The microfilm collections of Chicano movement periodicals at the Ethnic Studies Library at the

University of California, Berkeley, were indispensable. Outside of California, I consulted the personal collections of two key individuals: Dr. George A. Wiley, founder of the NWRO, whose papers are held at the Wisconsin Historical Society; and, Guida West, a scholar who wrote one of the earliest studies of the NWRO and was active in a friends of the NWRO chapter in the northeast. Her papers are included in the Sophia Smith collection at Smith College in Amherst. Further, I have also visited the University of Houston to view artistic representations of Chicana leadership in the Chicano movement. Lastly, items from Martha P. Cotera's personal papers held at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American collection at the University of Texas at Austin have also been reviewed.

A close analysis of Escalante's oral history interviews and her personal papers has been enhanced with further oral history interviews that have been conducted with six of her activist contemporaries: Gloria Arellanes, prime minister of finance and correspondence of the Brown Berets, fouder of the ELA Health Clinic and Las Adelitas de Aztlán; Carlos Montes, prime minister of defense of the Brown Berets; Joe Razo, *La Raza Newspaper* photographer, co-editor and community organizer; Lydia Lopez, community organizer and wife of Fred Lopez of the Brown Berets; Rosalio Urias Muñoz, Anti-Vietnam war organizer and co-founder of the National Chicano Moratorium Committee; and, Martha P. Cotera, co-founder of Mujeres Por La Raza Unida, the Texas Women's Political Caucus, the National Women's Political Caucus, and Colegio Jesus Treviño in Cristal City Texas. Though the majority were a bit younger than Escalante, with the exception of Joe Razo, they were all active in the Chicano movement. Arellanes and Cotera were active in both the Chicano movement and the Chicana feminist movement and all have vivid reflections of Escalante

and her leadership. These interviews have provided perspective, further information, and insight regarding events and collaborations between this activist cadre.

The oral history interviews have been analyzed along side the extensive archival research detailed above. These rich sources allow for a close textual, literary, and content analysis and have filled in the gaps and silences within the oral history interviews. During Escalante's activist years she was a fervent writer, publishing many articles in newsletters and newspapers and consistently writing letters to the editor of local East Los Angeles newspapers, including *Eastside Sun* and *Belvedere Citizen*. Her writings also appeared continuously in publications such as *La Raza Newspaper* as well as in Chicana feminist publications such as *Regeneración* and *Encuentro Femenil*. Equally important to Escalante's contributions to Chicana thought within the afroementioned periodicals have been the engagement of issues of employment, education, economic justice, and welfare rights by other Chicanas within the Chicana print community such as Anna NietoGomez, Francisca Flores, Yolanda Nava, Mary Tullos, Dolores Hernandez, and many others whose names were not included on the byline. Special issues dedicated to Chicanas within the Chicano movement were also important to consult to gain more perspective of the issues, analysis, and leadership of Chicanas across regions, with *Regeneración* and *El Grito del Norte* publishing special issues in 1971 and another by *Regeneración* in 1973.

Collections outside of California have been unexpectedly frutiful and have allowed me to glean much needed details regarding Escalante's involvement and role in the national welfare rights movement and her early engagement of multi-racial coalition and political solidarity. Dr. George A. Wiley's collection in particular provided integral information into welfare rights organizing in California and the close collaboration between Escalante and

Catherine Jermany, both of whom served on the National Coordinating Committee of the NWRO. Further Wiley's collection was also vital in the recovery of Escalante's participation in the Poor People's Campaign as a leader of the national welfare rights movement. Martha P. Cotera's collection at the University of Texas at Austin has also been critical to my recovery of Escalante's coalition building outsdie of California and within the feminist movements of the 1970s against welfare reform. Lastly, the visual representation of Chicana leadership in the Chicano movement via an expansive 1973 mural at the University of Houston has created an opportunity to begin to explore Escalante's leadership outside of California.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter one, "Riding the Train of Consciousness: Alicia Escalante's Coming of Age Story," documents her political formation and the larger social and economic conditions faced by single mothers of Mexican origin in the 1940s and postwar period. It also explores how Escalante and her neighbors responded to the social and economic conditions of the housing projects in which they lived. As it demonstrates, Escalante developed a grassroots, community-based consciousness that spurred her development as a community leader.

Chapter two, "From the Community onto the National Stage," discusses Escalante's transition from organizing in the Eastside housing projects to the national welfare rights movement initiated by her involvement with the "Save Medi-Cal Campaign" in the mid-1960s and engagement with local Black welfare rights activists Catherine Jermany and Johnnie Tillmon. This chapter also focuses on the founding of the ELAWRO in 1967 and the

circumstances that led to the declaration of autonomy from the National Welfare Rights Organization.

Chapter three, “Chicana Welfare Rights and the Chicano Movement: Alicia Escalante, the ELAWRO and Chicana Leadership,” begins in 1968 and examines Escalante’s continued political formation and militancy. It situates Escalante as a Chicano movement leader and explores welfare rights as a Chicano movement issue. Lastly, it focuses on the dignity work of organizing in coalitions and practicing solidarity with the multiple struggles that concerned the Chicano community and beyond.

Chapter four, “Economic Justice is a Women’s Issue: The Chicana Welfare Rights Organization’s Challenge to Welfare Reform in the 1970s,” locates economic justice as a Chicana feminist issue and examines the CWRO's multiracial and multiethnic coalition in the battle against early welfare reform represented by the amendments to the Social Security Act passed in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Conclusion, provides a discussion of the sacrifices and costs of Escalante’s organizing and activism as well as illuminating the many victories. It explores how Escalante’s leadership praxis, dignity work, and militant dignity politics are connected to and can inform contemporary human dignity struggles in the twenty-first century.

Chapter One

Riding the Train to Social and Political Consciousness: Alicia Escalante's Coming of Age

In 2014, reflecting on the origins of her politicization and her activist experiences fifty years earlier, Alicia Escalante explained that the development of her politics and activism began with her advocacy on her mother's behalf: "I think that's where it beg[an]. My ultimate goal was to please my mom because I saw her suffer and her hesitancy to question anyone. So, I was always ready to advocate for her."[1] Despite the significant time lapse from those early days, Escalante recalled vividly the intense emotions unleashed within her in response to the treatment that her mother received during her first attempt to secure public assistance.[2] According to Escalante, her mother, Guadalupe, applied for public assistance multiple times before receiving any type of aid. For women of color in the 1940s it was common to be denied support because of persistent racial and ethnic stereotypes that purported they abused charity or that they labored and earned enough disqualifying them from assistance. Years earlier, in 1973, Escalante had reflected on these lived experiences in *Encuentro Femenil*, the first Chicana feminist journal. In her article, "*Canto De Alicia*," she recollected the coldness of the white social worker who simply responded to her mother's request for assistance by declaring, "No—there was nothing they could do for her," other than provide her with some tokens to return home. She wrote that she remembered "feeling such anger at the Anglo woman. Her whole attitude towards my mother was one of hostility. I sensed prejudice; I sensed that she could have done something more than to give her tokens. And I hated her for stripping my mother of her pride, who was kind, good, struggling to survive."[3]

These and many other early lived experiences served as the catalyst for the development of Escalante's political consciousness and the essence of her advocacy on

behalf of poor Chicana single mothers in East Los Angeles and poor women across the nation. That came about in an official capacity when, in 1967, Alicia Escalante founded the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization (ELAWRO) after she became a single mother and found herself in very similar conditions as her mother in the mid-1940s. How Escalante and the ELAWRO's broader struggles emerged and the significance of those struggles serve as the basis for an essential political biography of gender and leadership focused on Escalante. This chapter begins this political biography of gender and leadership by focusing on Escalante's coming of age story and the seminal events that altered her life and directed her on a path of becoming a leading advocate for the recognition of the human dignity of Chicana single welfare mothers. Engaging one of my central research questions, this chapter explores the social, political, and economic conditions in the World War II era through the mid-1960s in which Mexican American women and Chicanas like Escalante became politicized and took their causes to the community, streets, and anywhere they needed their voices heard.

To grasp more fully the social, political, and economic context shaping the lives of Mexican-origin people in general and Mexican American women and Chicanas in Los Angeles in the twentieth century in particular, we need to turn briefly to the nineteenth century and the U.S. War with Mexico. The end of the U.S.-Mexico War in 1848 and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) ceded vast amounts of land to the U.S. and extended citizenship to the Mexican population that remained in the ceded territory. This citizenship, however, would never be fully realized by Mexicans in the U.S. and would be tempered by subordination to the dominant Anglo society. During the post-war period Mexicans who remained in the ceded lands were subject to economic, social, and political subordination for

generations to come through “legal disenfranchisement,” “land dispossession and extralegal vigilante violence,” effectively turning Mexicans “into outsiders in what had once been their own land.”[4] With the turn of the twentieth century the Mexican population in the U.S. rose dramatically through immigration primarily. Between 1910 and 1930 over one million Mexicans migrated to the U.S. for a variety of reasons including fleeing the instability caused by the Mexican Revolution and employment opportunities in the expanding capitalist economy of the south and Midwest.[5] The increase in the Mexican population spurred concern among those in power that was reflected in the racialization of Mexicans as backwards, inferior, diseased, hyper-fertile, undeserving, and ultimately deportable.[6] The era of the Great Depression ushered in a shift in the treatment of Mexicans in the U.S. Largely shielded by the need for low-wage labor in the early twentieth century, Mexicans had been excluded from the quota system instituted by the 1924 Immigration Act, which limited immigration flows from Southern and Eastern Europe. The period between the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act and the beginning of the Great Depression witnessed the racialization of Mexicans through “biologically based negative representations,” via public health institutions to justify deportation and repatriation and promote immigration restrictions for Mexicans.[7] Los Angeles was a hotbed of activity when it came to deportation and repatriation, given its large Mexican population. In 1931 alone, an estimated fifty-thousand individuals were repatriated from Los Angeles over a five-month period, constituting approximately one-third of the Mexican population living in the city at the time.[8] Entire families were either deported, repatriated voluntarily or due to coercion, separated, and included both Mexican and U.S.-born family members.

Certainly the racialization of Mexicans as outside the body politic and as extraneous to U.S. social membership had been in process since the aftermath of the U.S. War with Mexico, but the 1930s in particular was the site of the shift from Mexicans being understood as an important "source of labor" and capable of being Americanized to charity seeking, diseased, and undeserving.[9] Mexican women and their reproduction had been the targets of Americanization efforts and nativist attacks since the turn of the century.[10] With the onset of the economic downturn as a result of the depression, their reproduction became a major source of concern. Scholar Elena R. Gutierrez explains that from the turn of the century to the early 1940s, "growing nativist sentiment blamed Mexican immigrants for societies ills and commonly bemoaned their fertility."[11] Historian Natalia Molina has documented that concerns over the Mexican population had less to deal with labor competition during the depression, and much more to deal with their position as Mexican Americans in the next generation and what that meant for the existing racial order.[12]

In Los Angeles, growing concerns over the increasing birth rates of Mexican women were reflected in the popular press and administrative county reports. A Los Angeles County Welfare Department expenditure report from 1930 accused Mexicans of "overburdening" the welfare system and other county services with high birthrates among Mexican women on public relief and exhausting welfare benefits while practicing fraudulent claims. They blamed them too for the presence of disease such as tuberculosis. Despite these claims, the reality was that "Mexican immigrants constituted 20 percent of the city's population but accounted for less than 10 percent of its welfare recipients."[13] Mexican women were also identified as the cause for Los Angeles County's high Infant Mortality Rate, which was attributed by health officials attending a 1934 Public Health Convention to the "natural law of survival of

the fittest."[14] Mexican women in Los Angeles were thus stereotyped as hyper-fertile, dependent on charity, and producing unhealthy children. These attributes further contributed to Mexican women being deemed "racially inferior," and therefore subject to sterilization, which had become widely practiced in California by the 1930s.

Concern with Mexican and Mexican American women's reproduction was central to those associated with eugenic efforts particularly in California, which passed a eugenic sterilization law in 1909 that remained in effect until 1979.[15] Eugenics advocates' intent was to improve society by keeping those deemed "unfit" from reproducing. "Unfit" included a range of characteristics that included people with disabilities, low education levels, low income, and were increasingly intertwined with scientific racism as well as prejudices and stereotypes. Mexicans and Mexican Americans who made California their home were indeed a "highly vulnerable population during the depression."[16] California was the site of approximately 20,000 sterilizations out of the approximate 60,000 total cases in thirty-two states.[17] The majority of these sterilizations took place in eight state public institutions for the "feebleminded, insane, and epileptic."[18] By the beginning of the Great Depression in 1930, "approximately seven thousand men and women in California had been sterilized," totaling more than any other state and all other Southwest states combined.[19] Scholars have found that Mexican youth in particular were "prime targets" for institutionalization and sterilization and that being labeled as socially or sexually deviant and/or classified as feebleminded would be "a crucial first step on the road to legal commitment to a state hospital and possible sterilization."[20] Significantly, Natalie Lira and Alexandra Stern demonstrate in their study of eugenic sterilization in California that "Mexican-origin" individuals had an average age of eighteen and were institutionalized and sterilized at rates disproportionate to their state

population. They found that Mexican-origin individuals accounted for 23.2 percent of all sterilizations from 1928 through 1951, with a peak of 36 percent in 1939, even though they accounted for a much smaller proportion of the state population.[21]

In between the turn of the century and the eve of the United States entrance into World War II, Mexicans occupied one of the lowest levels of society economically, politically, and socially not only in California but across the country, especially in states such as Texas which has one of the worst records with race relations. Racialized as “other,” since the U.S. War with Mexico despite having access to citizenship and being deemed white, they had come to be constructed as outside of “U.S. social membership” by the 1930s. This was demonstrated by their mass deportation in the late 1920s and early 1930s, high rates of sterilization, and their status as perpetual foreigners. Mexican women were stereotyped as hyper-fertile, promiscuous, dependent on charity, illiterate and diseased, and racially inferior and therefor a threat to the nation because of their reproductive capabilities.[22] These stereotypes were widespread and had direct implications on public and social policy that negatively impacted Mexican and Mexican American women’s daily lives and continued to do so for decades.[23] It is within this social, political, and economic context that Alicia Escalante came of age, leading her to experience institutionalized racial, gender, and class discrimination in a range of spaces and places.

The Train Ride from El Chamizal to Los Angeles

One day in the early 1940s, nine-year-old Alicia Lara (nee Escalante), a resident of El Chamizal, a predominantly Spanish-speaking *barrio* of El Paso, Texas, directly across the Rio Grande from Juarez, Mexico, set out to follow through with a life-changing decision she

had contemplated for some time. She decided to find a way to flee her father's household and reunite with her mother, Guadalupe, who had recently moved to Los Angeles after divorcing her husband and Alicia's father, a violent alcoholic who had taken legal custody of her seven children, including Alicia, the second eldest. Throughout her young life, Escalante had witnessed her father and her uncles (her father's brothers) mistreat her mother. Indeed, for fifteen years Guadalupe suffered a difficult marriage that caused her great emotional pain. Unemployed and unable to prove that she could provide for her children, she lost custody of Alicia and her six siblings in the divorce. Her limited formal education and lack of skills or training as well as the rampant sexism and racism Mexican American women encountered in the workplace—and in other institutions in the early 1940s made it nearly impossible for her to feed seven mouths. Prior to World War II Mexican and Mexican American women occupied "low-paying domestic, agricultural, and garment and food processing jobs." Further in 1930, job discrimination in "women's" employment meant that "only 10 percent of Mexican women workers in the Southwest held clerical or sales positions."[24] Gender and racial biases in the courts likely too contributed to her loss of parental rights to her husband.

Their mother's absence devastated Escalante and her siblings, for they longed for Guadalupe's presence in the household. Before heading to Los Angeles, Guadalupe wrote to Escalante often, informing her of her decision to leave Texas. She reassured Escalante that she would send for her and her siblings as soon as she was settled. Escalante trusted her mother and waited patiently every day for the mail to arrive with news from her mother's whereabouts. After many days and weeks of waiting, she finally received the fateful letter informing her of her mother's circumstances, work, and contact information. To Escalante,

the letter was like gold, and she held onto it tightly, using it to chart her own path to reunite with her beloved mother, a path that lay right around the corner.

Near Escalante's home in El Chamizal, freight trains frequently passed through swiftly, though at times they slowed and idled for a bit. One day, Escalante noticed the patterns of the trains, as she would often go down to the tracks to play, sit, think, or read her mother's letters, and she resolved to use them to find her mother in California. One morning Escalante packed a small bag and headed for the railroad tracks and soon enough came upon an idling freight train. She picked a car and jumped in but found herself nearly blinded, as it was unlit and pitch black. At that point, Escalante could not turn back. She had resolved to no longer sit idly by while her father and uncles verbally disrespected her mother for leaving Escalante's father and did so in her absence. With determination, she felt her way through the darkness of the car and settled herself in a corner, attempting to make herself as comfortable as possible. She dozed off as the train gained momentum, and it was not long before she noticed that she was not alone. A transient startled her when he lit a small flame to light his cigarette that illuminated his face. Fearful and untrusting, she tried to ignore him, but he was intrigued. When he asked if she was running away, she did not answer. When he later asked if she was hungry, again she did not answer. But when he threw half a sandwich in her direction, she reached out for it. She was hungry and ate it readily. As the train slowed down, she watched intently as the man readied himself to jump. Before he did so, he wished her good luck and warned her to be careful, and then he jumped off into the unknown.

Alone in the train car and relieved, Escalante dozed off. Suddenly, the train came to a stop and she found herself with flashlights in her face. Had she made it to California? How much time had passed since she had fallen asleep? She was not in California, she soon

learned, but in Arizona. "Where are you going and where are your parents?" the officer asked her. She told them she was going to reunite with her mother in California and she was thirteen years old. The official knew otherwise, however, sensing she was a runaway and younger than she claimed. The officer then proceeded to call her father at work. Her father, in response, said that if she wanted to be with her mother, then she should go to California. Relieved, Escalante produced the letter with her mother's phone number and the official called Guadalupe and decided to put Escalante on a bus to Los Angeles. Hours later, Escalante arrived in Los Angeles and was elated to finally reunite with her mother. Her determination had paid off. Escalante would never forget this early experience, as it would have a lasting impact on her life and in the development of her political consciousness as an activist and advocate for social justice for poor Mexican American women and Chicanas in Los Angeles. This experience taught Escalante that if she felt that something was unjust, she had the power and the mental and physical ability to challenge the injustice and to create change.[25]

Social, economic, and political life for Mexican Americans generally across the American Southwest by the end of WWII continued to be marked by oppressive second-class citizenship. Historian Natalia Molina notes that, although Mexican Americans were "legally classified as white…they were often not accepted as socially or culturally white. They attended segregated schools, lived in marginalized neighborhoods, and labored in dead end jobs in a market stratified by race, all of which significantly affected their ability to accumulate resources and live a life without social or cultural restrictions."[26] Citing historian Pauline R. Kibbie's description of social, political, and economic conditions for Mexican Americans in Texas during the mid-nineteen forties, historian Juan Gómez-Quiñones argues

that these descriptors were pertinent for Mexican Americans across the United States. These included "economic discrimination" that involved unfair labor practices and exclusion from unions, "inequitable educational opportunities," including arbitrary segregation and inadequately trained teachers, and "social and civic inequalities," such as barriers to voting, serving on juries, and "terrorism on the part of law-enforcement officers and others."[27] Though these forms of social, economic, and political exclusion certainly impacted Mexican origin communities, these experiences varied and differed based on region.

The postwar period was witness to a rapid increase in the Mexican and Mexican American population. Within two decades, from 1940 to 1960 the Mexican American population exploded, doubling from "approximately two and one half million to five million, with a native-born majority."[28] In Los Angeles the Mexico-born population began to decline in relation to the U.S.-born populace by 1940. The American-born members of the population, in turn, grew by 45 to 65 percent.[29] But as both Gómez-Quiñones and historian Ernesto Chávez have pointed out, that increase did not translate into economic and political power for Mexican Americans.[30] Although several returning Mexican American World War II veterans ran for political office and two won city council seats, change was slow. Among the few successful politicians was Edward R. Royball, who was elected to the Los Angeles City Council in 1948. A few years later Henry B. Gonzales earned a seat on the San Antonio City Council in 1953. They both would go on to be elected to Congress in the 1960s.[31] The postwar period also witnessed the rise of significant Mexican American organizations, including the G.I. Forum and the Community Service Organization, both founded in 1947, and the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) founded in 1959. Mexican

American women played critical roles in these organizations through participation in auxiliaries as in the case of the G.I. Forum and in the founding of MAPA.[32]

While political representation emerged sporadically, the postwar era did bring about some positive changes for Mexican Americans. "[M]ore Mexicans attended schools, more spoke English, more became citizens, and more lived in large urban concentrations." There were also some "net gains for some in income, education, and occupational diversity as well as relatively more geographical dispersal."[33] Returning Mexican American veterans also benefited from government programs such as the G.I. Bill, which created access to educational opportunities that would benefit them and their children. The increase in educational access opened the door to economic mobility for some as did Veterans Administration loans which made homeownership more accessible, though they were often restricted from purchasing homes in predominantly white communities and neighborhoods. Collectively, these shifts culminated in rising incomes among some Mexican Americans in the World War II and post-war eras, roughly 1945 to the 1960s.[34]

Mexican American women also contributed to increasing incomes by laboring in significant numbers in defense industries during wartime. These contributions, however, were short lived given the decline of women's employment immediately following the war. Historian Elizabeth Escobedo demonstrates that, although African American women and Mexican American women were among the first to be fired from their positions in the war industries, they did make significant inroads in employment. Prior to WWII Mexican women had primarily occupied "low-paying domestic, agricultural, and garment and food processing jobs."[35] Escobedo found that, between 1940 and 1950, the number of single Mexican women in the Southern California labor force had grown by 7 percent and among Mexican wives the

percentage rose to 9 percent. Further, by 1950, 24 percent of Mexican and Mexican American women had made their way into white-collar clerical positions almost always occupied by white women.[36]

Despite the advancement of some within the Mexican American community, the reality for the majority was second-class citizenship, and continued social, political, and economic subordination and isolation. Further, the stereotypes that pathologized Mexican women since the turn of the century persisted and, in the 1940s, they developed into the hypersexual, criminalized "pachuca." This stereotype, or what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as a "controlling image," would be utilized to further the marginalization of Mexican American women by justifying policies of social control, such as institutionalization and sterilization, which continued in the 1940s and 1950s. For Alicia's mother, Guadalupe, now a divorcé, with no formal education, skills, and training beyond maintaining a household and mothering seven children, attempting to care for her daughter Alicia, with whom she had been recently reunited, would be a challenge.

Learning to Live: Developing a Desire for Social Justice, Dignity, and Respect

Reunited with her mother in Los Angeles at a young age, Escalante was overjoyed. The joy, however, was soon tempered by the harsh reality of living in poverty and by her mother's looming medical condition. When Alicia first arrived, Guadalupe was living with her sister Aurora, who was married and had a home. Soon, however, Guadalupe, who wanted her own independence, moved them into a room in a boarding home, which was a less than ideal location to raise a child. Boarding rooms was all that Guadalupe could afford and they settled temporarily for one in downtown Los Angeles on Main Street. Without much of an

education and unskilled, Guadalupe worked as a waitress and received meager wages, earning between 36 and 50 cents an hour, leading her to struggle to provide for herself and Escalante. After several years of waitressing, which required standing for long periods, Guadalupe developed a physical condition that made it extremely painful for her to stand on her feet, leading to her disability. Guadalupe's incapacitation put the family in a grave situation, given that she was the main provider. Faced with limited options, Guadalupe was advised by medical staff to go to the Los Angeles County Welfare Department to see if she could qualify for assistance because of her need to support Alicia.

Escalante vividly recalled the experience of accompanying her mother to apply for the aid. Escalante remembered the crowded waiting room and long hours of waiting before being called by the receptionist, an experience that was typical for most seeking public assistance. When the receptionist called Guadalupe's name, Alicia was the one who walked up to speak with her since it was difficult for her mother to walk because of the pain in her legs and feet. She often spoke on her mother's behalf—acting as a cultural broker or intermediary—as Guadalupe lacked confidence in her communication skills despite being bilingual. Surprised to see a young girl, the receptionist asked if she was Guadalupe. Alicia explained that she was not, but that Guadalupe was her mother and she would speak on her behalf. The receptionist asked Alicia, "well can she come up here," to which she replied, "her legs hurt," and was having difficulty walking. Without sympathy, the receptionist refused to speak with young Alicia about her mother's application for aid and they proceeded to have a verbal argument. A supervisor overheard the commotion as she passed by the reception area and Alicia stopped her to inform her of what was happening and requested to speak to her in private. The supervisor agreed and after talking with young Alicia in private about her

mother's condition and inability to work she provided further documents for Guadalupe to fill out with the assistance of Alicia and they left the office with her mother's application approved.[37]

Following that experience at the welfare office, Guadalupe and Escalante returned to the general hospital where Guadalupe was first attended for a follow-up appointment only to receive worse news. Guadalupe would need to have surgery on her spine to stop the debilitating pain. A social worker from the hospital advised Guadalupe to send Escalante back to her father in El Paso, as she would likely be unable to care for her following surgery. The news was difficult for young Alicia to hear. After spending nearly three years in her mother's care, Escalante was sent to El Paso as her mother prepared for surgery. She recalled, "I was devastated in the sense that how was I going to leave her alone? She's going to have surgery."[38] Escalante had not seen her father or uncles since she left almost three years prior; she was now a preteen yet living a life beyond her years and was unwilling to give up the independence she had gained in her mother's care.

Upon her arrival in Texas, she was treated coldly by her father, but Escalante only had one thing on her mind, how to get back to her mother. Escalante was able to return to California rather quickly, however, as she had secured a train ticket through her uncle Octavio who worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad. By the time she returned, her mother was in the care of her *tía* Aurora, recovering from surgery, which they soon learned had debilitated her even further. As her mother's health deteriorated, Escalante could not stand by and do nothing. Instead, she took it upon herself to get her mother to the Los Angeles General Hospital, the only place her mother could receive medical treatment because she was poor and did not have medical insurance that would allow her to receive specialized care.

After examining Guadalupe, the doctors decided to reopen the incision, likely suspecting a botched job. Their findings: a pair of scissors left behind by the previous doctor. The scissors, they learned, had infected her spine, which had led her to develop a severe infection. Stunned by the shoddy medical care, Guadalupe nevertheless recovered slowly. Yet the experience radically altered Escalante's understanding of social justice. Years later she reflected on that incident, saying, "It made me fully aware of the oppression that existed in that system. It left me with a scar in the sense that my mother…had to endure what she had to endure. We went through some hard times."[39]

The shameful medical treatment Guadalupe received as well as the difficulty she experienced securing welfare assistance are but two examples of the kind of institutional violence that poor women of color in the United States have experienced in history.[40] Witnessing her mother's treatment at the hands of the very institutions that were meant to help women like her deeply affected Escalante and her consciousness of how the welfare and medical systems mistreated poor women of color. If Escalante had not advocated for her mother, what would have become of her? These experiences shaped Escalante's consciousness as a young woman struggling to assist her family.

As they continued to scrape by, a fifteen-year-old Escalante decided to help her mother by finding a job assembling dolls in one of the many factories in downtown Los Angeles, which was heavily focused on garment and manufacturing industries. Although Mexican-origin women labored in a range of industries in Los Angeles, they generally labored in "routine" work. Findings from a study focused on employment patterns of Mexican women in the late 1920s revealed that "two-fifths" of their sample were "general laborers" with high concentrations in the packing and cannery industry followed by the

garment and manufacturing industries.[41] Also revealed in this study is the prevalence of prejudice and discrimination against Mexicans by industrial employers. Though she could bring in a few extra dollars—the work paid poorly—it meant Escalante had to drop out of school. Escalante worked for a while at the doll factory, but her employment soon ended, for it was temporary. She returned to school but attended sporadically because of the need to help sustain the household and contribute to the family economy. Escalante's life seemed to improve when her mother remarried, and her new husband sought to provide Guadalupe with economic independence by helping her start a business, a mobile hotdog stand.

While working with her mother at the hotdog stand, seventeen-year-old Escalante met her future husband, Antonio Escalante Jr., who eventually turned her life upside down. After a short courtship, of which her mother did not approve, Escalante and Antonio were married in downtown Los Angeles in 1951 and moved to the Ramona Gardens housing project in East Los Angeles.[42] Her husband came from a respectable home, and both of his parents worked hard all their lives. Antonio, however, struggled with a drug addiction, making it hard for him and the family to make ends meet. When she married him, Escalante knew he used drugs but did not understand the extent of the disease or what it would mean for their marriage and future. A year after their marriage, in 1952, they had their first child, and despite her excitement for her family, life was anything but picture perfect. Antonio's battle with drugs led to his incarceration for extended periods, and though it strained the marriage, Alicia vowed to keep the family together and stand by her husband. To support the family, she provided child care in her neighborhood, ironed clothes, and sold Avon beauty products to her neighbors or anyone who would buy them, but the work never provided enough. Without an education, skills, or the resources for child care, Escalante found herself without

recourse, much like her mother a decade earlier. By 1962, ten years into her marriage, Escalante was pregnant with her fifth child and essentially raising her children alone. Though her previous ill memories of the welfare department remained alive, her desperation compelled her to seek assistance from that same office again, but this time for her own household.[43]

By 1962, when Escalante applied for public assistance, social, political, and economic conditions for the Mexican American community in Los Angeles continued to reflect that of previous decades' circumstances, which included structural racism, miserable wages, low education levels, little to no political representation, and violence at the hands of law enforcement. By 1960, 79% of Mexican Americans resided in urban areas such as Los Angeles as compared to 70% of all Americans. Mexican Americans also represented 23% of those living in poverty in the Southwest, despite the fact, that they only represented 12% of the population in the region. Regarding employment and income, as a group, Mexican Americans had an unemployment rate almost double that of the entire population, and a little over half of the income of other citizens–$2,084 compared with $4,337. They also occupied five times as many dilapidated housing units and completed a little over half of the number of years in school compared to the rest of the American population.[44] At the outset of the 1960s the welfare expenditures for Los Angeles County alone was $194 million. By 1970 that figure would soar to $645 million reflecting a 232% increase. A significant portion of that overall increase was attributed to the rising caseloads of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program (AFDC). The costs for this program at the beginning for the 1960s was a bit over $49 million and within ten years in 1970 that number was $255 million reflecting an increase of 412%.[45] These are some of the conditions under which Alicia Escalante, her

family, and much of the Mexican American community in Los Angeles found themselves at beginning of the 1960s.

Connecting Poor People's Struggles: Everyday Life Struggles in the Housing Project

Alicia Escalante put her awareness and consciousness of racial, class, and gender discrimination into practice beginning in the early 1960s while residing in the housing projects. There, she learned how to be an advocate for herself, her family, and members of the community. It was also the site of the development of an early Chicana feminist sensibility that was centered on Escalante and her neighbors' collective experience of poverty and single motherhood. As Chicana historians Vicki L. Ruiz and Marisela R. Chávez have demonstrated in their examinations of Mexican American women's organizing in the twentieth century, Mexican American women and Chicanas formulated a practical feminism that was oriented towards addressing women's needs in multiple capacities.[46] Further these scholars situate the genealogy of Chicana feminism prior to the 1960s and 1970s. Although Escalante did not adopt a Chicana feminist identity during the 1960s and 1970s, I argue that Escalante's history of coming of age and activism reflects a Chicana feminist consciousness that is rooted in her lived experiences. Her experiences and those of many other similar Chicanas living in poverty have served as a grassroots source of a feminist consciousness that needs more attention. For Escalante and the women with whom she organized, Chicana feminism was a practice, a mode of survival, a strategy to challenge the oppressive policies of the welfare system and a society who increasingly viewed them as unworthy of support.

As she recalled years later in an interview, the shift in Escalante's consciousness was further activated by an exchange with a neighbor, an elderly woman who lived with her

daughter. One afternoon the older woman approached Escalante, asking for her help with cashing her Social Security check. The elder woman's daughter was away at work and would not be home until late, and she needed the money right away. Her daughter, the elderly women explained, normally helped her because she did not know how to write and only signed with an X. Escalante explained that they could not carry out the transaction that day because they needed more time for travel, as the bank was far away. They then agreed to go the next day, after Escalante had sent her children off to school.

The next morning, the elderly woman and Escalante walked quite a distance to the bank on Brooklyn Avenue and did so arm in arm. When they attempted to cash the check using her "X" mark, the teller looked baffled and explained they could not cash the check. Instead of accepting the teller's declaration, Escalante asked the teller to review the bank the records to see if the woman had cashed checks previously using the same approach but with her daughter present. Agreeable, the teller did so and even called the daughter at work to confirm the transaction. When all was cleared, the elderly woman received her payment and they walked home together feeling very accomplished. For Escalante, this experience was particularly significant because it taught her, once again, that she could make a difference in someone's life by advocating for them, as she had with her and her mother's situations. Escalante realized that the skills she had developed through her experiences could be utilized to advocate for others. This event, though seemingly insignificant, culminated in what Escalante recognized as her first real organizing effort on behalf of herself and her community.[47]

Living in the Ramona Gardens housing project was not an ideal situation for Escalante, but like the other families in the units she had little choice. Opened in January

1941, Ramona Gardens housing project was Los Angeles's "first low-rent public housing project" of seven that would be built in the city during this era.[48] With a total of 610 units, the housing project would provide much needed housing for those in poverty in Los Angeles, including Escalante and her children. Living on public assistance and raising children as a single mother, she struggled to stretch the meager funds she was allotted by the welfare system. Every dime, nickel, and penny counted, and it meant a world of difference if any funds were squandered. When Escalante was faced with a situation that threatened her family's and neighbors' economic ability to survive, she spoke out and challenged the injustices head on. Such was the situation she encountered with a small store down the street from the Ramona Gardens public housing complex. She knew the store well, as she often patronized it and sent her older children there to buy things they needed. On one occasion Escalante sent her daughter to buy some items with strict instructions on how much to spend, given their dire economic situation. When her daughter returned from the store with inaccurate change, she knew something was wrong. With daughter in tow, Escalante walked back to the store and approached the owner, inquiring about the incorrect change. The owner quickly accused Escalante's daughter of dropping or misplacing the change and followed with an explanation that the prices had recently increased on that particular item. Incensed, Escalante challenged him, informing him that she knew he had gouged the price as it was the beginning of the month when many of his clients received their checks. Essentially, she accused him of raising the prices when he knew they had a bit more spending money. Finally, she told him that if he did not give her the correct change, she would rally her neighbors and demonstrate publicly about his shady practices in front of his store.

Unconvinced, he asked her why she wanted to create problems. Unmoved, she responded, "You haven't seen nothing yet."[49]

With purpose, Escalante organized her neighbors in the housing project and soon had a small group of mothers protesting outside of the store, discouraging shoppers from patronizing a store with unfair pricing and egregious practices. A relatively compact demonstration, it nevertheless had impact: the storeowner stopped inflating his prices at the beginning of the month. And though she never received the change that was due to her, Escalante gained much more from that incident. She realized that in order to pursue social justice and empowerment you had to be committed to your cause and "stick to your guns."[50] This may have been a seemingly small success; Escalante could have just been content with creating this change, but this experience served as another catalyst for changing her approach to her life and that of many others. Taken together, her life experiences encouraged her to speak out against injustice and to stand up for what she thought was right.[51] This was just the beginning for Escalante, for a few years later she would take her activism to a broader, political level.

By the mid-1960s federal policy had undergone a significant shift towards addressing historic social and economic inequality for many of its citizens. The successes of the civil rights movement put pressure on Washington D.C., to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which ended segregation in public places, banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, and national origins and enforced the voting rights of African Americans ensured by the 15th Amendment at the state and local levels. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson, in his state of the union address, declared a "War on Poverty" and in August of that same year, Congress passed an important

piece of social welfare legislation, the Economic Opportunity Act, which sought to tackle the root of unemployment and poverty in America by providing funding for job training, adult education, small business loans, and several anti-poverty programs. Those federal policies, however, were slow to bring about change in impoverished inner-city communities of color. This was especially true for the Mexican American community of Eastside Los Angeles. A year later, in 1965, Los Angeles boiled over with the Watts riots, signaling severe economic, legal, and social distress. The Watts uprising began August 11th and was sparked by a traffic stop of Marquette Frye by a California Highway patrolman in the commercial area of Watts. During Frye's arrest, as a result of the traffic stop, locals began to gather at the scene and an altercation between law enforcement and the community ensued. The uprising lasted five days, with an estimated one-thousand buildings being destroyed by fire, totaling 40 million dollars of property damage, over a thousand injured, four-thousand arrests, and thirty-four deaths by August 16th when the National Guard was able to restore order. These riots would be the first of many urban revolts across the country from 1965 through 1967. Although the federal government had just launched their War on Poverty in 1964, the effects of generations of inequality had outweighed their efforts, and by 1966 it came under the "budgetary ax," with funding for the Office of Economic Opportunity, which coordinated anti-poverty efforts, cut by 25 percent and funding for community action programs being slashed by a third.[52]

Despite concrete efforts to address the immense social and economic inequality affecting millions of citizens through the passage of federal legislation and emergence of poverty programs, public opinion and federal policy regarding who was deserving and or worthy of receiving public assistance began to shift to the conservative right wing of politics.

This shift was marked by the changing composition of those receiving benefits through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC) and its ever-increasing budgets to administer the program. Indeed, according to welfare rights scholar Premilla Nadasen between 1950 and 1960 the public welfare rolls began to look very different socially and demographically from when the welfare programs were initiated during Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal administration in the 1930s. The Social Security Act of 1935 established social insurance programs for current and retired workers and public assistance programs for eligible categories of poor Americans, which included, the elderly, the blind, and single mother families with dependent children.[53] Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) the predecessor to AFDC provided less generous and more restrictive assistance than the federally run social insurance programs that were associated with employment. ADC programs were administered at the state and county level with matching funds from the federal government, which resulted in varying grant levels, from state to state, and were largely influenced by local racial, social, and economic politics.[54]

Increased African American migration out of the U.S. South in the World War II era and an overall increase in single motherhood among women across racial lines due to "social and economic dislocations" changed the composition of those seeking support. By the 1960s, Nadasen argues, most welfare recipients were not "widows but were never-married, divorced, or deserted women."[55] In 1960, Black women and women of color in general were disproportionately single mothers, with an official out-of-wedlock birthrate of 216 out of 1,000 compared to 23 out of 1,000 for white women.[56] The wide gap between women of color and white single-mothers, Nadasen finds, was exacerbated by the hiding of white women's pregnancies and by their ability to birth "illegitimate" children and give them up for

adoption outside of the public eye. The politics of welfare in the 1960s became racialized and sexualized, laying the basis for the stereotype of the "welfare queen."[57] Increasingly, Black mothers were associated with this stereotype as unmarried, a hyper-sexual breeder, lazy, and unworthy of public assistance. According to Nadasen, "This image that interwove race, sex, and morality more than any other fed the fires of the welfare controversy."[58] This controversy, too, exploded in the public arena through the rhetoric of the conservative press, local politicians as well as through social science literature.

The most well-known and influential piece of social science scholarship connecting welfare, poverty, and race was produced by the assistant secretary of labor under President Johnson, Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Authored in 1965, Moynihan's *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action* or the *Moynihan Report* centered on the issue of Black urban poverty and adamantly argued that the source of the conditions of "Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family." That deterioration, according to Moynihan, was rooted in the matriarchal family structure which he referred to as a "tangle of pathology."[59] As Nadasen has emphasized, the power of Moynihan's report did not lie in his claims but rather in the impact the report would have on welfare policy. She asserts that in the mid-1960s "social policy and urban politics were at a critical juncture," creating an atmosphere where Moynihan's report would be especially invaluable to both critics and reformers. In effect the report "cemented the issue of race to welfare and single parent families," and more importantly "shifted the debate about urban poverty from structure and economics to culture and values."[60] Indeed, the focus moved away from looking at inequality in education, housing, health care, and public aid, to cultural and personal flaws and disorders. Although the *Moynihan Report* was focused on the crisis of urban Black poverty, the conclusions

drawn from it would have a wide impact for all women of color on welfare, including Chicanas and Mexican American women.

As Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins has demonstrated, stereotypical images or controlling images are extremely potent in maintaining the intersecting oppressions that Black women and women of color experience in our society.[61] These controlling images function to "other" women of color as "non-normative," and as historian Natalia Molina has convincingly argued serve a dual purpose. First, "it excuses inequality by attributing it to the non-normative behavior of racialized groups. It also legitimizes intrusive measures of social control," such as who is deserving and non-deserving of government assistance.[62] The welfare queen controlling image undoubtedly served this purpose during the 1960s to justify discriminatory treatment of poor single mothers of color on welfare, as well as a move to a much more restrictive federal welfare policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The image of the welfare queen, though ascribed mainly to Black women, did have a direct impact on all women of color. As Molina posits, the welfare queen is a public identity, "one that is commonly assigned across the full range of the racial spectrum, implicating various groups of women of color." Mexican American women and Chicanas in Los Angeles, as mentioned earlier, were indeed racialized as "non-normative," and as outside of the U.S. body politic since the late 1920s.

In her discussion of the racialization of Mexican women in Los Angeles during the 1920s, Molina demonstrates that increasing birth rates among Mexican women in Los Angeles led to a fervor of concern by immigration restrictionists and city and public health officials. In a report to the County Board of Supervisors, welfare officials accused Mexican women and their families of "abusing the county welfare system's resources." Jointly, public

health officials, city officials, and the popular press depicted Mexican women as having too many children and "dependent on free birthing and medical services and reliant on charity to support their newly expanded families."[63] These depictions situated Mexican women as resigned to live in a "culture of poverty," and as Molina has argued effectively serve as precursors to stereotypes such as the "welfare queen."[64] By the mid-1960s the controlling image of the "welfare queen," that would come to dominate politics in the 1970s and 1980s, as dependent on the state and tax payers dollars was firmly entrenched in the psyches of the public and of those in positions of power who would determine the fate of these poor women and their families.

Conclusion

Throughout her childhood and into adulthood, Escalante witnessed many injustices that stirred her passion for fighting for social justice. As a young girl, she witnessed her father's maltreatment of her mother, the institutional violence of local institutions that were supposed to help the poor, and the desperation of dire poverty. These experiences did not beat her down. Rather, they shaped her into a resilient woman with a keen desire for human dignity. Because she observed how her mother was denied justice, dignity, and respect, she would not allow this for herself or for others in similar situations any longer. The roots of her desire for justice emerged at an early age, and she acted on that desire by questioning and resisting what she knew was wrong.

As a young girl, Escalante also saw the inequities that she would battle for a life time. As a child, she often asked her mother why the men in the family had to be served first at the dinner table. Later, when she assisted her ailing mother at the hospital, she asked the doctors

why her mother had not improved despite her recent surgery. Later, as an advocate in her community, she organized her neighbors to stand in front of the corner store and demand an end to economic exploitation. Through her mother's encouragement, support, and need, Escalante put her heart, thoughts, and action into organizing and writing, acts that not only had important implications for spreading awareness of the plight of poor, single mothers on welfare but also led to the forging of a collective struggle for women's rights as human rights.

Chapter Two

From the Ramona Gardens Housing Project to the National Stage: The East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization and the Poor People's Campaign

In 1967, when Alicia Escalante's family and countless others in Los Angeles county were threatened with the loss of their medical care, she helped rally a coalition to fight the cutbacks under the banner of the "Save Medi-Cal Campaign" with "The Committee for Better Health & Welfare."[1] In so doing, Escalante joined the ranks of a thriving movement—that cut across racial, ethnic, class, and gender—for social justice nationally and for welfare rights locally. In late 1967, she founded the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization (ELAWRO) in association with the Los Angeles County Welfare Rights Organization, an affiliate of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO). With the support of her family physician, Dr. Carlow, local disabled rights and welfare rights activists, and many in her community in need, the ELAWRO provided essential services to the Spanish-speaking community in Boyle Heights, a historically poor and multi-racial neighborhood.

This chapter addresses how Escalante emerged as a leader and organized across racial lines to respond to the conditions urban poor women of color faced in Los Angeles. It studies how she combated these conditions to create dignified lives for herself, her family, and her community. It traces too Escalante's political formation, which was rooted in a multiracial coalition-based activism and politics with the Save Medi-Cal campaign in 1967. It then proceeds to document Escalante's emerging militancy through her involvement with the Los Angeles welfare rights movement, the founding of the ELAWRO, the Chicano movement, and her participation in the Poor People's Campaign in the spring of 1968. The discussion underscores Escalante's political biography by highlighting the emergence and practice of a militant dignity politics, she described as a "new militant and determined will to organize

among the poor."[2] Escalante and others relied on militant advocacy to stake their claims for human dignity as mothers and as human beings. This militant advocacy took many shapes and forms, including direct action and building bridges across difference to forge coalitions and practice solidarity with other marginalized groups.

Saving Medi-Cal, Saving Lives

On an ordinary day in mid-1967, Alicia Escalante and her children made their way to their family physician's office for a scheduled appointment. Unlike their previous visits with Dr. Carlow, this one would shake her to her core, he informed Escalante that due to Governor Ronald Reagan's efforts to slash state spending, Medi-Cal—the program that provided her children and thousands of poor people with basic health care—would be cut. As a result, Dr. Carlow, who accepted Medi-Cal patients, would no longer serve them and many other low-income patients in the community. Alarmed at the news, Escalante learned from Dr. Carlow that other community members had begun to organize in protest of the cuts. After providing Escalante with more details about these efforts, including an upcoming event, Dr. Carlow told Escalante that, should she want to get involved, he would have one of his staff members drive her to the demonstration, as he knew she did not have transportation.[3] With the information in hand, Escalante and her children left the medical office with much to consider.

Escalante's economic difficulties with state support did not begin overnight. It had started months earlier, specifically in January 1967, when Reagan began his first term as governor of California. During the run-up to the elections, Reagan ran on a platform of revamping "wasteful government programs" and ridding programs of "welfare chislers (those who were accused of defrauding the government to receive benefits or considered unworthy

of public benefits)."[4] After his election, Governor Reagan ushered in a conservative agenda at a moment in which marginalized peoples in the Golden State and beyond were advocating fiercely for social, economic, and political justice throughout the 1960s. Indeed, California would serve as a test-run for Governor Reagan's anti-welfare policies and ideologies that he would more fully deploy as President a little over a decade later.[5] Reagan's prime target was Medi-Cal, a new program established in California in 1966 as a result of the Medicaid provisions in the Social Security Act of 1965.[6] The innovative Medi-Cal program provided medical, dental, and vision services for poor children, the elderly, and disabled.

A few days following their visit to Dr. Carlow's office, Escalante made a decision that would change her life, she decided to go participate in her first demonstration. Sharing her memories of that day years later, she explained,

> that day after I had sent my kids off to school and packed their lunches I took the bus. I always had a pickle jar full of change it was for occasions like that, and I took the bus. Sure enough, as soon as I got off the bus there was a large group of people physically disabled in wheel-chairs and so forth going back and forth in front of the city hall. I got off the bus and the first thing I asked was, 'who's your leader?' and one of the persons that was walking back and forth said, 'Molly Piontkowski.'

A Ukranian immigrant woman, Piontkowski migrated to Chicago in the early 1920s before moving to Los Angeles where she co-founded the Committee for the Rights of the Disabled (CRD).[7] Piontkowski, Escalante later learned, became disabled as a result of tuberculosis of the spine and osteomyelitis.[8] When the two women talked, Piontkowski encouraged Escalante to join their efforts to fight the Medi-Cal cutbacks and informed Escalante about a meeting taking place to discuss a strategy to halt the cuts. Escalante learned, she said, that "the medical cuts were going to affect them as much as they were going to affect my children," so she joined their cause.[9]

At the strategy meeting in downtown Los Angeles, Escalante would learn about the different organizations concerned with the Medi-Cal cuts, including disabled rights groups, local welfare rights organizations, and social workers from SEIU union Local 535. She recalls listening very intently, becoming aware that "they were adamantly opposed to the cuts and were intent on doing something about it."[10] She also realized that she was the only Mexican American or Chicana in attendance. This realization only furthered her resolve to advocate on behalf of herself, her family, and her community. Although she did not know anyone at the meeting Escalante felt inspired by the dedication of everyday people in halting the health care cut backs that would directly impact their lives. During the meeting Piontkowski asked if anyone present was from East Los Angeles and, in response, Escalante raised her hand. Upon leaving the meeting, she became the recognized representative for East Los Angeles welfare recipients.

The Save Medi-Cal Campaign committee formed shortly following this strategy meeting. The campaign represented a "broadly based county-wide coalition" garnering the support of several politicians, civil rights organizations, and union members. Among those present included:

> Senator Mervyn Dymally, City Councilman Tom Bradley, Assemblymen Bill Greene and Leon Ralph, representatives of Democratic State Chairman Assemblyman Charles Warren, Assembly Speaker Jesse Unruh and Assemblywoman Yvonne Brathwaite. Almost all of the welfare rights and other recipient groups were at the organizing meeting, including National Welfare Rights Organization Chairman Mrs. Johnnie Tillmon, representatives of the California Council of the Blind, the Committee for the Rights of the Disabled. Also represented were many medical, dental, optometric societies, the NAACP, Black Congress and Community Service Organization; The Hospital Workers Union (BSEIU Local 399), County Employees Local 434 (which speaks for LA County hospital employees), and the Social Workers Union, Local 535/AFL-CIO with eight chapters in California county welfare departments.[11]

The group composed of public officials, organized labor, healthcare providers, civil rights organizations, disability rights and welfare rights activists reflected the diversity of the coalition and campaign that cut across race, gender, and class. This diverse coalition would serve as an important training ground for Escalante and politicize her further. It would also inform her organizing approach, which sought to build bridges across difference to advocate for change for those impacted by economic inequality.

Following the community strategy meeting, Escalante shared her excitement with Dr. Carlow that she was ready to get the word out about fighting back against the Medi-Cal cuts in East Los Angeles. Upon hearing the news, Dr. Carlow encouraged Escalante. Reflecting on why she believed Dr. Carlow supported her during these early days Escalante explained, "we were friends besides him being my family physician," he understood the "importance of the people becoming educated" and being able to advocate for themselves.[12] Furthermore, Dr. Carlow served on the board of the American Civil Liberties Union.[13] Recognizing her potential for activism, Dr. Carlow suggested she secure an office to serve as the organizing headquarters and mentioned office space available across the street. Escalante could not even fathom renting an office, much less the supplies she would need to launch a successful information drive.

Overjoyed with Escalante's commitment to get the word out about the Medi-Cal cuts, Dr. Carlow helped her to secure the office. He mentioned that a new police malpractice center had just opened there due to the rampant police brutality in East Los Angeles and that he knew the man who opened it. He told her that, in addition to the space, they had a Xerox machine, and, soon, a telephone. At first, Escalante seemed a bit leery of Dr. Carlow's offer but then realized that he was serious. Escalante explained, "that's how he helped people in

the community back then, he took a lot of patients without insurance, without Medi-Cal, and he helped them, and he was doing the same for me."[14] A few days following their conversation, Escalante met with Dr. Carlow and they walked across the street together to meet with Art García from the police malpractice center. García, who was very welcoming, proved to be generous too. Escalante eventually shared office space with the police malpractice center.[15] Within a short time, Escalante had a fully functioning space along with all the essential items to challenge the threatened Medi-Cal cuts.

Feeling invigorated by the support of Dr. Carlow and the encouragement from Piontkowski and other local welfare rights activists including Catherine Jermany of the Los Angeles County Welfare Rights Organization (LACWRO), Escalante was determined to stop the cutbacks. She began by tapping her networks in the Ramona Gardens housing project and getting the word out about the proposed Medi-Cal cuts. She then translated into Spanish all the flyers and materials that Dr. Carlow had in his office informing clients of the threat to Medi-Cal cuts, the Save Medi-Cal Campaign, and upcoming demonstrations and meetings, she then xeroxed them for distribution. She and her sister Irene "Negra" Lara went door to door talking to neighbors about the issues and made hundreds of telephone calls to people in the community, encouraging them to show up at their planned meetings and demonstrations. Further, Escalante utilized the emerging Chicano movement underground press to circulate information. An advertisement for the LACWRO appeared in the first two issues of Los Angeles' *La Raza Newspaper* in September and October of 1967. In the subsequent issue, advertisements for both the LACWRO and the Save Medi-Cal Campaign appeared. "Help us to help ourselves!" read the advertisement. It described the Save Medi-Cal Campaign as "a coalition of welfare recipients and community organizations of all ethnic backgrounds."[16]

Such efforts paid off, Escalante recalled years later that, at the first community meeting challenging the cuts, “it was standing room only, and I’ve never forgotten that, standing room only.”[17] To Escalante, the presence of so many people meant that the community would fight.

From the Save Medi-Cal Campaign to the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization

While Escalante became immersed in the Save Medi-Cal Campaign, she developed a close relationship with the president of the Los Angeles County Welfare Rights Organization (LACWRO), Catherine Jermany. Jermany, born in Chicago, Illinois moved to Los Angeles with her family as an infant.[18] She was raised in Los Angeles and had been active in welfare rights organizing since the late 1950s. She had come from a politically active family and went on welfare following the birth of her third child as a result of losing her employment. The Welfare Action and Community Organization (WACO) founded in 1958 by Dorothy Moore in South Central began operating out of Jermany’s home.[19] As more welfare rights groups emerged across Los Angeles County, the leadership, many of whom were women of color, sought to solidify their collective power through the foundation of the Los Angeles County Welfare Rights Organization in 1961. With this momentum building across California for welfare rights in southern and northern California WRO’s consolidated into the California Welfare Rights Organization in 1966. As Jermany and Escalante’s friendship developed, and the Save Medi-Cal Campaign progressed Escalante became more deeply involved with welfare rights organizing in Los Angeles.[20]

Conditions for this momentum were also made ripe by happenings occurring at the state level beginning with the election of Democrat Edmund “Pat” Brown to the

governorship in 1958. Brown promoted more government spending and during his two term appointment established a state commission on fair-labor practices, passed two fair-housing laws, and increased benefits for the unemployed, elderly and disabled.[21] One of Governor Brown's first actions was to appoint Jacobus TenBroek as chair of the state Social Welfare Board, which oversaw the administration of the department of social welfare. The Board's responsibilities included studying the causes and effects of poverty and recommended legislative and procedural solutions to the governor and legislature.[22] TenBroek, a Berkeley professor, disabled at an early age, was initially appointed to the board in 1950 at the age of 39. Losing his sight in his childhood, he went on to attend the California School for the Blind, earned a law degree, and launched a successful career in constitutional law and social welfare. He also founded the National Federation of the Blind. During his tenure as chair he would usher in reforms that expanded access to services for the most vulnerable populations. Historians Boris and Klein have observed that under TenBroek's leadership, "the Social Welfare Board took an openly liberal turn, promoting services for poor single mothers, seniors and disabled people to encourage independent living and thus the opportunity to participate in society."[23] TenBroek also played a foundational role in the formation of the California Welfare Rights Organization.

Similarly, welfare rights proponents also found a critical ally in the Los Angeles Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and its executive Director David Novogrodsky. Originally founded in 1921 as the Building Service Employees International Union (BSEIU) by immigrant workers in Chicago, by 1960 the SEIU claimed a national membership of over 250,000 representing a range of service workers including janitors, educators, healthcare workers, and social workers.[24] (In 1968, SEIU officially changed its

name to the Service Employees International Union.) SEIU Local 535 traversed the state with members in eleven county welfare departments, mushrooming from 2,600 members in 1968 to 5,000 members by 1970.[25] This union actively conducted strikes, "with one in Sacramento lasting nearly all of 1967." Local 535 not only organized against unjust conditions but also against the welfare system in place and played a pivotal role in the foundation of the Committee for the Rights of the Disabled.[26]

Los Angeles-based social workers active in SEIU Local 535 advocated for welfare recipients at the administrative level, too, and became extremely valuable allies in the struggle for welfare rights as modeled in the Social Workers Union, Local 535 special action bulletin, *Brave New World*. The bulletin addressed the "chaos, confusion and despair" among social workers and their clients caused by the implementation of computerized budgets for the first time in six Los Angeles county districts. Social workers were informed that there were a few "bugs" but in reality over "75% of the budgets produced by the computer showed some error."[27] The bulletin declared that "thousands of clients have received checks in the wrong amounts; thousands have received no check at all and nobody knows why." The Belvedere district in East Los Angeles seemed particularly hard hit, as many in this largely Mexican community did not receive a check. Social workers had to be proactive in order to develop remedies to the countless recipients who went "two full months without a check!" The bulletin attributed the issue to a "total lack of alternate procedures for writing checks and an apparent refusal on the part of top-level administration…to accept the fact that this problem is so serious that social workers and clerks now spend most of their time struggling with the computer. Staff is completely confused, angry and demoralized."[28] The statement ends by providing solutions to the "bugs" in the system, which included the delay of

converting more districts to computerized budgets and increasing staff to deal with the remaining errors. This issue persisted and Escalante helped the emerging coalition bring awareness about the glitches with automation.[29]

When Reagan was elected to the governorship in 1966 he quickly began his assault on the dismantling of big government and the welfare state which required welfare rights activists to join together to fight. Escalante's and Jermany's growing relationship would prove an effective partnership in building a Black and Brown welfare rights coalition in Los Angeles. The American Public Welfare Association hosted its annual conference at the Biltmore Hotel with leading federal, state, and county officials in appearance. They included "President Johnson's Undersecretary of Health, Education, & Welfare Wilbur Cohen, Gov. Reagan's Health & Welfare Administrator Spencer Williams, California Welfare Director John C. Montgomery, and Los Angeles County Welfare Director Ellis P. Murphy."[30] Others expected included L.A. County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn "and top officials from a number of Western states and California counties—including Orange, Ventura, Madera, Santa Barbara and Sacramento."[31] Speaking for those protesting "Medi-Cut victims" were Molly Piontkowski, Catherine Jermany, Irene Anderson, and Alice Escalante, "representing most of the major welfare rights organizations in Los Angeles County."[32] They called on federal officials to put pressure on state and local agencies to live up to the 1965 Social Security Act's Medicaid provisions. One spokesperson declared, "if we don't halt this attack on the lives of the poor, the disabled, the blind and the elderly we are clearly in for some terrible times."[33] The looming Medi-Cal cuts were indeed a direct attack on the poor and a denial of their civil rights.

While Escalante was enmeshed in wider welfare rights struggles in Los Angeles, she turned her attention toward the need for welfare advocacy in her neighborhood. The fifth issue of *La Raza Newspaper* documents the founding of the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization (ELAWRO) at a meeting held at the All Nations Center in East Los Angeles on November 7, 1967, where over seventy-five individuals met to "launch an organization drive," against the impending cuts. That night, those in attendance produced over fifty letters to Governor Reagan addressing the Medi-Cal cuts. At the meeting Escalante took the opportunity to speak about the "need to organize a strong Welfare Rights Organization in the East Side." They also agreed to pay twenty-five cents a month to contribute to the expenses of the organization. By mid November of 1967 the ELAWRO had a dues paying membership with Escalante at the helm, where she articulated the development of a "militant" will to organize among the poor, a passion that would blossom into a militant practice of dignity politics.

As noted elsewhere, the ELAWRO's day to day business happened out of their office, which was staffed by Escalante, members of the organization, and countless volunteers, many of them university students.[34] Escalante and the organization challenged the status quo of the local welfare system by establishing a parallel structure that provided information to recipients in their native language, representing them at appeals hearings, and directly engaging with the local and state bureaucracy. Escalante and the ELAWRO also pushed for the translation of welfare forms from English to Spanish, for more accessible local community offices, and for client involvement in the hiring and training of social workers and administrative staff. Additionally, the ELAWRO organized against policies that directly violated recipients' rights or challenged their livelihoods. For Escalante, leading a dignified

life as a single mother receiving welfare included having adequate nutrition, clothing, a decent home, medical care, and a livable wage. It also meant respect for the labor of child and elder care at home. She also rallied against demeaning, racist, and sexist practices and approaches, as she and many others had experienced at welfare offices.[35]

On December 5, 1967, Escalante and the ELAWRO, in collaboration with Jermany of the LACWRO, SEIU Los Angeles executive director David Novogrodsky, and members of Local 535 of the social workers union protested against the cut of "special needs" grants from welfare benefits just prior to the holiday season. These grants provided for the purchase of necessary items such as furniture and appliances including cribs, beds and refrigerators, but also paid for out of pocket expenses such as transportation. These seemingly mundane items and expenses were essential to maintaining one's basic human needs and dignity. Escalante and the ELAWRO chafed at this sudden restriction. Upon learning about this cutback, those present at the meeting urged Escalante and the ELAWRO to act on their behalf.[36] Escalante, in turn, assembled a mighty coalition that included the ELAWRO, the LACWRO, SEIU executive director Novogrodsky, and memebrs of Local 535 of the social workers union. They also responded by attending a weekly meeting of the County Board of Supervisors.

Though they were not scheduled to present, the group demanded to be heard and received five minutes at the very end of the meeting. Speaking on behalf of the collective, Catherine Jermany of the LACWRO and David Novogrodsky petitioned the Board of Supervisors to restore the funds for the special needs grants. The supervisors, however, denied their request, declaring that the county did not have enough money. Exasperated by the response, Catherine Jermany replied that, "while the State and County were fighting over

who would pay, the people were doing without these necessities."[37] The supervisors responded that they would take their concerns and relay them to the governor.[38] Not satisfied, the coalition would return to fight for the special needs grants. This would be one of the first of many confrontations between Escalante, the ELAWRO, her allies in coalition, and the Board.

This burgeoning coalition received support locally from affected welfare recipients, concerned community members and activists, as well as sympathetic local politicians and welfare administrators. Radical and militant, the coalition to save Medi-Cal represented diverse communities who advocated collectively advocating for the basic human needs of the poor. Their efforts were being reinforced nationally by Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's advocacy for economic justice through their call for a Poor People's Campaign and a multiracial alliance of the poor beginning in late 1967. Both Alicia Escalante and Catherine Jermany, who led the coalition in Los Angeles, brought their experiences and knowledge to the national stage through the National Welfare Rights Organization and their participation in the Poor People's Campaign in the spring of 1968.

Multiracial Coalition and the Poor People's Campaign

By the end of 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference had significantly shifted their strategy and perspective from achieving civil rights to advocating for human rights with the demand for a "radical redistribution of political and economic power."[39] Dr. King's changing perspective led him to be become increasingly critical of the war in Vietnam, leading him to speak out about the need for a "radical revolution in values." He turned his attention, too, to the conditions poor people of all races

faced and their potential to transform society.[40] Dr. King first spoke of the necessity for a massive civil disobedience campaign in late October 1967, including all ethnic minorities.[41] Formally announcing the Poor People's Campaign in late 1967, for the following spring (1968), Dr. King declared the campaign would petition "our government for specific reforms" as they intended "to build militant nonviolent actions until that government moves against poverty."[42] Tragically his life would be cut short by assassination on April 4th 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, just weeks before the planned launch of the campaign. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder sent shockwaves across the nation, but also had the effect of building mass momentum for organizing the struggling Poor People's Campaign.[43] Alicia Escalante and Catherine Jermany of the LACWRO and the ELAWRO helped usher in the "militant nonviolent actions" at the very start of the Poor People's Campaign.

One of the first events to take place during the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D.C., was a vigil to honor the slain Dr. King Jr. Organized by the National Welfare Rights Organization. Alicia Escalante documented what she and others present at the vigil endured at the opening of the Poor People's Campaign in *La Raza Newspaper*. She revealed that she along with twenty-eight other women, welfare rights leaders in their respective states, joined together for a planned NWRO protest of the welfare provisions in the 1967 Social Security Act amendments. Escalante blasted Public Law 90-248 as the "most regressive and racist piece of social legislation in the history of the country." She exclaimed that it directly or indirectly "affects the majority of residents of the ghettos and barrios of our country," emphasizing that Black and Brown communities would be heavily affected.[44] The welfare sections of the 1967 Social Security Act (PL 90-248) established the Work Incentive Program (WIN) instituting the first federally mandated workfare program for recipients

receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits. WIN required states to refer a portion of AFDC recipients with school age children to take mandatory state-based employment training programs and incentivized recipients to join the labor market by allowing them to keep the first $30 of their wages and one-third of their wages after that without losing their benefits.[45] Should a recipient not comply with these new policies they would be subject to the termination of their benefits. The majority of recipients on AFDC were, in fact, single mothers, many of them women of color, raising families, Escalante clarified that the late Dr. King, "was to have been with us but due to his assassination we decided to hold a vigil in his memory instead."[46]

The WIN program was focused on AFDC families and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor in conjunction with local state welfare agencies. The program consisted of three priorities. The first was to "establish an employability plan" for each recipient through an employment agency. The second was "appropriate" training for "all those found suitable," and, if eligible, the disbursement of up to a thirty-dollar-a-month incentive payment. After the training, the third priority was referring as many as possible to regular employment. For those "who [were] found unsuitable for the training and those for whom no jobs in the regular economy can be found at the time," they were assigned to "special work projects."[47] The restrictive 1967 welfare reform establishing WIN resulted from efforts by southern Democrats who ushered in a new age regarding public assistance, which would have a lasting impact on the U.S. welfare state. They attempted to quell the growing "welfare crisis" recognizing the shift in recipient caseloads from white women to women of color, and to Black women, a national increase in out-of-wedlock births and divorce, and the ballooning of AFDC budgets.[48] In reality the increase in the AFDC rolls from 3.1 million in 1960 to 6.1

million in 1969 largely resulted from advocacy that generated more equitable federal policy that opened access for thousands to duly claim benefits previously denied.[49]

The goal of WIN was clear: to get recipients off welfare and into the labor force. While a lofty goal, the NWRO and ELAWRO questioned how this would happen and what it would look like. That is, what kind of training would welfare recipients receive? What sector of the labor force would they be expected to join? These were major sources of concern. In a fact sheet circulated by the NWRO the organization posed a series of questions about how this legislation would impact recipients. It asked rhetorically: "If welfare decides I am 'appropriate' to be forced to work," what kind of jobs could they be expected to find? The answer, those positions would be the "same low paying, menial, dead-end jobs that have always been reserved for the poor." If a recipient appeared to be unsuitable for training or placement, "a special job is supposed to be created for you with some agency like the welfare department or the poverty program."[50] That special job, however, remained unclear. To the NWRO and the ELAWRO, such welfare reform equated to a forced work program that would not lift people out of poverty. Further, the 1967 amendments to the Social Security Act also included a "freeze" on AFDC funds for children born out of wedlock, revealing policy makers and politicians' purported moral concerns over the growing rates of single motherhood and "recipients' personal sexual behavior."[51] The freeze capped federal funds to states at their current percentages. Escalante proclaimed that the "freeze" directly impacts "millions of needy children who are desperately poor but presently receiving no assistance."[52]

The NWRO's and the ELAWRO's critiques of the WIN program were rooted not only in a dissatisfaction with the training and placement in demeaning low-wage jobs but

also in an awareness that the program directly impinged on the agency of welfare mothers to make decisions for themselves and their families. “We are against forcing mothers to work,” “[w]e are for meaningful jobs with adequate pay and proper child care for all women who wish to work and for adequate income for all women who choose to work fulltime as mothers caring for their own children.”[53] From the perspective of the NWRO, whether a woman chose to work inside or outside of the home was irrelevant. What was most important was that the work be valued and compensated adequately, allowing women to live a dignified life. Escalante referred to the law as a means for local welfare departments to further “coerce and intimidate poor people,” indicting the system as an institution that sought to control the poor. Moreover, the federal government did not ensure significant investment in education, training programs, or the childcare necessary to effectively lift recipients out of poverty.[54]

The vigil has been acknowledged as a small “demonstration” by historian Gordon Mantler that took place prior to what is considered the official opening event of the PPC, a Mother’s Day march organized by the NWRO and led by Mrs. Correta Scott King.[55] The vigil took place at midnight on April 22nd the original start date for the Poor People’s Campaign which had been delayed as a result of Dr. King’s killing. The participants included “thirty of the leaders of the National Welfare Rights Organization from across the country, joined by clergy from the Washington area.”[56] The vigil would begin at midnight on April 22nd and last through 1pm the following day, taking place just opposite of the entrance to the House of Representatives. Dr. George A. Wiley, executive director of the NWRO took the precaution of informing Washington, D.C., police Chief James A. Powell about the peaceful vigil planned for that day. Wiley wrote, “our people will be orderly, disciplined and respectful of Capitol property, will be careful not to disrupt the flow of traffic, nor engage in

boisterous activities which could interfere with the conduct of the processes of government." Wiley had hoped that the NWRO and its members would "have the full cooperation of the capitol police," yet what would occur would be far from cooperation.

Reflecting about the vigil, Escalante described the group approaching capitol grounds carrying crosses and candles to signify their intention to honor Dr. King. As they advanced towards capitol grounds, they were met by law enforcement and warned that they "were breaking the law." After some negotiation between NWRO leaders and law enforcement, the group proceeded onto capitol grounds only to be told again, Escalante recounted, "we were breaking the law." Despite the warnings, Escalante explained that they had no intention of leaving. "We intended to stay. You see, we felt the need to stay."[57] Moments passed when Washington, D.C., police arrived and began arresting the vigil participants. Escalante recalled, "we were hauled into police wagons and taken into jail, booked, fingerprinted…most of us had never been to jail but this makes no difference to the law, you are still treated like a criminal."[58] She admitted to pleading guilty in the courtroom because, like many of the mothers arrested, "I had a family worrying about me" and she thought that by doing so she might go home quicker.[59] In total thirty-nine individuals were arrested and charged with unlawful assembly.

The welfare rights movement leadership arrested for the vigil sought not only to honor and publicly mourn Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. but also to emphasize the issues that poor women and, specifically, Black poor women and women of color faced. The incident highlighted the demeaning treatment of poor mothers. Furthermore, the episode provides an opportunity to underscore the national scope of the NWRO leadership, many of whom hailed from California. Among those arrested included members of the executive staff of the

NWRO, including Dr. George A. Wiley, Executive Director and Timothy J. Sampson, Administrative Director, Ms. Beulah Sanders of the Citywide Coordinating Committee of Welfare Rights Groups, New York, Johnnie Tillmon of ANC Mothers Anonymous Los Angeles and the LA County and California Welfare Rights Organization, Catherine Jermany of the LA County and California Welfare Rights Organization, and Alicia Escalante of the LA County and East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization. The thirty-nine arrested represented executive officers as well as state and area representatives and alternative delegates of the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) of the NWRO. Both Jermany and Escalante served on the NCC representing California from 1968 through 1970.[60] In total the NWRO paid $17,330 for the bail of the thirty-nine leaders who hailed from cities as diverse as Los Angeles, New Orleans, Gary, Minneapolis, Chicago, Pittsburg, Jackson, Seattle, St. Louis, New York, Baltimore, Denver, Newark, and Wichita.[61] While this list certainly reflects the regional diversity of the NWRO, it also underscored the minute representation of Latinas/os and other racialized populations within the national leadership. From 1969 through 1972 there was only one Spanish surnamed member of the executive committee of the NWRO.[62]

The NWRO vigil came quickly on the heels of the mass uprisings that occurred in several cities across the nation in response to the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As historian Gordon Mantler explains, although less deadly than Watts or Detroit in August 1965 and July 1967 respectively, the unrest of April 1968 "touched more cities and produced more property damage, arrests, and injuries than any other time in the 1960s."[63] Washington, D.C., particularly hard hit by the uprisings and the judge who presided over the bail hearings of the April 22nd vigil didn't mince words about how he felt about the destruction following

King's assassination. The NWRO released a statement on April 23rd the following day regarding the "obvious bias" displayed by Judge Halleck and the "cruel and contentious flow of verbal abuse" that the welfare mothers and their supporters were subject to during their bail hearings.[64] Judge Halleck chose to use his position behind the bench to "voice his passions against welfare recipients, the federal anti-poverty program, and any peaceful non-violent action poor Americans initiate on their behalf."[65] To demonstrate Judge Halleck's lack of professionalism, the NWRO cited several examples from his statements. In one instance where a defendant pleaded with the judge that the vigil was to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Halleck reproached unconvinced and unsympathetic, "That's what everyone said they were doing when they burned the town down."[66]

To another defendant from Newark who, when asked what city she represented, Halleck retorted, "that's where they burned four or six square blocks." Those seeking bail were asked about their employment, and Halleck seemed hostile, "Is that funded by government money? Is that an Office of Economic Opportunity organization? Did the tax payers pay your way out here?" When it came time for Escalante's bail hearing, a defense counsel informed Judge Halleck of her concern over the welfare of her five children in California, to which Halleck replied, "she can't be too distressed if she left them there to come out here to be arrested." Further documenting his obvious bias demonstrated, he set bail according to geographic location, but when Mrs. Sherill Covrain disclosed that she was the secretary of the New York Citywide Coordinating Committee of Welfare Rights Groups she was ordered to pay $2500. Ms. Beulah Sanders who did not disclose her position as the president of the same organization received a bail of $400. Two other welfare mothers who resided in New York also received bail amounts of $500. Though law enforcement disrupted

the vigil the incident steeled her will to continue to fight. She reflected, "if anything the experience has shown me the fight is just beginning." Her article closes with a call to all mothers to join her "in organizing and fighting this bill and for better treatment and respect for all poor people." Years later, Escalante's experience in Washington, D.C., continued to shape her militancy and her commitment to organizing for the human dignity of welfare recipients and "all poor people."

By the spring of 1968, Escalante had become intimately involved with local welfare rights organizing, through her involvement with the Save Medi-Cal campaign, the ELAWRO, and activism with the Los Angeles County Welfare Rights Organization through her close relationship with Catherine Jermany. She would become the first chairman of the LACWRO under Jermany by 1968 and became a presence nationally in the NWRO serving on the National Coordinating Committee and participating in the vigil that opened the Poor People's Campaign. Escalante sought to include the concerns of her Eastside neighbors to the national agenda of the NWRO. She urged the translation of welfare forms into lay language and then into Spanish, as a great need existed among the poor in East Los Angeles and certainly for Spanish-speakers across the country. The resolution that Escalante wrote and circulated for consideration on the national platform also included a call for hiring bilingual social workers and administrative staff as well as cultural sensitivity training. Deeply disappointed, Escalante did not receive the support she needed among the national leadership to have the issues she considered crucial included in the national platform.[67]

Speaking about her early organizing with Black women from South Los Angeles and within the NWRO, Escalante recalled, "it was quite obvious that they [Black welfare rights activists] were not very culturally aware of our needs." Reflecting further, Escalante

described that there were instances of racial tension regarding her involvement in the National Welfare Rights Organization. During an NWRO National Coordinating Committee meeting in Jackson, Mississippi, Escalante was confronted by another welfare rights activist who exclaimed, "she ain't Black, she's white."[68] Catherine Jermany quickly came to her friend's defense and retorted, "leave her alone." According to Escalante their back and forth continued with the woman questioning Escalante, "what are you doing here?" Escalante replied, "the same thing that you are doing lady," with the woman responding, "you're not Black!" The heated discussion ended with Escalante responding, "I don't have to be Black."[69] Instances such as these reflected some of the limitations that existed when it came to cross racial coalition. Although Black and Brown activists worked collectively to advocate for welfare rights, the specific needs of Spanish speaking people, and other racialized groups including Native Americans often went misunderstood, or subsumed within the NWRO's goals respect, justice, and dignity.

Despite these experiences Escalante remained committed to working across racial lines for poor people's human dignity. While the NWRO prided itself on being a multiracial organization, the inclusion of Chicana issues on the platform were absent during the early years of the organization. It became clear to Escalante that the specific needs of Spanish-speaking welfare recipients would not be included in the group's early agenda but continued to try to influence the NWRO until 1970. As a result, Escalante chose to not become an official affiliate of the NWRO and placed her focus specifically on issues affecting Spanish-speaking welfare recipients while still engaging in multiracial coalition. Escalante remained committed to the NWRO goals, and supported the same causes, she however, "regrettably felt that the only thing to do was just then, just go on my own." For Escalante and for

Spanish speaking welfare recipient's the NWRO's goals that included respect, dignity, and justice could not be achieved without being able to access welfare documents in Spanish and working with a bilingual social worker. Further, Escalante and the ELAWRO extended their reach to those considered outside of the bounds of U.S. social membership, noncitizens. Welfare rights meant something specific to each racialized group due to the specific historical contexts and competing views. These realities coupled with many other factors varying from geography to generation required patience and commitment to forge coalitions across differences.

Conclusion

In 1968 a rising nationalist current reverberated in both the Chicana/o and Black populations nationally, especially in Los Angeles. Both Escalante and Catherine Jermany embraced the cultural nationalist movements of their respective communities and adopted political leanings rooted in identity. However, Escalante and Jermany continued to mobilize together, and they would use their involvement as a platform to organize for Black and Brown coalition. Late in 1968 the ELAWRO became known as the National Chicano Welfare Rights Organization in an attempt to build a national organization focused specifically on Chicana/o and Spanish Speaking welfare rights issues. Escalante and the organization remained connected with the national poor people's movement, but as the late 1960s rolled on she and the organization became more focused on events happening in East Los Angeles and the burgeoning Chicano movement.

Alicia Escalante cut her activist teeth within a nascent multiracial, and multiethnic coalition that developed among disabled and able-bodied welfare recipients, unionized social

workers and concerned community members through the Save Medi-Cal campaign. She understood that poverty shamed diverse groups of people and the importance of building power collectively across lines of race, class, gender, and ability to advocate for the human dignity of the poor. Through her involvement in coalition-based activism and politics, Escalante founded the ELAWRO and developed a militant dignity politics. She believed in the power of a collective shared experience of struggle among those in poverty despite their differences.

This would not be the end of the story for Escalante and her involvement with the Poor People's Campaign. Following her return to Los Angeles after her arrest and bail hearing for the vigil she would have another opportunity to participate in the Poor People's Campaign. The second time, however, she traveled as part of the official multiracial western PPC caravan on a greyhound bus to Washington, D.C., with her five children in tow. Also traveling to D.C. were Chicana and Chicano members of the Brown Berets, with whom her eldest children had already created a connection to. Her eldest daughter and son, Lorraine and Raul Escalante had become active with the Brown Berets as a result of their participation in the East Los Angeles High School Walkouts or "blowouts" in March 1968. The "blowouts" involved almost ten thousand East Los Angeles students walking out of their local high schools in response to substandard educational experiences and conditions. Escalante fully supported her children in their decision to advocate for themselves and she would join them in their commitment to the Chicano movement.

Chapter Three

Chicana Welfare Rights and the Chicano Movement: Alicia Escalante, the ELAWRO and Chicana Leadership

A growing discontent with the educational system and greater historic political, social, and economic disenfranchisement of Mexican-origin people in the United States and particularly in Los Angeles boiled over in early March 1968. Urban Mexican American youth in East Los Angeles had been subject to overcrowded classrooms, run-down facilities, inadequately trained teachers, racial discrimination, and an astoundingly high drop-out rate. For decades, students had been tracked into vocational education instead of college preparation. In response to these conditions and years of community advocacy for change in the schools falling on deaf ears, a coalition of Mexican American and Chicano high school students, college students, radical teachers, community activists, and organizations such as the Brown Berets, came together and launched the East Los Angeles High school walkouts or "blowouts." Students at Wilson initiated the walk outs early, despite well laid plans for them to being at Lincoln High school, in response to the principal canceling a play, in which many Chicano students participated, due to language deemed inappropriate to the administration. The momentous day was Friday March 1st. With their hands forced, the coalition put their collective effort into motion on March 5th at nearby Garfield High School, which also had a sizable Mexican American and Chicano student body. The following day Lincoln High School and Roosevelt High School, with similar profiles to Garfield and Wilson High Schools, joined the walkout with Belmont High school joining soon after. By the end of the week over ten-thousand students had participated in the walkouts concentrated in East Los Angeles. Soon, similar walk outs would take place throughout the region and across the United States.[1]

The East Los Angeles High school blowouts signaled one of the seminal events of the Chicano movement in Los Angeles, which collectively advocated for social, political, and economic justice for and the self-determination of the Chicano community. Beyond educational inequality, the community east of the Los Angeles river also had to contend with rampant police violence and suppression, poverty, and the historical lack of political power. High school students Lorraine and Raul Escalante, the two eldest children of East Los Angeles welfare rights activist Alicia Escalante, were among the those who participated in the walkouts. Through their involvement with the blowouts at Lincoln High school they joined the ranks of the Brown Berets, a paramilitary community youth organization, and became enmeshed in the Los Angeles-based Chicano movement alongside their mother. Alicia Escalante founded the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization in late 1967 to advocate for the human dignity of Spanish-speaking single mothers who were subject to demeaning and racist conditions within the welfare system. Her children, especially her eldest had witnessed her political development, her determination to challenge injustice, and her commitment to tackle community issues and were inspired to follow in her footsteps.

When the blowouts occurred the first week of March 1968 Alicia Escalante had already become well known in the east side community and Los Angeles at large for her welfare rights advocacy work. Her activism, rooted in a deep commitment to advocating for the human dignity of poor people, demonstrated to her children and community the importance of civic duty to the community and fighting for justice. Escalante became involved in grassroots organizing in response to California Governor Ronald Reagan's threatened cutbacks to the Medi-Cal health program that she and her children depended on for health care. She joined a multiracial coalition in 1967 called the Committee for Better

Health and Welfare (CBHW) that rallied together to organize the "Save Medi-Cal Campaign." Participation in the committee provided Escalante with an opportunity to build relationships with the leadership and rank and file membership of local welfare rights, disability rights organizations, and social workers active in SEIU Local 535, giving her the opportunity to cut her teeth with organizing. Those experiences would be crucial in establishing the ELAWRO. Escalante's commitment to advocating on behalf of poor people such as herself and her family also demonstrated to her children the necessity of not only advocating for the Chicano community but also building bridges across difference and practicing solidarity with other oppressed peoples and those willing to organize on their behalf. This included poor African American women on welfare, such as Catherine Jermany and Johnny Tillmon, leaders of the welfare rights movement locally and nationally.

For Escalante, access to adequate education was vital to the struggle for human dignity and welfare rights. An adequate education, she believed, created opportunities for those in poverty to economically lift themselves and their families and provide for more dignified living conditions. She not only supported her eldest children in their decision to protest being subjected to an insufficient education but also joined them and many others to advocate on their behalf. In fact, she and her five children participated in the blowouts at Lincoln High school where her eldest children attended.[2] Escalante's involvement in the East Los Angeles High School blowouts, the wider Chicano movement, and the welfare rights movement as well as supporting her children in their advocacy for a just education represented her commitment to a militant dignity politics. This militant dignity politics centered basic human needs including a dignified education where students are treated humanely and provided the opportunity to excel. Escalante not only practiced this militant

dignity politics but also modeled it to her children and those in her community by taking on the necessary dignity work to advocate for social, political, and economic justice for all marginalized people. An essential part of that dignity work included being a staunch advocate for human dignity and being willing to make sacrifices, by putting yourself on the line, which Escalante would do frequently throughout her activism.

Histories of social movements are often told through a siloed lens; the history of Alicia Escalante and the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization provides an important opportunity for a historiographic paradigm shift. It is a shift that focuses on the confluence of the multiple social movements of the 1960s and 1970s instead of on each movement individually. At the center of this confluence is the collective fight for human dignity and economic justice waged by Escalante and the ELAWRO across race, ethnicity, gender and class. Escalante simultaneously engaged in and served as a leader in the myriad social movements of this era in order to tackle the multiple forms of oppression she faced as a woman of color. Her activism and organizing shed new light on the interethnic and interorganizational dynamics of social movements of this era. It draws attention to the multiple insurgencies of Chicana activists like Alicia Escalante and the development of social and political consciousness among urban poor women of color. Further, by tracing the militant dignity politics of Escalante and her dignity work through a political biography of gender and leadership, Chicana leadership comes to the fore as a critical site of historical recovery within the histories of social movements of the 1960s and '70s. This chapter traces Alicia Escalante's continued political formation, her increasing militancy, and the emergence and recognition of her leadership in the Chicano movement. It examines Escalante's efforts to bring to the fore the gendered issues of welfare rights to the Chicano *movimiento*. It is

focused on the dignity work of organizing in coalitions and practicing solidarity with the multiple struggles that concerned the Chicano community and beyond.

Building Solidarity in the Chicano Movement and the Poor People's Campaign

Scholars Laura Pulido and Josh Kun hone in on two events in the 1960s in Los Angeles that they argue mark this era of "political change and activism": the Watts uprising in 1965 and the Chicana and Chicano high school walkouts of 1968.[3] The year prior to the East Los Angeles High school blowouts, 1967, consisted of activist rumblings on local college campuses with increased Mexican American enrollments, in high schools, and in the community that were directly linked. The Lincoln Heights based Episcopalian Church of the Epiphany, under the leadership of Father John Luce, served as a critical space for community and student activists to congregate, rap, strategize, organize, and disseminate information.[4] Operating out of the basement of the Church of the Epiphany, with a grant secured by Father Luce, was *La Raza Newspaper,* which was edited by Eliezer Risco, a Cuban émigré and Stanford graduate Ruth Robinson. Risco and Robinson had previously worked with the farm worker movement and the United Farm Workers (UFW) in California's central valley before arriving to Los Angeles and founding *La Raza Newspaper* along with Father Luce.[5]

The first issues of *La Raza Newspaper* were published in 1967 the same year Escalante founded the ELAWRO and would quickly evolve into an important underground press publication of the Chicano movement and would lead to other publications such as *Chicano Student Movement* (*CSM*), which covered the blowouts closely.[6] It would serve as an important organizing tool for Escalante and the ELAWRO, as she published in *La Raza Newspaper* about their organizing activities and the plight of the poor. That same year,

Father Luce also played a critical role securing a grant to support the foundation of the Young Chicanos for Community Action, the precursor to the Brown Berets and setting up La Piranya coffeehouse, where they would meet. Soon after Alicia Escalante founded the ELAWRO in 1967, the organization shared office space on First Street in Boyle Heights with the newly founded Police Malpractice center headed by Art Garcia and sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union.[7] Raul Ruiz, editor of *CSM* and, later, co-editor of *La Raza Newspaper* years later reflected in an interview that 1967 was a year that was "centered on issues such as the police, the schools and politics. Alicia Escalante had started an important welfare rights group especially for women in the barrio. There were new associations forming as well as new life appearing in some of the older ones."[8] The East Los Angeles High School blowouts did not emerge in a vacuum but were the culmination of years of organizing and advocacy among different sectors of the Mexican American community and represented a rising militant approach to creating change.[9] Both *CSM* and *La Raza Newspaper* and their staff, which included Raul Ruiz and Joe Razo were instrumental in the organizing before, during, and after the blowouts.

In early June of 1968 following multiple meetings with the coalition that enacted the blowouts and their supporters with the Los Angeles Board of Education, thirteen individuals were indicted on charges of conspiracy for orchestrating the high school walkouts. They were collectively known as the East L.A. Thirteen and consisted of all men, though young women undoubtedly played key roles in the blowouts.[10] Among those indicted was Sal Castro, a Lincoln High school social studies teacher who had been dismissed from his teaching position as a result of his involvement and support for the students who boycotted classes. Also facing charges were many community activists including members of the *La Raza*

Newspaper staff, Eliezer Risco and Joe Razo, members of the Brown Berets, Carlos Montes, David Sanchez, Ralph Ramirez, Gilbert Cruz Olmeda, and Fred Lopez, as well as activist college students including Moctesuma Esparza and Carlos Muñoz, who were involved in United Mexican American Students or UMAS. The East Los Angeles community, including Escalante and her eldest children, were roused by Castro's dismissal and the charges he along with the rest of the East L.A. Thirteen faced. The community, including Escalante, quickly organized to form the Chicano Legal Defense Committee (CLDC)..[11] Prior to that, the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee (E.I.C.C.) had been formed before the blowouts in anticipation of the battle ahead and the need for collective support. According to Raul Ruiz, the EICC consisted of a coalition of community activists, parents, activist college students involved in UMAS, and members of the clergy. The E.I.C.C. played an important role in maintaining pressure on the board of education, supporting the East L.A. Thirteen, reinstating Sal Castro to his teaching position, and solidifying ties among students, parents, and community activists.[12]

The struggle over the repercussions of the East L.A. high school walkouts lay in the months ahead, meanwhile Escalante, her family, and members of the Brown Berets became enmeshed in the national struggle of the poor that had gained traction by the early spring of 1968. The Poor People's Campaign (PPC), planned and organized by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), was scheduled to begin on April 22, 1968, just a few weeks after the East Los Angeles High school blowouts. Tragically, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4th delaying the official launch of the campaign until May. The PPC was organized to gather as many poor people from across the nation to descend upon Washington, D.C., to advocate for

their collective civil rights and to demand economic justice. The campaign was focused on achieving a multiracial and unified front of poor Black, Mexican American, American Indian, and white people. As historian Gordon Mantler has observed, the Poor People's Campaign's militancy and radicalism was rooted in the "aggressive inclusion and recruitment of non-black minorities."[13] That experience would serve as a critical training ground for Escalante and other Chicanos from East Los Angeles to continue to build bridges across difference, engage in coalition activism, and solidarity, in other words, to do dignity work. Further, it was an important opportunity for Chicanas, Chicanos, and Mexican American people to bring attention to issues specific to their communities on a national scale.

The Poor People's Campaign represents a significant historical event that sought to coalesce the collective power of poor people from across the United States to lay claim to their collective economic rights as a human right and advocate for change to the existing economic order. Alicia Escalante participated in one of the first events of the PPC as part of a delegation of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) leadership on April 22, 1968 the initial inauguration date of the campaign. The NWRO leadership had originally planned a demonstration to protest the welfare provisions of the 1967 amendments to the Social Security Act, which established the first workfare requirements for people who received benefits from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was to participate in this demonstration to show solidarity with poor mothers receiving AFDC. In place of the demonstration, the NWRO leadership decided to hold a vigil to honor the recently killed Dr. King, Jr. Escalante was one of thirty-two NWRO officers, state, and area delegates and alternates to join in the vigil

along with NWRO executive staff members and representatives of the local Washington, D.C., clergy.

On the night of April 22, Escalante and the NWRO leadership attempted to mourn publicly a central leader of the African American civil rights movement on capitol grounds at the House of Representatives. As they proceeded onto capitol grounds many held crosses and carried candles. Their presence was met by Washington, D.C., police who quickly arrested and transported them, all women, to the local jail to be arraigned the following morning. Fortunately, the NWRO paid her one-thousand-dollar bail. Upon Escalante's release, she returned to East Los Angeles even more determined to fight for economic justice. She reflected in an article she wrote upon her return to Los Angeles in *La Raza Newspaper* that, "if anything the experience has shown me the fight is just beginning."[14] Indeed, the fight was just beginning. Escalante would return to Washington, D.C., this time with her five children in tow and as part of the Western caravan of the Poor People's Campaign.

Although Escalante had participated in what was to be one of the first actions in connection with the PPC, the official launch of the campaign began with an NWRO-sponsored Mother's Day march on May 12, 1968. The march was led by the recently widowed Mrs. Coretta Scott King, the NWRO leadership, and local membership. In total, nine caravans across the country proceeded to the PPC, the first of which, the southern caravan or the Freedom Train, arrived in time for the opening march.[15] The other eight caravans were the Eastern, Midwestern, Western, and San Francisco caravans, the Indian Trail, the Appalachian Trian, and the Mule Train. The Western caravan departed from Will Rogers Park in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts on May 15th. Reverend Dr. James Hester Hargett was the local organizer for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

(SCLC) and had been the west coast representative for the organization since taking his position in 1958 as minister of the Congregational Church of Christian Fellowship in Los Angeles. Born in Greensboro, North Carolina, Rev. Dr. Hargett had marched with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965.[16] Although Rev. Dr. Hargett and his organizing team faced difficulty securing funding, they did not have difficulty recruiting people to attend.[17]

Following her arrest in April at the NWRO vigil, Escalante had been warned never to return to Washington, D.C. However, when she received a phone call at the ELAWRO office from the SCLC and was asked if she was willing to participate and recruit families to attend, she did not hesitate to say yes.[18] The SCLC representative had informed Escalante that they would be underwriting the expenses and that each participant would have their basic needs met and that each bus would have at least one monitor from the SCLC. Wasting little time, Escalante quickly organized enough families to fill one Greyhound bus. She, too, would be present at Will Rogers Park that May 15th day along with her children. Lorraine and Raul, Escalante's eldest children, and active with the Brown Berets, were joined by their younger siblings Julie, Tony, and Alex.[19]

The day began upbeat with a rally at the park that included fiery and well recognized speakers. They included the Reverend Jesse Jackson of the SCLC and Reies Lopez Tijerina of the New Mexico based La Alianza Federal De Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Land Grants) whose leadership in the Chicano movement was being increasingly recognized. Originally, five buses were to leave from Will Rogers Park on 103rd St. and Central Avenue, but only three left due to fundraising issues.[20] Additionally the buses ended up departing three hours late, leaving behind a number of people who were unable to get a seat one of the

three buses, which were full.[21] This unplanned delay proved helpful to Gloria Arellanes, prime minister of finance and correspondence of the Brown Berets, who along with seven other Berets, were running late to the park. Arellanes, who was from El Monte had worked for the Neighborhood Adult Participation Program Project, an anti-poverty program, felt compelled to attend to express what she later called "solidarity with other poor and minority communities."[22] She and her fellow Berets who attended, including Carlos Montes and Ralph Ramirez, had been recruited to participate via Eliezer Risco, the editor of *La Raza Newspaper,* who had been contacted by Walter Bremond of the Los Angeles-based Black Congress and Brotherhood Crusade to recruit Chicanos to attend.[23] Although they ran late, Arellanes had enough time to provide a brief interview for the *Los Angeles Times* before boarding a bus. The campaign, she said, was , "a chance for poor people to actually confront government."[24] Upon boarding the bus Arellanes, Montes, Ramirez, and the four other Berets found themselves at the back of the bus that was occupied primarily by African Americans who were happy to be able to join them and depart as part of the Western caravan to the PCC.[25]

Escalante recalled her experience preparing for her second trip to Washington, D.C., for the PPC as being full of excitement, as she was able to recruit many families for the trip, mostly single mothers with their children and many of them members of the ELAWRO. At Will Rogers Park on the day of departure, she reflected years later, she "packed that bus with about 35 people, that's about as many as we could fit in there and Jesse Jackson was one of our monitors."[26] The atmosphere of that day at the park and its happenings were documented by both the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, the mood was festive and full excitement. Both papers reported that those departing were mainly mothers with their

children and consisted of representatives from the African American, Mexican American, and white communities of Los Angeles. The *L.A. Times* more specifically recorded that of the one-hundred and thirty-eight people departing, "10 were Caucasian, 47 were Mexican American, and the balance Negro."[27] The first stop was to be in Phoenix, Arizona. The trip to Washington, D.C., from Los Angeles would take eight days and the caravan traversed thirty-two hundred miles across eleven states, acquiring more participants along the way.

During the long ride, close relationships were fostered amongst those on each bus but also during the overnight stops in cities that included Phoenix, Albuquerque, Denver, El Paso, Kansas City, St. Louis, and Louisville, where people convened for welcome rallies, ate dinner, and rested for the night. Some of these stops were exuberant and full of high energy, while others included instances of racial tension and anxiety. As historian Gordon Mantler has observed in his study of the PPC, these events provided opportunities for inter-racial solidarity building as caravans converged and some of the rallies held reflected racial, ethnic, and class diversity. The caravans provided, too, for the opportunity for building intra-racial solidarity. This was the case for Escalante, and her eldest children Lorraine and Raul, as they built close ties with Arellanes, Montes, and Ramirez as well as the rest of the Brown Berets in attendance.[28] Escalante and her family would also build a connection with Crusade for Justice leader Corky Gonzalez and his family during the caravans stop in Denver, Colorado. This camaraderie would continue throughout the trip and especially upon their arrival to Washington, D.C. Due to delays with the construction of Resurrection City in D.C., the central location where those arriving would be housed, Corky Gonzales of the Crusade for Justice made arrangements for an alternative location following the Western caravan's departure from Denver. Gonzales had arranged accommodations for the Chicano contingent,

many of which were mothers and children, at the Hawthorne School, located two miles from Resurrection City.

Also arriving on May 23rd to Washington, D.C., along with the Western caravan, were torrential rains that created harsh conditions in Resurrection City. The Hawthorne school became a welcome safe-haven from bad weather conditions with the majority of the Western caravan and the Indian Trail staying there.[29] Escalante recalls that although she and her family were not staying at Resurrection City, those being accommodated at the Hawthorne school consisted of a diverse group consisting of Chicanos, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and white folks.[30] Although many efforts had been made to draw in the nation's non-Black poor to the PPC and to Resurrection city, the reality was few Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and whites had moved into Resurrection City, opting instead for other accommodations like the Hawthorne school to escape inadequate conditions. These circumstances often worked to undermine the SCLC's vision and hope for a multiracial image of unity among the nation's poor. Further, tensions between the leadership of the diverse sectors of the poor had flared at different demonstrations and planned events throughout the PPC.[31] Despite this, what became apparent to the leadership of African American and Black, Chicano, and Native American organizations was that in order to create successful and sustainable cross-racial organizing they needed further organization within their own respective movements. Identity based organizing did not occlude the possibility of cross-racial organizing but rather as something that strengthened it.

Alicia Escalante and her family would participate in the PPC for two weeks and would return to Los Angeles just a few days prior to Senator Robert F. Kennedy's assassination on June 5th. Escalante explained in an interview in late 1968 that she was proud

that she and her children had participated in the PPC and believed the experience provided them all with an important education. “To see all these people of all colors, of all races, of all creeds get together,” she recalled, “it’s really something you know, and I’ll never forget it—I’m very proud that we participated in that.” The education they received at the PPC went beyond them sharing space with diverse poor people but included practicing solidarity with other poor people regardless of their race and ethnic background. Critical links were forged with members of the Brown Berets for both Alicia and her children. Lorraine and Raul Escalante would become more deeply involved with the organization following their participation in the PPC.[32] Similarly intra-regional relationships were built with the Gonzales family of the Crusade for Justice, relationships that would continue for years. Their experience at the PPC and the Hawthorne school as part of the Chicano contingent only further expanded Escalante’s networks and strengthened her commitment to continue to do the dignity work necessary to create change for poor people across the country.[33]

That dignity work necessitated Escalante’s participation across multiple movements simultaneously. Escalante sought to organize around the linkages between these movements. The primary link was human dignity, something that all human beings have a right to enjoy. Indeed, Escalante would fight tooth and nail for it for herself, her family, and all oppressed people. What is significant is that while they were practicing solidarity with all poor people, what became blaringly apparent was the need to continue to bring representation to issues that were specific to the Chicano, Mexican American, and Latino communities in the U.S. While the PPC touted a multiracial vision, the reality was that much work remained to be done to bring these specific issues to a national platform. Upon Escalante’s return to Los Angeles she would become further enmeshed in local struggles for the recognition of the

human dignity of poor Mexican Americans and Chicanos and their self-determination. This dignity work on behalf of the Chicano community, however, did not bound Escalante to working solely with Chicanos. Rather, she would continue to utilize coalition building organizing tactics and solidarity as part of her leadership in the Chicano movement.

Chicana Leadership in Chicano Community Struggles

The Poor People's Campaign proved to be a transformational experience for Escalante and her family, as it would serve as a critical motivation to continue solidarity work with others across ethnic and racial lines. Indeed, the dignity work of building bridges across difference and practicing solidarity were vital components to Alicia Escalante's militant dignity politics and leadership praxis. Escalante's leadership was one that sought to empower others, especially those who had been degraded by living in poverty and her leadership within the Chicano movement would further develop following her and her children's participation in the blowouts of March 1968. She and ELAWRO would become prominent fixtures in the community and in the wider Chicano movement. As someone who grew up in and was raising her children in the barrio of East Los Angeles, Escalante felt an extreme commitment to community issues. "I was part of the community," she stated years later in an interview, "and that is where my obligation stood."[34] Community issues reflected a broad range of issues including welfare rights, educational justice, police brutality and repression, self-determination, and anti-Vietnam war efforts. Escalante was determined "to fight the establishment by whatever means necessary to bring justice to our people."[35]

On September 16, 1968, on the first day of the school year, and Mexican Independence Day, members of the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee (EICC), the

Chicano Legal Defense Committee (CLDC), community activists, and community supporters held a series of protests outside of Lincoln High School. This same collective would consistently attend the meetings of the Board of Education. The participation and demonstrations in the school board meetings were meant to apply pressure on the Los Angeles Board of Education to reinstate Lincoln High school teacher Sal Castro to his teaching position. During the last week of September, following the end of a school board meeting, which resulted in little progress, attendees who were present in support of Castro decided to occupy the Board of Education via a sit-in until the board met their demands. Those who first occupied the hall included members of *La Raza* staff, including Joe Razo and Raul Ruiz, members of the Brown Berets, Carlos Montes, Fred Lopez, Ralph Ramirez, and Raul Escalante, members of the EICC, and UMAS college students, Juan Gómez-Quiñones, Susan Racho, Jesús Treviño, Henry Gutiérrez, and Carlos Vásquez.[36]

The sit-in began on September 26 and lasted until October 2nd. Initially the police were not called, and sit-in participants were free to come and go to handle their individual commitments but they kept a constant presence at the Board of Education with people sleeping over-night. Lydia Lopez, who participated in the sit-in as a community activist and as the wife of Brown Beret Fred Lopez, recalled the exuberance in the board room. “There was a lot of time as we were sitting in there to talk. I remember Father Luce came and he did a eucharist and instead of the host we had a tortilla. There were songs, I remember Jesus Treviño and I writing some songs about the board of education.”[37] Throughout the week the participants received support from the community via hot meals, mariachi music, and a Sunday mass held by Father Luce of the Church of the Epiphany. As the sit-in progressed, the board’s patience grew thin and the doors to the boardroom were locked to prevent people

from coming in and out after hours. The only opportunity for people to come in after the doors had been locked was during board meetings. On October 1st those continuing the sit-in were warned that they would be arrested the following day if they did not vacate the board room by a certain hour. The occupants discussed among themselves and decided who would go and who would volunteer to stay to be arrested. On the evening of October 2nd thirty-five participants of the sit-in were led out one by one to be arrested, including Alicia Escalante. Their persistence paid off, however. The next day, the board voted to reinstate Sal Castro to his teaching position.

Those arrested for the sit-in had to spend the night in jail before being bailed out the next morning. Escalante documented her participation in the sit-in and why she volunteered to be arrested in an article she wrote for *Chicano Student Movement* following her release. She justified her actions by saying,

> I am a Chicana mother and was one of the 35 arrested in the Board of Education sit in…Since my children were old enough to speak…[t]hey were taught to speak up when abused, to fight back tooth and nail, to get their rights as human beings. I, for one, won't hide behind the cloak of hypocrisy and say these things do not exist…Only some mothers are still not willing to face reality so there will be many mothers who will criticize me. The same mothers who are critical of the word "Chicano." I am at least raising my children to be proud of their heritage [and] to demand their rights. For those of you mothers who may think I may not be a good mother because I am militant, on the contrary, my children are well taken care of in every respect. Viva La Raza![38]

Although Escalante and the organization were focused on welfare rights, their greater goal was working towards the recognition of the human dignity of the marginalized. To Escalante, educational struggles were human dignity struggles and she would militantly advocate for the human dignity of her children and youth in the community who were directly impacted by unequal conditions in the education system. This article is significant because it is the first time that Escalante identifies herself as a militant Chicana activist. It also documents

Escalante's defense of her militant motherhood and dignity politics by directly addressing critiques of her identity as a Chicana mother and her mothering practices. She willingly put her body on the line by being arrested for what she considered to be a legitimate cause, even though her family would surely be affected. Escalante demonstrated to her children and the community her leadership by being steadfast in her advocacy for a quality education, human dignity, and justice.

Chicana welfare rights encompassed multiple struggles and necessitated the practice of a militant dignity politics to create a more just welfare system and dignified life for poor people. For Escalante, the multiple issues facing the Chicano community and other marginalized communities were not separate, although they did have their distinctions. Escalante's leadership praxis empowered those living in impoverishment and sought to build bridges across differences such as race. Escalante's organizing experience and connection with Catherine Jermany, president of the LACWRO, was reflective of this bridge building between Black and Brown communities in Los Angeles and of broader connections. Following the victory of the Los Angeles board of education sit-in, the Black Political Liberation Organization (BPLO) held a benefit party for the Brown Berets and the Chicano Legal Defense Committee in South Los Angeles. The BPLO was the "political arm to the Black Congress," founded in 1962 by Walter Bremond as the organizing chairman and who, following the Watts uprising of 1965, founded the Brotherhood Crusade in 1968.[39] Catherine Jermany was an active member of the Black Congress, a Black nationalist organization, and was a leader in the welfare rights movement. The benefit was held "in an attempt to show our appreciation for their gallant stand and dedication to the liberation of our people."[40] Those honored included Alicia Escalante who served on the board of the CLDC and the thirty-four

other sit-in participants. More importantly the gathering as the article documented, was also "to encourage Black and Brown unity in an effort to build political solidarity between Black and Brown people."[41]

These cross-racial efforts to build solidarity and coalition were captured in the November 1968 issue of the *Los Angeles County Welfare Rights Organization Newsletter*, edited by Jermany. The newsletter included information on the activism of Black and Brown communities, issues pertinent to both communities, and articles addressed specifically to each group individually. For instance an article by Jermany, "A Message to the Black Social Worker," was direct in its intended audience, declaring that, "[d]iscrimination against Black people and other non-white people have created your job—there are sacrifices you must make to become Black—you must give up your negro attitude of individualism."[42] Another article documented a dinner held in the Chicano community to honor the thirty-five people arrested that was held at the Church of the Epiphany in Lincoln Heights. The dinner included a special guest from Denver, Colorado, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales founder of the Crusade for Justice, who Escalante and the Brown Berets had built close ties with during their time at the PPC. The same issue of the newsletter highlighted that "something new and different is happening in the Black and Brown community. A new force has come to help us challenge the power of the police."[43] The article detailed a lawsuit that the Western Center of Law and Poverty filed in early 1968 against the LAPD on behalf of twenty-one victims of police violence , reflecting the impact that police violence and suppression had on their communities. Other articles focused on new legislation impacting welfare recipients such as the passage of WIN as well as advertisements for the ELAWRO, the Committee for the Rights of the Disabled, and the SEIU social worker union Local 535. Taken together the

November issue of the LACWRO reflected the multiracial coalition work that was continuing to take place in Los Angeles despite the rise of cultural nationalist, identity-based organizations, and politics. In fact, Gloria Arellanes, the prime minister of finance and correspondence for the Brown Berets, served as the co-editor to this issue of the LACWRO Newsletter, further illustrating Black and Brown collaborative junctures.[44]

Scholars such as geographer Laura Pulido have documented a clear connection between Black and Chicano nationalist and cultural nationalist organizations such as the Black Panther Party and the Brown Berets. In interviews conducted with BPP members, she observes that the Brown Berets were viewed as a parallel organization in the Chicana and Chicano community. Pulido has also documented the multi-racial coalition and inter-ethnic collaboration work between the BPP and organizations such as the United Farm Workers and the Chicano movement organization, and El Centro de Acción Social Autónomo (Center for Autonomous Social Action or CASA).[45] What has not been documented substantially is the cross-racial nationalist and militant organizing of Black and Brown women in the struggle for welfare rights in Los Angeles and the insights their inter-ethnic and inter-organizational dynamics can provide about the histories of their activism, leadership, organizations, and movement building that are especially relevant today.[46] Further, grassroots Chicana leadership within the Chicano movement is a critical site in need of historical recovery as well as the inclusion of welfare rights as a Chicano movement issue.

Escalante and the ELAWRO forged coalitions and utilized direct action tactics to draw attention and raise awareness about the plight of those on welfare in the Chicano community. This was the case two days before Christmas on December 23, 1968. In response to cutbacks on "special grants" just before the holiday season, Escalante, members of the

ELAWRO, and several members of the social worker union SEIU local 535 from the Metro East and Belvedere DPSS offices picketed outside of the Metro East district office on Olympic Boulevard to demand an increase in aid. The Director of the Metro East district of DPSS, Mr. Fred Gustafson, who was described as “an incredibly insensitive administrator,” reacted to the demonstration at the following Metro East district staff meeting of the DPSS.[47] He bitterly attacked the actions of Escalante, the ELAWRO, and the social workers who supported the demonstration.[48]

The following month in January 1969, Escalante was invited to speak at the Metro East district office by members of the social workers union local 535 and members of a new organization, Social Action Latinos for Unity Development or SALUD, in order to get a better understanding of the problems arising for recipients in their districts. SALUD had been recently established earlier that spring by social workers whose objective was to build a “unified force of community and professional Chicanos working for change in the field of social work.”[49] SALUD was focused on bringing to the DPSS administration’s “attention the specific needs and problems of Chicanos and other Latinos on welfare.”[50] When Director Gustafson learned that Escalante had been invited to speak, he refused to allow her to enter the building and speak.[51] Arriving soon after, Escalante found the members of the social workers’ union and SALUD huddled outside in bad weather, as they had opted to have the meeting outdoors given Director Gustafson’s gruff response. Unmoved by Gustafson’s intimidation tactics, Escalante made her way into the building followed by the forty-three social workers who had been refused to hear her speak. Escalante was confronted by Gustafson who tried to keep her out of the main meeting room by imposing himself at the door. Undeterred by his imposing size, she made her way past him to enter the room and

turned the lights on, he shut them off. Back and forth they went, she turned them on again and he turned them off until at one point while this was unfolding, someone from the crowd of social workers shouted, "get out of here Gustafson."[52] To which a flabbergasted Gustafson finally stormed off to his office. Escalante then proceeded to speak to the social workers about community concerns and left soon after she was done. The next day the forty-three social workers who supported Escalante and witnessed her speak received suspension notices.[53]

Escalante and the social workers were not defeated. A coalition was formed in response to the suspensions. It included Escalante and the ELAWRO, SALUD, members of the social workers union local 535, and the Welfare Issues Committee (WIC). Formed in early 1969, WIC was constituted by activists involved in several different local Chicano movement organizations such as the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee (EICC), the Brown Berets, La Junta, The League of United Citizens to Help Addicts (LUCHA), and many other concerned organizations fighting for community empowerment and self-determination in the Chicano community. Collectively they gathered to discuss the needs of those on welfare and to develop forty-three demands (the number of social workers and supervisors suspended) to be presented to County of Los Angeles Director of the Department of Public Social Services, Ellis P. Murphy. The thirty-eight social workers and five supervisor social workers of SEIU local 535 who were suspended also responded by challenging their suspensions by requesting a review by the County Civil Service Commission. Their request for the review of the decision to suspend them resulted in a two-to-one vote that the union social workers were in fact victims of "discrimination because of union activities."[54] The Los Angeles County Department of Social Services was ordered to

provide those suspended with back pay and a directive was established under the instruction of the County Board of Supervisors to "inform all county departments how and when unions and other organizations can utilize county facilities."[55]

The first meeting with Director Murphy took place on January 30, 1969, and developed into an intense confrontation. When Escalante and members of the community arrived at the Triggs Street central office in the City of Commerce at the 9:30 a.m. scheduled time, they were locked outside of the building. Two security officers stood on the inside of the glass doors as Escalante and members of the community first asked and then demanded to be let in by pounding on the glass. Eventually they made their way into the building but no sooner than they met seven or eight Sherriff vehicles and officers who, according to one observer, were there to "make sure that no one started a 'riot.'"[56] Despite the very tense situation at the Triggs Street welfare office, by 10:30 a.m. Escalante and members of the community were allowed to have the meeting that was scheduled for that morning with Director Murphy.[57]

At the meeting, they presented some of the forty-three demands, which centered on the recognition of the human dignity of recipients, accountability from the welfare department, cultural sensitivity, and representation within welfare administration, and access to resources. At the top of the demands was a public apology from the welfare administration in Los Angeles County to the East Los Angeles community. They also demanded the removal of Director Gustafson who they believed had disrespected Escalante and the East Los Angeles community outright. They wanted culturally sensitive people and Chicanos hired on all levels of welfare administration. They advocated, too, for cultural sensitivity training for social workers, welfare outposts in the community that included Spanish-

speaking staff. They sought the creation, as well, of a welfare advisory council with members selected by the community and the translation of specific welfare forms from English to Spanish. Access to resources such as culturally competent child care centers was another area of need identified by the demands. Overall they sought to humanize the welfare system and improve relations between the social worker and client in the Spanish-speaking community.[58] Escalante and members of the coalition were there to advocate for the community and present these demands at that first meeting with Director Murphy, but were met with resistance and intimidation tactics via law enforcement.

Undeterred by that initial meeting with Los Angeles County Director Murphy, Escalante and the coalition participated in a series of meetings with him and other county administrators that, at times, became very contentious. At the second meeting held on February 10, 1969, Director Murphy walked out before even hearing any of the rest of the demands. In response, Escalante sent a telegram to California State director of the Department of Social Welfare, John C. Montgomery, notifying him of Murphy's unwillingness to participate in the meeting due to the presence of a specific committee member.[59] In response, Montgomery asserted that "all aspects of Mr. Murphy's performance as County Welfare Director are not the responsibility of the supervisory agency (State Department of Social Welfare). It would appear that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors would be your proper court of appeal since they have the responsibility for all staff employed in county government."[60] In essence, Montgomery passed the buck back to the county. Upon Director Murphy's unexpected departure from the February 10th meeting, the coalition immediately launched a candle light vigil at Murphy's home for two nights "with over a hundred people participating including some of his neighbors."[61] Lydia Lopez,

who participated in the picket, recollected in an interview years later that priests from the Church of the Epiphany including Father John Luce and Roger Wood had participated along with members of the Brown Berets, including Fred Lopez and Carlos Montes.[62]

Since State Director Montgomery informed Escalante that the County Board of Supervisors were responsible for all county employees, including Director Murphy, Escalante, the ELAWRO and the coalition turned their attention there. Escalante and members of the WIC attended a Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors meeting where they were met with outright disrespect, namely from Supervisor Ernest E. Debs. When Escalante and her supporters arrived unannounced demanding to be heard by the board and proceeded to pressure Supervisor Debs to arrange special meetings to discuss the issues impacting recipients, Debs became irate and began verbally insulting Escalante. Debs then ordered two deputy bailiffs to quiet Escalante and make her sit down. When approached by the officers, members of the Brown Berets rushed to Escalante's side and surrounded her, escorting her safely out of the room.[63] Despite tense instances such as these, Escalante and WIC continued to meet with Director Murphy and other County administrators in order to bring to light the experiences and needs of welfare recipients in East Los Angeles and discuss possible solutions. These direct-action tactics did have an impact, as the DPSS began to implement some of the demands, though they did so at a snail's pace. Escalante, the ELAWRO, and their supporters in coalition responded by keeping the pressure on. By the summer of 1969 district director Gustafson was transferred to another district and thirty of the demands had been "implemented, partially implemented, or were in the process of being implemented."[64]

The Chicano community and those active in the Chicano movement in East Los Angeles viewed Escalante as a leader in their community and considered welfare rights an important community issue.[65] Their support for Escalante, the ELAWRO and the welfare rights struggle in Los Angeles are representative of the strong ties built among community people in East Los Angeles and of the coalition building and inter-organizational dynamics of this era. Ralph Ramirez of the Brown Berets recollected that, "whenever we heard of an event, we would round up members together to attend that event, like a protest or demonstration she was having." Further he explained that "everybody was on the same page…generically everybody was referred to as El Movimiento. Everybody belonged to the movimiento, including Alicia."[66] This conception of the Chicano movement and Escalante's commitment to community issues provide insight into Escalante's leadership praxis and militant dignity politics that encompassed multiple struggles both inside and outside of the Chicano movement. Escalante and the ELAWRO were often sought after by different organizations and collectives within the movimiento for support and she would often provide the backing they were looking for.

Fighting for Human Dignity on Multiple Fronts

The St. Basil's Catholic Church demonstration organized by Católicos Por La Raza (CPLR) on Christmas Eve 1969 illustrates one of the many instances in which Escalante and the ELAWRO were tapped for support. CPLR was led by Ricardo Cruz, a law student at Loyola Marymount University who sought to organize against the Catholic church and its unresponsiveness to the conditions of poor Chicanos in Los Angeles. Unlike other Chicano movement organizations, CPLR functioned more as a political association or coalition of

activists concerned with the neglect of the Chicano community by the Catholic church. Joe Razo, co-editor and photographer for *La Raza Newspaper/Magazine* remembered attending a community meeting at the Euclid Neighborhood Center in Boyle Heights led by Cruz to discuss organizing tactics. Razo offered his and the *La Raza* staff support to Cruz in his effort to build a coalition and to bring awareness to the issue. Years later, Razo reflecting back, said, "there were so many loosely affiliated groups, welfare rights, the Brown Berets, and so on."[67] Their organizing efforts culminated in a series of actions against the construction and establishment of a new multi-million-dollar church on Wilshire boulevard, St. Basils.

The most documented of these actions was the Christmas Eve midnight mass demonstration that ended in an all-out police melee.[68] Escalante and the ELAWRO were recruited to attend the demonstration and they did so in large numbers with many families, including elderly and young children.[69] That night, many of the participants, including Escalante and her children, were subject to police brutality, suppression, and surveillance. Escalante would be among a few community leaders who were arrested that night after experiencing violence at the hands of the police. Joe Razo of *La Raza* received a strike to the head by an LAPD officer that resulted in thirteen stitches and recalled that Raul Escalante was also beat by the police after attempting to come to his aid. After losing contact with her youngest son, Alex, who was six years old, Escalante kicked an officer who was preventing her from searching for her son, which resulted in her immediate arrest.. In the aftermath of the demonstration, Escalante and nineteen other individuals identified by law enforcement as leaders of the event were indicted on charges, including "disturbing a religious meeting, inciting a riot, assault with a deadly weapon and damage of property."[70] Escalante was the only one who was charged with damage to church property. Collectively the twenty

individuals were put on trial and Escalante would be among the few among them who would later serve jail time for their role in the demonstration.[71]

Facing substantial jail time for the charges being levied against her, Escalante would not have to go at it alone. The community that she was dedicated to responded by rallying around her defense. Her case was handled by a group of lawyers associated with the Western Law and Poverty Center and the ACLU. Social worker members of SEIU local 535, SALUD, and a group known as the Social Welfare Workers Movement (SSWM), among many other professional and community people, organized to advocate on her behalf. Upon the completion of her trial in the spring of 1970 and her pending sentencing, several individuals wrote letters in support of Escalante. To further aid Escalante, the SSWM published an article in a special information bulletin regarding her case. The SWWM bulletin recognized Escalante for the dignity work that she had done for the community and for social workers themselves, relaying that, "it is Mrs. Escalante who now faces a thirty day stay in jail; who has fought for her people, even fought for us, the welfare workers. Yes, even for us." The article called on social workers to thank Escalante for her valiant service. "[I]ndeed the only way, we can thank Mrs. Escalante for the support she has lent us is to enlist, alongside our clients. In the fight against the welfare system which oppresses and exploits us all."[72] Further the SWWM published a flier, "Alicia Escalante Needs Our Support," which solicited letters on her behalf as well as encouraged her supporters to attend her sentencing hearing. Addressing social workers, the flier explained, "[t]hose of us who saw Mrs. Escalante leading the fight against county cut backs in emergency aid and special needs last December, only a few days before the St. Basil's incident, believe that Mrs. Escalante has been convicted of once again struggling with her people against their exploitation and for their rights."[73]

Some of those who wrote letters on her behalf engaged with her directly, while others were compelled to write, despite not knowing her personally but were aware of her work and impact in the community. Collectively, the letters speak to her leadership, her role as a spokesperson, and tireless devotion to the human dignity of poor people in her community and beyond. Social worker John R. Taliaferro shared that, though he did not always agree with Escalante, "she has given heart to the welfare clients and a conscience to the DPSS." "Anything that diminishes Mrs. Escalante's voice in the community," he said, "will be a loss to us all."[74] Issac Fuhrman, another social worker who only witnessed Escalante speak once and had worked with "poor and socially handicapped" people for many years in the DPSS wrote, "it was most interesting and heartening to find an indigenous spokesman come from the poor to verbalize and make the public consciously aware of the problems and the unmet need of the welfare clients." He declared that the removal of Escalante from the community, "for any period of time would deprive the unvocal clients of a spokesman in their community."[75] David Lee Billhimer, a district staff development specialist in the East LA DPSS, reflected in his letter about the many "changes taking place in the welfare system which have been due in great part to Mrs. Escalante's concern and hard work." He continued, that he felt that, "Mrs. Escalante's motives are unselfish and that her actions are primarily directed toward alleviating the suffering of the poor—a kind of suffering that most of us know nothing about."[76] Social worker Richard Strayer shared the high regard in which Escalante was held by many, stating in his letter that Escalante, "is highly respected by both the community and the social workers that have had contact with her. As she has accomplished so much for the community, it would be a real loss for all of us to not have her dynamic leadership."[77]

Several others who worked much more closely with Escalante wrote compelling letters, including Mike Ornelas and Aurora Rubio, both members of SALUD. The two were deeply concerned with the discontent and turmoil occurring in the country with the battles for civil rights and in Los Angeles. They wrote that Escalante's case was the symptom of larger social problems. Rubio, in particular, powerfully advocated for Escalante stating, "I strongly urge that not just for Mrs. Escalante, but for community and nation, that her case be handled as leniently as possible."[78] Others who worked with Escalante directly on community advisory committees included professor Frances Feldman who was the chairperson of the Advisory Committee on Family of Children Services and a member of the day care subcommittee for DPSS. Feldman shared in her letter that she had served on these committees along with Escalante and from her perspective Escalante, "has been unselfish in her efforts to provide leadership effectively." She continued, "from the standpoint of her participation in these particular committee activities, [Escalante] has made a positive contribution."[79] Despite the immense support from the community, social workers, and from politicians, Escalante served thirty days in the Sybil Brand Correctional facility in 1972 as a result of the charges from her participation in the St. Basil's demonstration. Being arrested and subjected to county probation and jail time were significant sacrifices that Escalante made in the name of human dignity and social, political, and economic justice for those on the margins of society.

Alicia Escalante also participated in what is considered the first Chicano anti-Vietnam war protest held on December 20, 1969, in East Los Angeles. As U.S. involvement in Vietnam deepened and casualties rose, anti-Vietnam war sentiment and protests began to spread across the country and also in the Chicano community. By 1968 there were half a

million US troops on the ground in Vietnam.[80] Despite the legacy of military service of Mexican Americans, the Vietnam war provided Chicano activists the opportunity to challenge "prevailing notions about American citizenship and national belonging." Organized largely by the Brown Berets and Chicano student activists, the protest took place just days prior to the Católicos Por La Raza St. Basil's demonstration. Organizers sought out Escalante to serve as a speaker for her grassroots leadership in the community. Like CPLR, the Chicano Moratorium Committee (CMC) was constituted by a coalition of individuals and groups that included several members of the Brown Berets, anti-draft activists and UCLA students Rosalio Muñoz and Ramsés Noriega, and many other student and community activists. During her speech, Escalante declared, "I'd rather have my sons die for La Raza and La Causa than in Vietnam."[81] Reflecting the gender constraints of the Chicano movement, which relegated women organizers to the margins, Escalante was the only woman who served as a speaker. In her fiery speech, she made direct connections between the extreme poverty in the community and the need for self-determination in the Chicano community instead of waging war in Vietnam. Given her notoriety in the community and the growing momentum of the Chicano anti-war movement in Los Angeles, she also served as a speaker for the second Chicano moratorium a few months later, on February 28th. The second Chicano Moratorium was better organized than the first and drew in approximately two thousand people from across the state and the southwest, despite the downpour of rain that day.[82] Again Escalante would be the only woman to address the audience and was among a list of men such as Sal Castro, Corky Gonzales, Rosalio Muñoz, and David Sanchez.[83] In the summer of 1970, Escalante was invited yet again to speak but did not have the chance to do so. That Chicano anti-war protest on August 29th, the largest to date, ended

with police violence and the shooting of innocent participants. The police later argued that they had credible reason to shoot first and ask questions later. As a result of the police violence, three people were killed. Among them former *Los Angeles Times* reporter Rúben Salazar, fifteen-year-old member of the Brown Berets, Lynn Ward, and thirty-year-old Angel Gilberto Diaz.[84]

Escalante's participation in Chicano anti-war struggles were significant as she represented the grassroots leadership of women in the community and critiqued the immense poverty experienced in the community meanwhile millions of dollars were being burned to feed the Vietnam war machine and not the poor. Indeed, her impact and influence in the community informed the organizing demands of the National Chicano Moratorium Committee (NCMC). La Marcha de la Reconquista was organized as a march across the state against Governor Ronald Reagan and his policies and would be one of the last events organized by the NCMC. The march was also an attempt to build a Chicano political party, the La Raza Unida Party (LRUP) in California. According to Rosalio Muñoz, co-founder of the NCMC there were five key issues under the umbrella of the anti-Reagan themed march, "the RUP, welfare, education, the police, and the war."[85] La Marcha began on March 5, 1971 in Calexico, California, and ended in Sacramento on August 9th in front of Governor Reagan's home in Sacramento. The march reflected an expansion of the NCMC's focus and brought together several issues under the same banner against Reagan.[86]

Conclusion

The community's support of Escalante and the ELAWRO did not emerge in a vacuum but rather reflected her deep commitment to community issues that went beyond

welfare rights. As poor and working-class people on the East side of Los Angeles, their dignity was often at risk of being trampled on not only by the welfare system but also by the multiple forms of oppression that emanated from the education system, law enforcement, and the U.S. Government. This commitment to doing the dignity work, which was necessary to preserve her own dignity and that of the greater Chicana and Chicano community, entailed her consistent involvement in community struggles. In the process, Escalante was recognized as a community leader by many.[87] She played a leading role not only in the battle for welfare rights but also in the Chicano movement and broader civil rights struggles in Los Angeles and nationally. These struggles were closely interwoven and informed one another, although they have often been examined in silos, as unrelated and not part of a larger movement. The history of Escalante and the ELAWRO provides a vital opportunity to explore these struggles at their nexus and the multiracial, interethnic and interorganizational dynamics of this era. Further, it demonstrates how Escalante centered the gendered experiences of poor single mothers on welfare throughout her sustained involvement and leadership in the Chicano movement.

This centering of Chicana and Mexican American women's issues while active within the welfare rights and Chicano movements led to Alicia Escalante's emergence as a leader and champion of poor women's rights. The next chapter continues to trace Escalante's political biography of gender and leadership by focusing on the struggle against early welfare reform represented by the amendments to the Social Security Act passed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It demonstrates that economic justice was a Chicana feminist issue that was well represented in Chicana feminist print communities and was a cause that required the collective effort of the Chicana feminist movement. It documents the dignity work of coalition building among Chicanas locally in Los Angeles and across regions via the National Women's

Political Caucus against the 1971 Talmadge amendment to the Social Security Act. I argue that through Escalante's leadership and practice of a militant dignity politics, she and the organization were able to build bridges across difference and help mobilize a broadly-based, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic coalition of women and men to challenge repressive legislation that they believed robbed people of their dignity.

Chapter Four

Economic Justice is a Women's Issue: The Chicana Welfare Rights Organization's Challenge to Welfare Reform in the 1970s

In 1967, during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, the U.S. Congress passed increasingly restrictive amendments to the Social Security Act. These amendments marked a shift in federal policy from the entitlement-based system under Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programs to a more conservative "work" requirement. Essentially, the 1967 amendments to the Social Security Act established the Work Incentive Program (PL 90-248), which required AFDC recipients to take mandatory state-based employment training programs with the end goal of pushing them into the labor force. The majority of the cash aid recipients on AFDC were, in fact, impoverished single mothers, many of them women of color and Black women, raising families. That same year, in the midst of this political shift away from government support of the poor, Alicia Escalante, a welfare activist from East Los Angeles, founded the East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization (ELAWRO) in direct response to the mounting issues faced by single Chicana welfare mothers in her community. Almost immediately, Escalante and the ELAWRO joined the fight against the conservative drive to remove single mothers from those deemed deserving of public assistance. They centered their efforts on creating awareness regarding the plight of the single mother on welfare and serving as an advocacy group on behalf of a vulnerable population that was increasingly becoming the target of repressive legislation.

This chapter on Alicia Escalante and the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization's battle against welfare reform demonstrates the significance of the struggles poor, single mothers, most of them women of color and Black women faced in challenging policies and practices as well as ideologies about who was worthy of government support. To do so, it

begins by briefly tracing Escalante's development as a grassroots community leader dedicated to women's issues and locates the 1960s and 1970s as the site of the transition in government policies from welfare to workfare. As scholars have observed, these two decades witnessed the passage of increasingly restrictive social policies and dismantling of New Deal welfare policies in favor of workfare.[1] Prime examples – and foci of this study – are the passage of the 1967 amendments to the Social Security Act, which first established the Work Incentive Program (WIN) and the Talmadge Work Incentive amendments to the Social Security Act, also known as WIN II, in December 1971. Using untapped archival documents from Escalante's personal collection, in addition to the personal papers of Guida West, NWRO founder George A. Wiley, and Chicana feminist and Chicano movement publications, I turn to the battle waged by the CWRO, formerly the ELAWRO, against the Talmadge amendments to the Social Security Act.[2]

I argue that through Escalante's leadership and practice of a militant dignity politics, she and the organization were able to build bridges across difference and help mobilize a broadly-based, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic coalition of women and men to challenge repressive legislation that they believed robbed people of their dignity. Further, it demonstrates that economic justice was a Chicana feminist issue that was well represented in Chicana feminist print communities and was a struggle that required the collective effort of the Chicana feminist movement. Escalante and the CWRO were committed to defending and advocating for women's rights as human rights. And, though they lost the larger battle against welfare reform, their efforts demonstrate the power of the collective movement they built to preserve the dignity of poor people and the awareness they created regarding our interconnected nature as human beings.

Beginnings: Alicia Escalante and the Emergence of a Grassroots Chicana Feminist Sensibility

Alicia Escalante's entry into grassroots community activism was rooted in her lived experiences in witnessing the indignities her impoverished mother had to endure as well as her own as a poor, under-educated, under-skilled, single mother. Her activism began in the Ramona Gardens housing project in Los Angeles, an experience that quickly led to her involvement in a multi-racial coalition that launched a state-wide campaign against the threat of Medi-Cal cuts proposed by Governor Ronald Reagan in 1966. The following year she founded the ELAWRO, which began as an affiliate of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), where Escalante had cut her activist teeth organizing against the passage of PL 90-248, which was the public welfare reform provision embedded in the social security amendments of 1967 that established the WIN program. This work provided an early training ground for Escalante and the ELAWRO in the sustained battle against early welfare reform.

Also contributing to Escalante's political formation and organizing approach was her involvement in the Chicano movement and her role as a grassroots Chicana community leader. Indeed, Escalante and the ELAWRO have been briefly historicized by scholars as a recognized Chicana community leader and as an early Chicana organization during the Chicano movement, yet an in depth engagement with her history has not been written.[3] Building off of the traces in this scholarship my work explores how Escalante advocated on behalf of poor Chicana and Mexican origin single mothers on welfare and did so by organizing in coalition and solidarity within and between the multiple social movements of this era. As women of color, Chicanas faced multiple forms of oppression that necessitated engagement with the various movements for social, political, and economic justice of the era.

These experiences and organizing tactics according, to Dionne Espinoza, Maria Cotera and Maylei Blackwell, "shaped the emergence of Chicana feminism as a *field of resistance* constituted by alternative networks, counterpublics, and countermemories."[4] The rise of Chicana feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s was also rooted in the legacy of Mexican and Mexican American women's community organizing and activism that continued within the Chicano movement. Los Angeles served as a critical site of the forging of this "*field of resistance*" and Escalante and the CWRO played a vital role in its formation from the experience of poor grassroots Chicanas and mothers from the barrio.

Catapulted into activism out of necessity of basic human rights for herself and her children Escalante understood intimately the issues facing single mothers on welfare and many in poverty across the nation. One issue that dramatically influenced her political formation was hunger and access to food. New York Senator Jacob Javits, committee chair of the Senate Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs and Kansas Senator Robert Dole were "shocked to find that the areas Mexican Americans and Negroes were not only hungry and unhappy but also bitterly critical of the committee."[5] In May 1969 *TIME Magazine* captured the sentiment at the Senate Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs hearings held in East Los Angeles at the All Nations Community Center. There, the committee learned first-hand from local leaders about the immense amount of hunger in Los Angeles. These local leaders included Alicia Escalante and her close allies in the struggle for human dignity, Molly Piontkowski of the Committee for the Rights of the Disabled (CRD) and Catherine Jermany of the Los Angeles County Welfare Rights Organization (LACWRO). "All you do is investigate…You don't do a damn thing," declared Piontkowski to the committee. When Chairman Javits asked if, "people actually suffered from hunger," Jermany retorted, "Are

you kiddin'? You can walk down the street in east Los Angeles and seven families out of ten on a block are barely existing."[6] Asking about the effectiveness of food stamps, Javits received a sharp reply from Escalante, explaining that when they are distributed stores "jack up" their prices and not enough are given out. As a result, she declared, "we are forced to feed our families, rice, beans, and other starches. Hidden hunger and starvation appear in at least half of the families in our community."[7] The hearings reflected the dire conditions that poor people, including single mothers and their children, faced on a daily basis and the strategic organizing on the part of Escalante and other local leaders to make their realities known on a federal administrative level. According to the *TIME* article, the committee, convinced by the local leadership, did have an impact on the Nixon administration's decision to maintain the food stamp program into 1970.

Soon after Escalante's participation in the hearings on hunger, she had the opportunity to broaden her political perspective by participating in a Nutrition Seminar and Study Tour held by the United Presbyterian Church in the Unites States of America's (UPCUSA) Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations to tour the globe. Sponsored with a grant by the United Council of Churches, Escalante was one of twenty-seven women, with the majority being United Presbyterian, but also included Roman Catholics, and United Methodists, to travel to ten countries. Seminar participants' travel itinerary included departure from New York to Italy with subsequent stops in Lebanon, Iran, India, Thailand, Philippines, China, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan. The seminar was held between July 15 through August 30th 1969, and sought to bring together Protestant and Roman Catholic women "seeking to discover new ways of using our full potential and influence to contribute to a more abundant life for people everywhere."[8] The seminar was also concerned with the

need for “changes in economic and social structures – national and international – which produce injustice and suffering as the rich become richer and the poor poorer.”[9] Organized to develop solutions to human hunger locally and internationally the seminar proved to be an important experience for Escalante in the development of her militant dignity politics and feminist leadership.

Escalante quickly learned that hunger and starvation was a global issue and that though well intentioned, the professional women who participated in the seminar were oblivious to the hunger and periodic starvation occurring at home. Escalante documented her experience a few months following her return from the seminar in the November issue of *La Raza Newspaper*. She explained that she participated in the seminar as a means of representing the perspective of the poor in this country and to learn about hunger taking place across the globe:

> And hunger, I felt, related to what a hell of a lot of recipients go through day after day, no matter how well they budget. I know from my own personal experiences and from working with recipients daily, that 21₵ per person, per meal is not enough! And that, hermanos, was my main concern, the need to voice the welfare recipient’s woes.[10]

She recounted that she was “the only Chicana, the only grassroots person,” among professional women including educators ranging from primary school to the university, dieticians, pediatricians, and secretaries, she felt that most women, “were completely out of touch that there were problems here.”[11] Critical of the seminar, Escalante shared that before “we even left the states I felt the sting of discrimination from some of the group.” She realized, she said, the seminar was just a “way [for the United Presbyterian church] to establish good or better relationships around the world.”[12] During her travels, Escalante and the rest of the group witnessed extreme poverty, hunger, and starvation, conditions that sadly

were much more dire than the poor were experiencing back at home. The hypocrisy of the U.S. became particularly apparent to Escalante as she came to the "conclusion more than ever, that this the richest country in the world, and for hunger of any kind to exist here is inexcusable."[13] She drew this conclusion because unlike the countries she visited the U.S. did not have the same limitations yet, poverty, hunger, and periodic starvation persisted.

Having witnessed extreme deprivation and the suffering of mothers and their children as a result of underdevelopment and lack of modern technology, Escalante critiqued the U.S. government for the existence of widespread hunger despite being a first world country that was technologically advanced. Escalante argued that as a nation we produce more than enough food yet, "farmers are paid not to grow crops!"[14] Indeed *TIME Magazine* reported in May 1969 that the federal government paid farmers "more than $1.8 billion dollars a year not to grow crops."[15] In response, Escalante asked in her article, "[a]nd the poor, still have hidden hunger, never have enough, in a land of plenty?"[16] Escalante's critique continued, "But let's get down to the nitty gritty carnales, who's on welfare? The oilmen, the farmers, the politicians that's who." Incensed with the daily attack on poor women's dignity for receiving welfare, Escalante made clear to expose those who were also receiving government support. Though Escalante was focused primarily on securing the basic human needs of poor single mothers on welfare in the U.S., her tour abroad allowed her to make direct connections with the conditions that third world women and their families faced with those of women of color at home. These experiences also informed her perspective against the war in Vietnam and convinced her more than ever that the war was at home against social, political, economic, and gender inequality. Further, it influenced her feminist political formation and

ideology that women should serve at the forefront of struggles that directly impact them, especially poverty and hunger.

Escalante and the CWRO organized at the nexus of the Chicano, welfare rights, and women's movements and her leadership became recognized within these movements, across regions, and, particularly where she was most active, in Los Angeles. Her feminist politics and leadership were recognized on November 25, 1969, when Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) de UCLA, a recently widely adopted umbrella student organization of the Chicano student movement, invited her to participate in "A Chicana Symposium: Corazón de Aztlán." Focused on Chicana leadership in the Chicano movement, the symposium included a panel that represented the broad range of activism and organizing taking place across the country by Chicanas and Chicanos. Over one-thousand Chicanas and Chicanos gathered at Ackerman Union, with the majority attending being young women. In addition to Escalante, the panelists included notable women such as Dolores Huerta, a nationally known leader in the United Farm Workers union; Elizabeth "Betita" Martínez, a former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee member and co-editor of La Alianza's *El Grito Del Norte* newspaper; Enriqueta Vásquez, a Colorado and New Mexico based activist who had been active with the Crusade for Justice and was also a contributor to *El Grito Del Norte*, La Alianza's newspaper from New Mexico; Geraldine Gonzales, co-founder of the Crusade for Justice in Denver, Colorado, and the Escuela Tlatelolco, an independent school for Chicano and Native American youth in the same city; Alicia Hernández, who was active with the Los Angeles Brown Berets; and Susan Racho of MEChA de UCLA, who would go on to produce many films, some of them documenting Chicano activism.[17]

Each panelist shared the activities of their organization and their role as women within the Chicano movement. A young Chicana wrote that the panel reflected "that the older Chicanas are living liberation, while the younger ones are still planning their move toward it. Chicana liberation is on the way, and in order to prevent stagnation, the Chicana from the barrio, from the campus, from fifteen years old to fifty years old must direct it together."[18] The gathering at UCLA for the Corazón de Aztlán Symposium is significant because it demonstrated the vital role that Chicanas played as leaders in the Chicano movement and marked one of the earliest gatherings of Chicana leadership from across the southwest. This occasion provided them with the opportunity to learn about each other's activism and connect "older" Chicana leaders with a younger generation of Chicana student and community activists. Further, the event marked a shift within the Chicano movement in Los Angeles towards the development of Chicana feminism and the establishment of separate Chicana feminist organizations. Of those on the panel, Escalante was the only Chicana leader who had established her own organization and was directly engaging with the gendered issues of poor single mothers on welfare. As 1969 closed and 1970 began so too did a much more concerted effort to organize on behalf of specifically Chicana issues via Chicana organizations. This process was aided by the continuity of a rich Chicana print community that blossomed in the Chicano movement that would serve as a vital space in the forging of Chicana feminism locally and across regions.

Escalante was certainly influential to this shift as a recognized and respected Chicana grassroots leader. Gloria Arellanes, prime minister of finance and correspondence of the East Los Angeles Brown Berets, attended the symposium at UCLA along with other women Brown Berets. As a minister within the Brown Berets, Arellanes made important contacts

with other Chicano movement organizations especially those with women participants and leaders. Arellanes had established a close organizing relationship with Alicia Escalante and with her daughter Lorraine who was also active in the Brown Berets. Their ties were strengthened as participants of the Poor People's Campaign in spring of 1968 and local community organizing around issues of educational inequality, police brutality, and against the war in Vietnam. Theirs was a reciprocal relationship and Escalante would often contact Arellanes for support during organized pickets and demonstrations, especially at the district welfare offices in the City of Commerce.[19]

> The other Beret women and I would go and join whatever picket Alicia had organized on behalf of welfare Latina mothers. Any word Alicia gave, I would always honor. She did the same for me. She was amazing and a real major movement figure. She was a bit older than the rest of us, but that's also why she was respected and people looked up to her.[20]

Escalante provided an important source of encouragement and support beyond serving as a role model for Arellanes and many other women in the community. Later, she actively supported Arellanes and women in the Brown Berets in their decision to leave the organization and form their own collective called Las Adelitas de Aztlán. Prior to their exit from the Brown Berets, Arellanes and several of the women involved including Andrea and Esther Sanchez, Hilda and Grace Reyes, and Lorraine Escalante would have informal meetings where they shared their experiences of gender inequality within the organization. It was there where they decided collectively to leave.[21]

Las Adelitas de Aztlán resigned from their positions within the Brown Berets on February 25, 1970, and made their first appearance as a collective three days later at an anti-Vietnam war demonstration organized by the Chicano Moratorium Committee on February 28th.[22] The demonstration has been historicized as the March in the rain given the torrential

rain that poured throughout the march and rally. In a letter written to a member of a Brown Beret chapter in northern California regarding their decision, Arellanes, wrote, "[w]e have found that the Brown Beret men have oppressed us more than the pig system has, which in the eyes of revolutionaries is a serious charge. Therefore, we have agreed and found it necessary to resign and possibly do our own thing."[23] Las Adelitas participated in the demonstration wearing all black dresses, with rebozos, carrying white crosses bearing the names of the Chicano war dead and a massive banner with their namesake. Escalante also participated in the demonstration and was the only Chicana and woman to speak at the rally. Las Adelitas would serve as an important forum for Chicanas to discuss their gendered experiences in the movement that at times included exclusion, harassment, and toxic masculinity.

Instances of gendered tensions and acts of resistance by Chicanas within community organizations such as the Brown Berets would also occur within the Chicano student movement, leading to the formation of Chicana student organizations like Las Hijas De Cuauhtemóc, founded at California State University, Long Beach in 1970. Their newspaper, which went by the same name, served as a critical tool to organize Chicanas on campus, in the community, and regionally.[24] The formation of Las Adelitas and Las Hijas along with the founding of Chicana community organizations like the Comisión Femenil Mexicana Naciónal by long time Los Angeles activist Francisca Flores in 1970 were critical to the development of Chicana feminism in Los Angeles. These events paralleled the rise of the broader women's movement and the struggle for women's liberation, although many Chicana activists of the time did not identify as feminists due to its association with middle class white women. In retrospect, both Escalante and Arellanes believe that the dignity work they

engaged in as activists within the Chicano movement was indeed feminist.[25] Arellanes asserted that after forty years, "I see us [women Brown Berets] and Las Adelitas as a group that helped give birth to Chicana feminism."[26] These organizations, along with the Chicana feminist print communities that were forged by Chicanas in Los Angeles, were critical to creating a Chicana feminist identity and sensibility that would be influential across regions and key to building Chicana collaborations and solidarity in the fight against welfare reform.[27]

From Welfare to Workfare: The Battle Against the Shift in Federal Public Assistance Policy, 1967-1971

As Escalante would later realize, the restrictive 1967 welfare reform establishing WIN or the Work Incentive Program was partially the result of a politically conservative drive by Southern Democrats who ushered in a new age in the approach to public assistance, which would have a lasting impact on the welfare state in the United States. Other factors that contributed to this shift included demographic changes in recipient caseloads from white women to women of color, a national increase in out-of-wedlock births and divorce, the ballooning of AFDC budgets, and the resulting public outcry.[28] The introduction of the 1971 Talmadge Work Incentive amendments to the Social Security Act, or WIN II, further signaled the demise of the welfare state in favor of a workfare state. The passage of the WIN program in 1967 and WIN II in 1971 are significant in the history of public welfare as they signaled the first work requirements for public assistance. The 1967 WIN program was the first to require states to establish employment and training programs for welfare recipients. They were not, however, mandatory. The 1971 WIN II program championed by Georgia

Senator Herman Talmadge federally mandated participation in the program for recipients without "special responsibilities" in the home or no preschool aged children.[29]

WIN II was much more "tough" on AFDC recipients than under previous requirements as outlined in the Work Incentive Program of 1967. WIN II removed states' ability to use discretion in deciding who to enroll in these programs and required all recipients who were eligible for work to register for employment, including single welfare mothers. WIN II also had a harsher enforcement provision than the 1967 reform, which would make states subject to a loss of federal funds if they did not reach a set quota of enrolled recipients working in the labor force.[30] In essence WIN II prioritized quick job placement for recipients rather than training, which would provide opportunities for long-term and skilled employment and thus bring higher earning power. When the Talmadge Amendment (WIN II) was introduced in the summer of 1972 in Los Angeles County, Alicia Escalante and the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization, formerly the ELAWRO, were ready to organize to challenge its implementation.[31]

By the time of the implementation of the WIN II program in 1972, the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization had become deeply engaged in the national struggle for economic justice and human dignity. While they had joined forces with the NWRO in the late 1960s, a series of conflicts with that national organization had led the CWRO to give up their affiliation and claim autonomy. Nevertheless, they maintained their connections with the NWRO to continue organizing for welfare rights and economic justice in the Chicano and broader community. From the first appearance of WIN II, Escalante and the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization adamantly opposed it. As single welfare mothers this legislation directly affected their everyday lives, as it imposed new regulations and meant a new level of

bureaucracy that they had to deal with, in addition to caring for their children and maintaining their households. In a resolution issued in 1972, at a Third World Women's Group conference, the CWRO blasted the amendments for its impact on women, children, and families specifically and "human being[s]" generally:

> We as a Chicana Welfare Rights Organization believe that every woman has the right to make her own decisions affecting her and her family, therefore maintaining her dignity as an individual and knowing that the Talmadge Amendment would deny women this basic right that should be the right of every human being, we as a Chicana W.R.O. oppose the Talmadge Amendment for the following reasons: I. Work registration allows H.R.D. and other agencies to control people II. People will be working for no pay just their welfare check III. Slave labor jobs IV. Women should have the choice to stay home to care for children or work V. Devi[c]e to eliminate AFDC VI. Offers no meaningful training VII. [I]nadequate day care services…[sic][32]

The CWRO's resolution clearly identified the Talmadge Amendment as directly infringing on recipients' agency and on women's agency in particular. For these women, being able to make decisions for themselves and their families was understood as critical to the maintenance of their personal dignity, which the CWRO viewed as "a basic right that should be the right of every human being."[33] Escalante and the CWRO framed women's rights as a human rights issue, signifying the broader struggle they were dedicated to, the struggle for human agency and dignity. This desire obligated Escalante and the CWRO to cross social movement boundaries to work within and among the white feminist, Chicano, Chicana, and Welfare Rights movements to achieve their goals. They found the WIN II policy's intent to "control people" unjust, believing that women should have the right to choose whether they stayed home to raise their children or left the household to earn a wage. The CWRO was understandably critical of the "wages" recipients would be receiving under this program. It was understood that recipients would be locked into the low-wage labor sector, which generally provided a meager living. Plus, as they noted, the state had yet to provide adequate

day care services for recipients to complete their required training or job searches under the new legislation. As the CWRO understood it, neither the jobs nor the training were meant to lift the women out of poverty. To the CWRO, the Talmadge Amendment's intent to alter radically welfare legislation was a direct blow to the spirit of the welfare state and its obligation to the poor through the elimination of AFDC. As Historian Eva Bertram has emphasized, the conflicts over workfare were not just about low wages for single mothers but about questions surrounding what counts as work and whose work counts, under what terms must the work be done, and what role the government should play in the lives of one of its most vulnerable populations.[34]

With their opposition to the Talmadge Amendment and WIN II outlined clearly, the CWRO took on one of their biggest battles: to abolish or revise the Talmadge Amendment (WIN II). The fight would not be easy or quick. In East Los Angeles, Escalante and the CWRO faced a triple-pronged attack on their battle to shore up the welfare state. First, it came from President Richard Nixon and his national welfare reform proposal, the Family Assistance Plan; second, from the Southern Democrat controlled House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee, both of which were chaired by Southern Democrats and determined welfare policy; and, third, from California Governor Ronald Reagan who ran on a platform of welfare reform in his reelection campaign in 1970. Knowing the enormity of the struggle, the welfare activists took on the challenge strategically by building solidarity with disparate groups and forging a coalition. Using writing campaigns, which they often employed to seek change, they called on people of "all races and classes" to join the struggle:

> The Chicana WRO in East Los Angeles is organizing to abolish the Talmadge Amendment. It is their hope to arouse concern of all people of all races and

> classes to help fight for the abolishment of an amendment which does not provide meaningful employment or training for the poor. ELAWRO is holding welfare info classes. Join the fight against repressive legislation affecting the poor.[35]

The CWRO attempted not only to cast a broad net over who could and would join their fight against the Talmadge Amendment (WIN II) but also to educate people about the larger struggle. Their goal was to build bridges across difference and create awareness about welfare rights as an issue important to all people and social movement sectors.

Building Solidarity with Chicana feminists in Los Angeles

The CWRO's strategy to defeat the Talmadge Amendments necessitated the forging of Chicana feminist coalitions, which would serve as a major component to the mobilization. Locally, Escalante and the CWRO linked with the mobilized and visible Chicana activists involved with the Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional via the Chicana Service Action Center (CSAC), which was founded in East Los Angeles in 1972 as a project of the CFMN. The CFMN was founded two years earlier, in 1970, by a collective of women led by long-time Los Angeles activist, Francisca Flores. In addition to working with Chicana activists at CSAC, the CWRO joined forces with a diverse group of educated, activist, and professional Chicanas through the formation of the "Committee on Current and Proposed Welfare Legislation."[36] This committee included individuals such as Diane Holguin of CSAC, Carmelita Ramírez, the State Chairwoman of the Chicano Law Student Association, and Anna NietoGómez, an instructor at California State University, Northridge, and, arguably, a leader of Chicana feminism in Los Angeles.[37]

The CWRO sought to recruit the support of Chicanas and other women of color to their cause—a feminist cause—through the circulation of their activities in Chicana feminist

and Chicano movement publications. Although Escalante and the CWRO did not claim a Chicana feminist identity outright, their activism and advocacy for single mothers speak otherwise. I contend that Escalante and the CWRO represented one of the earliest Chicana feminist organizations in California and the nation. Feminist scholar Maylei Blackwell argues that Chicana print communities documented Chicana feminist mobilizations and forged new sites to build “Chicana political solidarity and participation.”[38] The formation of Chicana print communities were essential to the creation of critical links and conversations across regions, organizations, activist individuals, and significantly to the “Chicana feminist politics of knowledge production, debate, and distribution.”[39] Many Chicana activists, including Escalante contributed to the circulation of Chicana thought, analysis, and activism via the Chicano underground press in multiple Chicano movement publications including *La Raza*, *La Causa*, and *El Grito Del Norte*. Building on this dignity work of documenting Chicana perspectives and concerns, two significant Chicana feminist publications emerged in Los Angeles, *Regeneración* and *Encuentro Femenil*.

These Chicana feminist publications documented the exchanges and, sometimes, conflicting viewpoints, among activist individuals. One example of this is illustrated in a heated exchange between Escalante and Flores of Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional. This dialogue or, rather, public debate among Chicana activists about national policy impacting women on welfare, demonstrates the diversity of perspectives and approaches of Chicana feminists. It started in 1973, when Anna NietoGomez documented the activities of Escalante and the CWRO against the Talmadge Amendments in articles published in *Regeneración* and *Encuentro Femenil*. NietoGómez’s articles reflected her concern for the welfare rights struggle in East Los Angeles and, wrote them to raise awareness about the

Talmadge Amendment in support of the CWRO's effort to mobilize opposition. The first of NietoGómez's essays, published in *Regeneración*, "Chicana Welfare Rights Challenges Talmadge Amendment," was a brief statement that called for "the cooperation of every Welfare Rights Group, every Women's Group, every organization and every individual in helping us to revise or eliminate this law altogether." The resolution, which was passed by the Third World Women's Group conference, mentioned earlier, had been adopted by the CWRO a year earlier, in November of 1972,.. Alongside the resolution was a second article, "What is the Talmadge Amendment," which included a detailed discussion of the impact of the legislation on recipients and CWRO's fight against it. Francisca Flores was the lead editor of *Regeneración*, a seminal publication focused on Chicana and Mexican American women's issues, activism, and knowledge production.[40] A third article, published that same year in 1973 in the first issue of *Encuentro Femenil*, "Madres Por Justicia," was an adapted and expanded version of "What is the Talmadge Amendment."[41]

In response, Francisca Flores, a life-long Los Angeles activist who advocated for the leadership, political involvement, and economic independence of Mexican American women, Chicanas, and the Mexican American community in general, wrote a "reaction" piece on the organizing efforts of the CWRO against the Talmadge amendment.[42] Flores's article, which immediately follows NietoGomez's articles in *Encuentro Femenil*, identifies the Talmadge Amendment as being "apparently designed as one of the many efforts to get people off of welfare in order to appease the great number of people who labor or are middle class and who are tired of the rising cost of government."[43] Flores's article essentially chastised the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization for taking what she believed was a limited approach towards organizing against the Talmadge Amendment. Flores argued that the CWRO was

hindering its ability to garner support from a wider audience by limiting their advocacy "solely on the basis and interest of one group affected by it."[44] Flores posited that the CWRO "would receive greater support from the general public if they took up the cause of mothers who work or who are unemployed but not on welfare." She proposed that by doing this the CWRO could then have a campaign that advocated for "adequate child care," "adequate hourly minimum wages," and meaningful training "for people who want to work in para-professional occupations."[45] Knowingly or unknowingly, Flores's words reinforced the stigma surrounding mothers on welfare by suggesting their need to collaborate with women who "work" or who are unemployed but not on welfare. Flores, it appears, was unable to recognize how the CWRO had actively worked to demonstrate that workfare policy was a threat to all people and not just single mothers on welfare. As Escalante reminded her, it is the "[w]elfare mother and her family who has practically been 'singled out' by the system as a target for elimination from the welfare rolls."[46] In Escalante's view, Flores failed to draw a connection among welfare mothers, working mothers, and unemployed mothers, as mothers who "worked," regardless of whether they received numeration for their labor.

To Escalante, Flores's critiques were misguided. Escalante asserted that the CWRO "feels [that Flores's suggestions] are unjust and destructive to all the efforts we have put forth in opposing the Talmadge amendment."[47] Escalante's rebuttal to Flores's article was made public and published alongside Flores's original commentary in the second edition of *Encuentro Femenil* in early 1974, providing readers the opportunity to view the diverse perspectives of two very well respected Chicana feminist leaders in Los Angeles. Escalante's rebuttal was also published in *La Raza Magazine* in February 1974 in an effort to further circulate her position to a wider audience, as Flores had done by publishing her article in

Regeneración a few months prior in late 1973. In Escalante's piece, she proceeds to counter Flores's critiques regarding the organization's approach to challenging the legislation, declaring "the main issue here is obviously the right of those on government aid to be able to check and prohibit any encroachments the government might make, in exchange for the aid, on these individuals' civil liberties."[48] Escalante went further and argued that the Talmadge Amendment did not just impact welfare mothers but rather has direct implications for workers. She stated, "Forced labor is the means by which the welfare system helps to manipulate the labor market…It is to the clear disadvantage of all workers, not just for those out of work, on relief, the un-unionized, but also for those who are employed and organized."[49] Escalante argued that their battle was not only for poor single mothers but also for all workers who deserve a decent, livable wage. Escalante followed her piece with a list of supporters to their cause and echoes Flores's recommendations about campaign demands and details several more focused on "meaningful training," more flexible civil service requirements, "transportation and child care," a "community children's center," and "advisory board participation."[50] Escalante then closed her article by schooling Flores on the issues: Escalante wrote, "first," Flores should "get herself informed about what the East Los Angeles Chicano Welfare Rights is all about and what it is really doing before she starts forming or giving her opinions." In a final admonishment, supported by her signees, Escalante reminder her that they "are not playing politics with each other. We are not competing. We don't need to. *Sin Mas* [without more], Sra. Alicia Escalante, Board Members, Advisory Committee."[51]

The civil exchange, though heated, signifies a collective and critical conversation between two Chicana feminist leaders in Los Angeles, Alicia Escalante and Francisca Flores,

about economic justice and women's rights.[52] Although Escalante and Flores may have not seen eye to eye about how to approach the Talmadge Amendment, what is clear is that they were both committed to advancing the economic status of Chicanas and Mexican American women in Los Angeles and beyond, albeit from different perspectives. Escalante was a grassroots, barrio activist who was ardently against accepting any funds from government institutions or anti-poverty sources. This was because she believed that once funds were accepted from these sources that the direction of the organization would ultimately be co-opted by those outside of the barrio and the experience of those on welfare. Escalante was also much more militant than Flores and willing to use direct action, especially when it came to the practice of her militant dignity politics and advocacy for single mothers on welfare. Flores, who was also a grassroots activist in Los Angeles, came from an earlier generation of Mexican American women who believed in fighting within the social structure for change. Flores, and the organizations she co-founded, CFMN and CSAC, both received funds from the federal government and seemed content with working on a reformist agenda from within the existing power structure. While both these prominent Chicana activists from Los Angeles were focused on achieving economic justice for Chicanas and Mexican American women nationally, they also practiced a different set of activist politics and served different sectors of the Chicana population.

As Flores's and Escalante's exchange illustrates, economic justice was a central issue to the organizing efforts of Chicana feminists in Los Angeles. The Talmadge Amendment, the greater national push for welfare reform under the Nixon administration, and Chicanas' historic lack of social and economic opportunity provided a rich ground on which to launch a battle for economic justice. Delving further into Chicana feminist publications such as

Encuentro Femenil, *Regeneración*, and Chicano movement publications such as *La Raza,* we can discern that there was an ample amount of activity around economic justice and welfare rights. For example, in the *Regeneración* 1973 special issue on Chicanas there are several other instances where the mobilizations of Chicanas for economic justice are documented. An excellent illustration is the essay, "Chicana Service Action Center: Proyecto de La Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional Inc." This article proclaimed that "the purpose of the Chicana Service Action Center is to provide meaningful employment and/or job training in order to promote women's social and economic well being."[53] Yolanda Nava's testimony before the California Commission on the Status of Women, provided on behalf of the CFMN in Los Angeles on February 10, 1973, demonstrated, as well, their interests in economics and politics. Nava's transcript was published as, "The Chicana and Employment: Needs Analysis and Recommendations for Legislation." An excerpt read: "So when we talk about employment as the solution to the economic situation of the Chicana, the issue is not a job at $1.65 an hour, but a job which provides an adequate income which will raise the Chicana and her family well above the poverty level."[54] Chicana engagement with issues of economic justice demonstrates their understanding of the centrality of fighting for class struggles in conjunction with race and gender.

Indeed, as *Encuentro Femenil* documents, Chicana struggles with the welfare system and education were paramount to its readership. "Canto de Alicia," a semi-autobiographical essay written by Alicia Escalante in collaboration with Anna NietoGomez, traces her development into a welfare rights activist by detailing the dehumanizing circumstances that she and her mother had experienced as single mothers on public assistance. Escalante also detailed the struggles against the myth of the welfare recipient, which situated women on

government support as shiftless, lazy, and unwilling to work, and made a call for solidarity among all women "from the law student to the college student, to the middle class Chicana [and] [f]rom the *pinta* (imprisoned Chicana) to the *abuela* (grandmother) that is receiving old age social security."[55] The first issue also included an article by Nava, mentioned earlier, regarding the employment counseling of Chicanas and the importance of employment counselors' awareness of poor Chicanas' barriers to full employment, including transitional support, birth control, and social pressures. Other issues *Encuentro Femenil* included focused on Chicanas in the labor sector more broadly. Finally, a well-known piece by NietoGomez, "Chicanas in the Labor Force," provided an important overview of the status of Chicanas and employment, enabling readers to understand where they fit in the broader context of the U.S. labor force.

Chicana engagement with issues of economic justice and welfare rights organizing were not only documented in Chicana feminist publications but also in the Chicano movement's underground press, specifically in *La Raza*. *La Raza* was significant because it was in production from 1967 through 1977 and was a great source of information for happenings in Los Angeles. It was also a member of the Chicano Press Association, which was a Chicano underground press collective that reprinted articles across Aztlán (the southwest) to disseminate activities of the movimiento. Although focused on a range of issues, economic justice was a common theme appearing in the paper. For instance, between 1971 and 1974, several articles about the Talmadge Amendment and further proposed welfare reform legislation under the Nixon administration were published. Clemencia Martínez, a writer for the paper, first authored such a piece, "Welfare Families Face Forced Labor." In it, she exclaimed: "Wake up, people on Welfare! You are about to be worse off

than ever, and it's time to fight back!"[56] The article challenged the Nixon-Mills Welfare Reform Bill or H.R. 1, which passed the House of Representatives in 1971 and was pending passage in the Senate. H.R. 1 was a repackaged form of legislation of Nixon's proposed Family Assistance Plan pushed by Democratic Senator Wilbur Mills from Arkansas. Martínez argued that this "bill is a big step backward. It is repressive, it throws people on welfare out in the cold, by saying that they must work when there are no jobs—and that they must work for almost slave wages." In "WELFARE," published in the subsequent issue of *La Raza*, author Sandra Ugarte, another staff writer, argued against H.R.1 for slightly different reasons. Paying attention to the impact of H.R. 1 on labor union efforts, Ugarte wrote: it "will force a cheap source of labor onto the labor market at a time when job competition is already at a critical level.[57] Citing a Department of Education, Health, and Welfare publication, "Welfare Myths vs. Facts," Ugarte used government statistics to debunk the myths associated with welfare recipients. These myths included the idea that the children of welfare recipients were illegitimate, or born out of wedlock, that once a family is one welfare, they stay on welfare, and that people on welfare have no morals and are cheats. Ugarte ended her call by stressing the hypocrisy of a government that is constantly calling on the poor to carry an overburden load, while also paying taxes, when that same government doles out subsidies and grants to corporations that pay little to no taxes. The consistent appearance of welfare issues and discussion of Escalante and the ELAWRO's effort in *La Raza Newspaper*–they appear a total of eighteen times in the first two years of the paper's publication – demonstrates the significance of issues impacting single mothers on welfare in the larger community.[58]

Collectively these articles and many others reflect a shared consciousness and struggle against the oppressive conditions under which many Chicanas found themselves or could potentially find themselves as those relegated to the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. Alicia Escalante and the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization effectively utilized print communities to educate people about the plight of poor women, to organize opposition to the Talmadge Amendment, and to build bridges across difference and forge a necessary coalition to battle the severe economic inequality taking place across the United States. Gaining publicity regarding their plight was yet another strategy Escalante and the organization employed to create awareness, garner support for their cause, and further their feminist connections.

Another critical way in which Escalante and the CWRO built and mobilized support, especially among feminists, was by attending and networking at Chicana and women of color conferences. Indeed, in November 1972, the CWRO gained the support of women attending a Chicana conference held in Southern California at Whittier College and a Third World Women's Group Conference held in Northern California in San Anselmo. Though the details of these two events remain unclear, the CWRO's efforts to build coalitions proved effective. Both conferences passed resolutions in support of the CWRO and the fight against the Talmadge amendments.[59] As these outcomes indicate, garnering the support of feminist organizations was yet another vital step in building a coalition against repressive legislation that directly impacted women.

Tapping National Feminist Networks: The National Women's Political Caucus and the Chicana Caucus

Nationally, Escalante and the CWRO took the battle against the Talmadge Amendments to the first convention of the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) in Houston, Texas, in February 1973, knowing it was a critical space to gain support for the coalition against the dismantling of welfare reform. Escalante had been invited personally by the conference committee as she had already received notoriety as a national welfare rights leader for her participation in the National Welfare Rights Organization and founding a local WRO in East Los Angeles. Founded in 1971, the NWPC was "dedicated exclusively to increasing women's participation in all areas of political and public life."[60] It was also a multi-partisan, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic national women's organization. The Chicana Caucus was first formed at the state level within the Texas Women's Political Caucus in 1972 in response to a lack of inclusion of Chicanas in the NWPC leadership and in an effort to represent Chicana concerns and perspectives, which had yet to be addressed in any way. Several Chicanas also played an important role in the founding of the NWPC, including, Martha Cotera, Ruth "Rhea" Mojica Hammer, Lupe Anguiano, and Gracia Molina de Pick. Chicanas within the NWPC sought to create independent women of color caucuses within the NWPC structure similar to the democratic and republican women's caucuses in order to have the political power to shape the wider agenda of the NWPC.[61] In a report written by Chicana activist Evey Chapa, following the Houston conference, she explained that "[t]he goals of the mujeres of the Chicana Caucus were aimed towards including the needs of the mujeres of La Raza in any political action the National Women's Political Caucus might undertake." The Chicana caucus consisted of "sixty mujeres from, seven states—California, Texas, New Mexico, Illinois, Washington D.C., and one other state."[62]

Escalante was well recognized and acknowledged by the leadership of the NWPC as a key Chicana leader with an established organization and network. Reflecting on her experience at the 1973 NWPC conference and her interactions with Escalante, Martha P. Cotera of Mujeres Por La Raza Unida and the TWPC recalled, "she was definitely a star, one of our really strong forces." Cotera had become familiar with Escalante and her activities via the Chicano underground press and later from Chicana feminist publications *Regeneración* and *Encuentro Femenil*. Though Cotera and Escalante had met previously in 1971 in Denver Colorado, at the Crusade for Justice's Escuela Tlatelolco, it was at the 1973 NWPC conference in Houston where they built a stronger connection. Cotera explained that she admired Escalante for her ability to build coalition with Black women around the issue of welfare rights. Years later, she explained: "Having Alicia as a coalition builder with other minority women on issues was very important…she was helping us coalesce politically very successfully with other minority women, particularly African American women."[63] The NWPC conference in 1973 was yet another site where Escalante was attempting to forge coalitions, this time within the women's movement. The Chicana caucus met several times at the 1973 convention and collectively formulated resolutions that would be presented and voted on the convention floor by the entire NWPC. In all, they produced seven resolutions, one of which focused on welfare and the Talmadge Amendments. The resolution declared its support for Alicia Escalante and the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization's opposition to the legislation and argued that the Talmadge Amendment was responsible for the breakup of the *familia* and did not provide the means to earn a meaningful wage.

Escalante helped develop a second resolution at a welfare rights workshop, which she co-facilitated along with civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer. That workshop, "Welfare is

a Woman's Issue," charged that the Talmadge Amendments perpetuated "discrimination against black, brown, and native Americans because it is sexist and discriminatory against women who are the sole support for their families." "[T]he amendment," the statement continued, "should provide adequate day care facilities and does not….it perpetuates the underemployment of women." For these reasons and more the "National Women's Political Caucus expresses its opposition to this amendment which created so much havoc in the lives of women."[64] Although both resolutions adamantly opposed the Talmadge Amendment, the NWPC membership failed to adopt them, for reasons that remain unclear. Nevertheless, the failure to adopt the resolutions demonstrates that the NWPC's lack of support for the resolutions mirrors the deep divisions about welfare occurring nationally during the 1960s and 1970s and welfare reform even amongst feminists.

Even though the NWPC failed to pass the resolutions, the conference space was an important meeting point for prominent Chicana activists and feminists including Martha P. Cotera, Evey Chapa, María Jimenez, Anna NietoGómez, Gracia Molina De Pick, and Lupe Anguiano.[65] Moreover, Escalante was voted in as an at-large representative to the NWPC steering committee, and as a member of the legislation committee along with Martha Cotera and Cecilia P. Burciaga, forging a reciprocal link between the CWRO and NWPC.[66] What is perhaps most significant about the first convention of the NWPC is that it became a site of a national gathering of Chicana activist and feminist leaders from across the country and a space in which they created networks, fostered empowerment, and forged solidarity for themselves and other women of color around welfare reform.

Building Coalition with Others Against Welfare Reform

Prior to WIN II, the CWRO had built a solid relationship with SEIU Local 535 of the social worker union in an effort to better the conditions for Spanish-speaking recipients living in the Eastside of Los Angeles, and they called on them in this effort. These supportive relationships had been built in the late 1960s with social workers that serviced East Los Angeles and the surrounding areas. Social Action Latino Unity Development (SALUD), which was a Chicano/Latino social worker organization in Los Angeles county, too, supported their efforts. Both of these connections would be important in the battle against the Talmadge Amendment as they created a direct link with organized labor. "Workers and Welfare Recipients Unite Against Forced Work Programs" was the title of a flyer announcing a collaborative meeting among the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization, the Metro-North Welfare Union, Social Services Union no. 535, the Coalition for Economic Survival, and United Defense Against Repression. Though it remains unclear who organized the meeting, at this informational gathering, which included a film screening held at an International Longshoreman Workers Union hall, these groups forged a collective response to "Nixon's and Reagan's so called 'welfare reforms,'" which, they argued "attack[s] both workers and welfare recipients fundamental rights." The flyer articulated precisely what they meant by these "fundamental rights." They included a "decent standard of living, the right to organize, a legal minimum wage," and the right to "raise their children as they see fit."[67] The solidarity shown by these groups was based on a recognition that the Talmadge Amendment amounted to the creation of a forced work program that threatened the precarious labor market by potentially flooding it with low-wage labor in Los Angeles and across the country in this period in the 1970s, which was undergoing massive economic restructuring with the

expansion of the technology sector, off-shore Asian markets, and the service industry, and the decline of manufacturing, leaving many, especially blue collar workers, without opportunities for social mobility. It signaled, as well, the potential for working class collaboration across ethnic and racial lines.

In other efforts to build coalition against welfare reform Escalante and the CWRO also tapped local city, county, and state officials. Letter writing campaigns proved particularly effective in the CWRO's effort to bring awareness to the struggle of single welfare mothers and the emergent punitive legislation that affected their everyday lives. Indeed, in an effort to bring the concerns of the Spanish-speaking community to their attention and to gain momentum in the organization's mobilization to amend or abolish the Talmadge amendments, Alicia Escalante wrote several tersely worded letters to elected officials. Among those she wrote to included Edward R. Roybal, a Los Angeles City Council member elected in 1949 and the first Mexican American to serve since 1881. In response to her correspondence, Roybal, who was also an important ally in advocating for the Spanish-speaking community (he would go on to be elected to the U.S. Congress in 1962), wrote about "the problems that the Spanish speaking have had with welfare and social security forms written in English." Upon carrying out research, Roybal asserted that it was clear "that many Spanish speaking [members of the community] are unable to comprehend Social Security and Welfare forms that may affect their lives." As a result of these findings, Congressman Roybal proposed legislation in the U.S. Congress in 1973 "mandat[ing] that notices to recipients of the termination of their eligibility…must be printed in languages other than English when there is a substantial number of recipients of aid who are not fluent with English in a given community."[68] Although it remains unclear why the legislation did

not garner enough votes to pass in the U.S. Congress, Roybal was nevertheless influential and brought the concerns of the Spanish-speaking community of Los Angeles to the national arena in Washington, D.C., and was supportive of Escalante's and the CWRO's efforts.

Through Escalante's and the CWRO's advocacy, Congressman Roybal became very familiar with the crisis his constituents had experienced as a result of the implementation of the Talmadge amendments in Los Angeles County. Escalante shared her concerns both in writing and in person and did so at a meeting regarding the operation of the "Talmadge-WIN program" in Los Angeles. Following this meeting, Roybal told her he was "seriously concerned that these officials will continue to take a rigid and repressive approach and place unreasonable conditions on the participants." Further, he believed that since it was unlikely that Congress would act to repeal the Talmadge amendment, "our best approach," he said, "is to discuss our grievances and recommendations with those administrators who are responsible for operating the WIN program for the Los Angeles County." He closed by notifying Escalante that he had tentatively scheduled meetings with the regional administrators of Los Angeles County in addition to the county director of the Department of Public Social Services and would be in contact with her.[69] The support of public officials against or in favor of amending the Talmadge amendment was critical to the CWRO's mobilization against repressive legislation.

Indeed, through Alicia Escalante's effort as the Chairwoman of the National Chicana Welfare Rights Organization and her and the CRWO's letter writing campaign, support came from multiple elected officials. In response to Escalante's request for support to dismantle the Talmadge amendment, California Congressman George E. Danielson asserted, "we must pursue the question of welfare reform." "I do not feel the piecemeal effort to patch the

present system late in 1972 is adequate," he argued.[70] California Senator Mervyn M. Dymally also replied to Escalante's concerns, saying "I agree with you that strict enforcement of such stringent rules and regulations would infringe on the self determination guaranteed to all citizens in the constitution."[71] California Assemblyman Bob Moretti went further stating that the obvious impact of the Talmadge amendment to the Social Security Act "would be to restrict many of the basic freedoms every woman has the right to make regarding her life and her family. I am opposed to any public law which denies these basic rights to women or any human being." Moretti supported the CWRO's position on the amendment and was willing to provide "any assistance" that he could and wanted Escalante to continue corresponding with him on matters of importance to her. While Escalante and the organization did receive some support from elected officials, many did not offer any assistance, including California State Senator Clark L. Bradley. Bradley declared in his correspondence to Escalante that "I would be in support of the Talmadge Amendment if it would, in fact, deny women the listed points contained in your letter." Further he exclaimed, "I believe that women now have full and adequate legal rights and more are not necessary."[72] In his view, women already had enough rights, and he directly associated Escalante's struggle with the wider movement for women's rights and liberation.

Conclusion

By 1974, Alicia Escalante and the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization had gained local and national momentum in building a coalition against the Talmadge Amendments (WIN II). To do so, they had forged critical connections with local grassroots community organizations as well as labor unions who advocated on behalf of the working poor. They

built strong feminist links with women of color, Chicanas, and white women both locally and nationally through their efforts with the Chicana Service Action Center and the Chicana Caucus of the National Women's Political Caucus. This is what Alicia Escalante's and the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization's feminism looked like, it was grassroots, broadly-based, inclusive, and intersectional. I argue that Escalante practiced a militant form of dignity politics. At the center of this dignity politics was the demand for an unequivocal recognition of the human dignity of poor people in general and of single Chicana welfare mothers in particular. Advocating for poor people's dignity, and the recognition of their humanity was a Chicana feminist issue in the eyes of Escalante and the CWRO. Escalante militantly advocated for the recognition of the human dignity of welfare mother's and framed their struggle as one that required the collective force of many to expose the reality of the welfare system. In the second issue of *Encuentro Femenil* Escalante proclaimed that "the real welfare picture will eventually come out if we as mujeres, madres, Chicanas, get together and communicate and help each other. The road of the welfare mother is a lonely one. And our hermanas, no matter what walk of life they come from, will have to join us."[73]

Join them they did, as evidenced by the collective efforts of Chicanas and several other organizations and politicians who supported the CWRO in their battle against the Talmadge Amendment. Those organizations and individuals included: The National Welfare Rights Organization; the National Council of Churches, La Raza Churchmen; Third World Women's Group; Congressman Edward R. Roybal; California State Assemblymen Willie J. Brown Jr., John Vasconcellos, and Bob Moretti; and California State Senators Alfred H. Song and Mervyn M. Dymally.[74] Not listed here are the important organizations and activists that were also a part of the coalition to abolish the Talmadge amendment, members of social

worker union SEIU Local 535, SALUD, Anna NietoGomez and the *Encuentro Femenil* staff, Francisca Flores and the CFMN, the CSAC, and the Chicana Caucus of the NWPC.

Yet, despite the collective efforts of Escalante, the CWRO, and the broad-based, multiracial and multiethnic coalition, they were unable to upend the Talmadge Amendments (WIN II). Notwithstanding the defeat, the collective movement the coalition built worked to preserve the dignity of poor people in the face of dire circumstances, including racial, ethnic, gender, and class oppression. Led by Escalante and the CWRO, they centered organizing efforts on building bridges across difference and bringing together a diverse group of people, both women and men from multiple social locations and movements. Ultimately, Escalante, the CWRO, and the coalition were successful in creating awareness about their interconnected nature as human beings and the oppressive policies being doled out by the government in the name of cutting costs and getting people to "work."

Conclusion

In early 1974 after eight years of service, Alicia Escalante made the difficult decision to formally resign from the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization (CWRO) or its newly adopted name La Causa de los Pobres. Escalante's battles for the human dignity of poor single welfare mothers, as well as her own personal struggles had left her beleaguered, physically and emotionally leading her to resign as chairwoman and director of the CWRO. On March 29, 1974 Escalante provided her formal resignation at a La Causa de los Pobres Chicana W.R.O. meeting held at her home and opted to serve primarily as a consultant and in an advisory role. She explained, "I don't think I need to elaborate on how much thought I've given this. The organization is a part of me. It has caused me jail, political repercussions, many, many pains, that are difficult for me to explain." She continued, "I also feel its time it [the organization] developed on its own with other leadership. I am emotionally being shattered by taking care of the directing, the writing, and the consulting."[1] Escalante's statements reflect the impact the multiple roles that she served in the organization had on her personally. Further, they testify to the many "pains" that she endured as a result of her leadership and commitment to organizing at the nexus of the multiple social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In her statement she also illuminated the "personal tragedies" that she had also endured during her leadership that included the deaths of two of her nephews, the sons of her sister Irene Villalobos.

After the long battle against the Talmadge amendment proved unsuccessful, Escalante, refused to abide by this restrictive legislation and decided that she would rather be deemed ineligible for welfare benefits than to comply. The legislative struggle had certainly left Escalante battle fatigued but it alone did not contribute to her decision to resign. State

sponsored law enforcement surveillance and harassment of her and her eldest children who were members of the Brown Berets –a common experience among civil rights leaders and organizations at the time, also played a role. A short jail stint of a few months in 1972 at the Sybil Brand Institution for Women, for which she was sentenced unjustly in connection to the Católicos por la Raza Christmas Eve demonstration that turned violent, further contributed to her decision.[2] These experiences, in addition to many others, led her to reflect in her resignation statement that, "all in all, the movement is not what I thought it was. I won't let it kill me spiritually, my work will continue but in an entirely different way."[3] Further, her decision was also a very practical one, ultimately she felt that there were sufficient women leaders in the organization that would be able to continue efforts in the community. More importantly, she explains, "I was too controversial in L.A. and my kids were still young and so I needed to work."[4] In the end the need to provide a more stable household for her children led her in search of other avenues to social justice.

By May 1974, Escalante and her family left Los Angeles for the Sacramento area where she would find employment first as a translator for the children of migrants at a local school in Woodland, and then with the National Migrant Referral Project (NMRP).[5] The NMRP was "established to effect continuity of quality health care for migrant farmworkers and their dependents by facilitating the exchange of information within the network of migrant health providers."[6] After a short while with the NMRP Escalante decided to apply for a position with the State of California Department of Social Services in Sacramento. She applied, passed all required exams and secured a position as a staff systems analyst. She first began working as a systems analyst with the farmworker population given her experience and then with the Indian Health Services program, and lastly with the civil rights division.

While working in these different programs Escalante climbed the ladder within the Department of Social Services and in total Escalante served the state of California and its people for twenty-three years.[7]

Though Escalante and her family had moved away in the spring of 1974, Escalante was still involved and for at least a few months traveled back and forth to continue serving as a consultant to the organization. She would continue to serve on advisory committees with the department of public social services and attend meetings. Escalante would also continue to write on behalf of the organization. A little over a month following her resignation other women in the organization had indeed stepped up with Socorro Soto serving as chairwoman and Molly De Leon as vice chairwoman although their involvement would eventually wane.[8] Though the organization would never function at the same capacity as it did under Escalante's leadership the CWRO had come a very long way and had made several accomplishments in the struggle for human dignity for single welfare mothers and beyond.

These accomplishments, however, came at a price, one that Escalante and her family paid for several times over and contributed to her decision to resign. Escalante's dignity work and practice of a militant dignity politics led her to travel extensively and she would often have to leave her family in the care of her comadres or of her eldest children. Escalante was also subject to intense police surveillance, violence, and harassment. This was also the case for her teenage children active in the Brown Berets who were also subject to police violence. The Catolicos Por La Raza (CPLR) Christmas Eve demonstration at St. Basil's is an example of the violence experienced at the hands of law enforcement. That night Escalante's son Raul would be the subject of a police beating when coming to the aid of *La Raza Newspaper* staff member Joe Razo during the melee. Escalante also believed that she had been targeted by the

police for apprehension even though she was not a member of CPLR. Escalante explained in a letter written to the community just prior to serving her sentence in May 1972, "[t]he truth of the matter was that the police department had been instructed to apprehend the so-called leaders. I was marked because of my involvement in the welfare rights movement."[9] Prior to St. Basil's, Lorraine Escalante also experienced the sting of being the daughter of a movement leader and of being an activist herself. Lorraine was a student at Lincoln High School and was being considered for a college scholarship. When she revealed to her teachers that she would be attending the Poor People's Campaign with her mother she received criticism from teachers and was no longer being considered for the college scholarship.[10] She would also be subject to police harassment as a member of the Brown Berets.[11] These were just some of the costs of Escalante's commitment to social, economic, racial, and gendered justice.

Through a political biography of gender and leadership and social history of Escalante and her organization, the ELAWRO I have been able to document the many victories and accomplishments of Escalante and the organization. Foremost is that she empowered her community and provided them with a sense of hope for an alternative future. The successful yet difficult process of forging bridges across race, class, gender, and ability in the "Save Medi-Cal Campaign," which proved effective was another. This bridge building continued and led to the fostering of a multiracial and multiethnic coalition for the human dignity of welfare recipients that cut across activist constituencies and social movements. The coalition of welfare rights, and disability rights organizations, unionized activist social workers of SEIU local 535 and SALUD, and Chicano movement activists led to critical changes in the Los Angeles County welfare administration. These included the adherence to

policies that had yet to be put in place including a community advisory board for families and children, the establishment of a Chicano Community Relations section with the DPSS, the translation of welfare forms into Spanish, client involvement in the hiring and training of social workers and administrative staff, and bringing attention to the need for welfare offices in East Los Angeles, and hiring culturally diverse and culturally sensitivity social workers. This coalition building continued into the 1970s with the passage of a heinous piece of legislation known as the Talmadge amendment to the Social Security Act in December of 1971, which federally mandated workfare over welfare. Joining the coalition that Escalante and the ELAWRO had already constituted were Chicana feminists in Los Angeles and across the southwest via organizations such as Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional, the Chicana Service Action Center, and the Chicana Caucus of the National Women's Political Caucus as well as many local politicians. Though the coalition was unable to defeat the Talmadge amendment, the collective movement the coalition built worked to preserve the dignity of poor people in the face of dire circumstances, including racial, ethnic, gender, and class oppression.

Escalante's gains and losses in the struggle for economic justice and human dignity articulated an activism and feminism rooted in the lived experience of poor women of color across, among, and within multiple constituencies and social movements. As my dissertation has demonstrated, by tracing the evolution of Escalante's political consciousness and development of an intersectional sensibility and activism, the potential for a forward thinking, broad based leadership emerges in the current moment with roots in the past. Escalante serves as a forerunner of a leadership that has not been attended to in a sustained way, a leadership that rests on the will and support of the collective, and those marginalized

by other social movements. Today, we see this type of leadership within the Black Lives Matter movement and by those waging the multiple struggles for the recognition of the human dignity of Black people, women, immigrants, and our youth. This style of leadership, dignity politics, and coalition building did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, it has a genealogy, a long and deeply rooted history that is critical to map in order to understand and connect the contemporary with the historical struggles for human dignity.

Black Lives Matter and the Current Struggle for Human Dignity

The hashtag #blacklivesmatter, written by Patrisse Khan-Cullors, first appeared on Facebook in August of 2013, in a response to a post by a friend and fellow activist Alicia Garza following the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin. Soon after Garza, along with Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi would transform the hashtag into an organization and movement.[12] According to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor #blacklivesmatter, "was a response to the oppression, inequality, and discrimination that devalue Black life every day."[13] BLM is one among many organizations that sprang from the blatant expression of racism and accepted state sanctioned violence represented by the acquittal of Zimmerman and the many deaths of Black and Brown bodies at the hands of the police that would continue. Alicia Garza explains that, "Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention…It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression...We've created the space for the celebration and humanization of Black lives."[14] The Black Lives Matter movement is a contemporary human dignity struggle that is directly connected to the human dignity struggles waged in the past by leaders such as Alicia Escalante, Catherine Jermany, Molly

Piontkowski and the many others that I have documented. Garza, Tometi, and Khan-Cullors are faced with the continuity of a struggle that has only been exacerbated and accelerated into the twenty-first century with the increasing brutality of state sanctioned violence at the hands of law enforcement and systems of control such as mass incarceration that has rendered poor Black and Brown life unworthy of recognition and ultimately disposable.

BLM would not have to wait long for another example of state sanctioned violence to take the life of another Black body to rally around. In the summer of 2014 members of BLM would join the ranks of the local community and activists that had converged on Ferguson, Missouri following the slaying of eighteen-year-old Michael Brown. That summer of 2014 was marred by police killings of Black bodies and Ferguson became the representation of the anger brewing in Black communities. The brutality of Brown's murder and that of many others that both proceeded and followed created a fervor among members of the local community and others across the nation who felt compelled to come to Ferguson. The people on the ground were participating in daily demonstrations and protests where activists had stand offs with the local police. These stand offs were like battles in a war, Taylor explains,

> The police response to the uprising was intended to repress and punish the population, who had dared to defy their authority. It is difficult to interpret in any other way their injudicious use of tear gas, rubber bullets, and persistent threats of violence against an unarmed, civilian population. The Ferguson police, a 95 percent white and male force, obscured their badges to hide their identities, wore wristbands proclaiming "I Am Darren Wilson," and pointed live weapons at unarmed civilians engaged in legal demonstrations.[15]

Indeed, the Black community was at war with the local police as is evidenced by the fact that in Ferguson the second leading source of revenue came from court fines, fees, citations, tickets, and arrests. In December of 2014, the Ferguson police department had 16,000 outstanding arrest warrants.[16]

I believe the words of historian Robin D.G. Kelley offer an incisive analysis of the issue of state sanctioned violence against Black people and "why we won't wait," in an article he published following the announcement of the Wilson verdict:

> You see, we've been waiting for dozens, hundreds, thousands of indictments and convictions. Every death hurts. Every exonerated cop, security guard, or vigilante enrages. The grand jury's decision doesn't surprise most Black people because we are not waiting for an *indictment*. We are waiting for justice—or more precisely, struggling for justice. We all know the names and how they died. Eric Garner, Kajieme Powell, Vonderitt D. Meyers, Jr., John Crawford III, Cary Ball Jr., Mike Brown, ad infinitum. They were unarmed and shot down by police under circumstances for which lethal force was unnecessary…. Mike Brown's murder brought people out to the streets, where they were met with tear gas and rubber bullets. State violence is always rendered invisible in a world where cops and soldiers are heroes, and what they do is always framed as "security," protection, and self-defense. Police occupy the streets to protect and serve the citizenry from (Black) criminals out of control. This is why, in every instance, there is an effort to *depict the victim as assailant* – Trayvon Martin used the sidewalk as a weapon, Mike Brown used his big body. A lunge or a glare from a Black person can constitute an imminent threat. When the suburb of Ferguson blew up following Mike Brown's killing on August 9, the media and mainstream leadership were more concerned with looting and keeping the "peace" than the fact that Darren Wilson was free on paid leave. Or that leaving Brown's bullet-riddled, lifeless body, on the street for four and a half hours, bleeding, cold, stiff from rigor mortis, constituted a war crime in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It was, after all, an act of collective punishment – the public display of the tortured corpse was intended to terrorize the entire community, to punish everyone into submission, to remind others of their fate if they step out of line. We used to call this "lynching."[17]

Kelley's statements reflect the continuity of the use of "collective punishment" on Black people in order to terrorize them into submission. Kelley's description of the four hours that it took to remove Brown's body from the sweltering pavement is reminiscent of the type of violence inflicted on Black people during the era of the redemption through the 1960s. The actions taken by Ferguson police that day parallel acts of lynching and mutilating Black bodies and leaving them hanging, on display for days for everyone to see.

The Black Lives Matter movement has spread across the United States like wildfire following the acquittal of the men who murdered Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown. “Their deaths, and the killings of so many others like them, prove that sometimes simply being Black can make you a suspect—or get you killed.” The movement that has coalesced around these killings reflect “exhaustion among African Americans who have grown weary of the endless eulogizing of Black people—young and old, men and women, transgender, queer, straight—killed by the police.”[18] Although the killings of Martin, Brown, Garner, Gray, and too many names to mention here are the names of Black men, the BLM movement is being led by women, queer, trans gender, and gender nonconforming people. These leaders of BLM remind us that Black women have always been susceptible to violence by the police and the criminal justice system.

> The police also kill Black women. The names of Reika Boyd, Shelly Frey, Miriam Carey, and Alberta Spruill are less familiar than those of Mike Brown and Eric Garner, but their killings were motivated by the same dehumanizing factors. Police also view Black women’s lives with suspicion and ultimately as less valuable, making their death and brutalization more likely, not less. It is hardly ever newsworthy when Black women, including Black transwomen, are killed or violated by law enforcement—because they are generally seen as less feminine or vulnerable.[19]

This reality of Black women being killed and bearing the brunt of police killings and violence still does not capture the invisible aspects of this violence that women contend. The literal disappearance of Black and Brown men by the system of mass incarceration has deep implications for women who are left to raise families alone, to care for elderly, and who also still provide care for the men who are incarcerated. I can speak from personal experience that when men are incarcerated, women often have to take up the additional physical and emotional labor of sending care packages, bearing the costs of exorbitant communication services and visiting, and many serve as the only link to the outside world for those on the

inside. Black and Brown women also contend with the threat of the murder of their children at the hands of law enforcement, the fear of losing your child when they leave home for school, these realities are reproductive justice issues.

Further, and critically important is the fact that women are the fastest increasing population to be incarcerated. Many of these women are mothers and care providers whose absence send crippling ripples through their families and communities. The devastation that their incarceration creates includes increased poverty, and a brutal cycle of criminalization and mass incarceration that has historical roots in systems of social control such as welfare. Black women are twice as likely as white women to be incarcerated. Poverty has a direct implication to the skyrocketing rates of women and mothers who are being incarcerated. 60% of women in local jails haven't even had a trial or been convicted. Countless mothers are detained because they are unable to afford the bail bond amount and are left to wither away within inhumane conditions in detention.[20] Despite this, or actually because of this, Black women have continued to step into much needed leadership positions in the continuing struggle for Black liberation and the recognition of Black human dignity.

Learning the Lessons of the Past and Building a Collective Human Dignity Movement

The leadership of the Black Lives Matter movement, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi represent the continuity of Black women's participation and leadership in anti-Black racism, anti-state violence, anti-poverty, and the human dignity struggles of Black people. Khan-Cullors, Garza, and Tometi are building on the legacy of Black feminist struggle and thought in the U.S. As Black feminist scholar and social theorist Patricia Hill Collins has articulated, "[j]ust as fighting injustice lay at the heart of U.S. Black

women's experiences, so did analyzing and creating imaginative responses to injustice characterize the core of Black feminist thought."[21] They have continued to develop these imaginative responses by gleaning from the lessons of their foremothers and the women of color who they built coalition with such as Alicia Escalante and the ELAWRO. These lessons that I have detailed in my political biography of gender and leadership on Escalante include the critical importance of fostering a leadership among many that empowers others and provides a vision of hope. The centrality of building bridges across difference while honoring and acknowledging those differences was another lesson. This bridge building enabled them to forge the vital coalitions across race, class, gender, and now sexuality to launch a collective response against the constant threat and attack on the human dignity of those on the margins of society. Further, the need to cultivate political solidarity among disparate groups in coalition in order to tackle the multiple issues and struggles that impact the collective in varying ways as vital to the project of human liberation and an alternative vision of the future.

Since its founding in 2013 BLM has expanded to a global network with over forty chapters and has focused on cultivating an inclusive membership-based leadership, or a collective leadership as Delgado Bernal has described. It promotes a leadership that empowers others and that provides a vision of hope in the face of a deeply entrenched social, political, and economic system of injustice. In particular, the organization has been cognizant of the need to center the leadership of those who have been on the margins of previous movements for Black liberation. In the about section of the BLM website it reads:

> Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes. It goes beyond the narrow nationalism that can be prevalent within some Black communities, which merely call on Black people to love Black, live Black and buy Black, keeping straight cis Black men in the front of

> the movement while our sisters, queer and trans and disabled folk take up roles in the background or not at all. Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement.[22]

The leadership of each chapter of the BLM Global Network determines its own agenda while centering the recognition of Black human dignity and determines what the destinies of their communities will look like.

Each of the founders of Black Lives Matter has been shaped by their own lived experience and had been involved in community organizing prior to their founding of BLM. Like Escalante their individual experiences have shaped their collective leadership practices, dignity politics, and have informed the multi-issued nature and coalition-based approaches of their organizating practices. Alicia Garza who was born in Los Angeles before moving to Oakland, California where she currently resides. Garza identifies as a queer social justice organizer and is an activist and writer. Prior to her work with BLM she served as the executive director of People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER) and served as a board chair of Right to the City Alliance (RTTC) which fights gentrification and police brutality, both organizations are situated in the Bay area. She received her bachelor's degree at UC San Diego in anthropology and sociology in 2003. Currently Garza serves as the strategy and partnerships director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) which strives to better working conditions and pay for workers in the home and sits on the board of Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity (BOLD) which helps to foster the organizing skills of Black activists.[23]

She has received several awards for her activism and leadership and has contributed her writing to *Time*, *Mic*, *Marie Claire*, *The Guardian*, *Elle*, *Essence*, and *The New York*

Times. Recently she has founded the Black Futures Lab which seeks to harness Black political power through engagement with advocacy organizations and legislators "to advance local, state, and federal level policies that make Black communities stronger."[24] This year she also is serving in the leadership of a new membership-based organization, Supermajority, whose mission "affirms and builds women's power and serves as one-stop shop for advocacy, community building, and electoral participation aimed at transforming our country and building an intergenerational, multiracial, movement for women's equity." The supermajority believes, "[t[hat women's equity is essential to the advancement of our humanity as well as the economic, political, and social progress of our country and world. In the humanity, dignity, and equality of all people and in a universal capacity to learn, grow and change. In fighting for the basic human needs of all people, including universal health care, public education, a living wage, a clean environment, and affordable housing."[25]

Opal Tometi, the daughter of Nigerian immigrants, grew up in Arizona and is a human rights advocate, strategist and writer.[26] She considers herself to be a transnational feminist and received a bachelor's degree in history at the University of Arizona in 2005. She has been committed to organizing on behalf of Black immigrants through the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) since 2011 and served as its executive director. BAJI is the first national immigrant rights organization for people of African descent and is focused on improving the lives of African Americans, AfroLatinos, and African and Caribbean immigrants. Her efforts included serving as co-director and communications director of the first Black-led rally for immigrant rights held in Miami, Florida in January of 2016. Further, she also was heavily involved with the organization of the first congressional briefing on black immigrants in Washington D.C. She is currently involved with Black Organizing for

Leadership and Dignity (BOLD) and sits on the board of the Phoenix based Puente Human Rights Movement. She is a co-founder of the Black-Brown Coalition of Arizona.[27] Tometi firmly believes that we, "are all worthy of the celebration and defense of our inherent human dignity, and our rights."[28]

Patrisse Khan-Cullors, is a Los Angeles native and is an organizer, activist, artist, writer, actor, and producer. Her activism and leadership has been shaped by the experiences of the incarceration of her father and brother who suffers from mental illness. In 2012 she curated her first performance art piece focused on state sanctioned violence. Through touring her performance piece she co-founded the Coalition to End Sheriff Violence (C2ESV) which is made up of a coalition of over twenty local organizations. Khan-Cullors also founded Dignity and Power Now, its "mission is to build a Black and Brown led abolitionist movement rooted in community power towards the goal of achieving transformative justice and healing justice for all incarcerated people, their families, and communities." Both coalitions have been instrumental in the establishment of the Los Angeles County Sherriff's Civilian Oversight Commission established in 2016. Further, Khan-Cullors has expanded her coalition work and has led a committee, Reform L.A. Jails that seeks to garner support for a 2020 county wide ballot initiative to grant the L.A. County Sheriff's Civilian Oversight Committee subpoena power to independently investigate law enforcement misconduct and to develop alternatives to a proposed $3.5 million dollar Los Angeles County jail expansion plan. Khan-Cullors has also recently produced a memoir, *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*, that details her experience with and the impacts of state sanctioned violence.[29] Her recent ventures include serving as the Truth and Reinvestment director at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights.

What is significant about the founders and organizers of BLM is that like Escalante they have been organizing on several different fronts, engage in several different issues and movements, and do the difficult work of coalition building and forging political solidarity, all while centering Black human dignity. On the Black Lives Matter website we can read a demonstration of their strategy to make connections between struggles.

> When we are able to end hyper-criminalization and sexualization of Black people and end the poverty, control, and surveillance of Black people, every single person in this world has a better shot at getting and staying free. When Black people get free, everybody gets free. This is why we call on Black people and our allies to take up the call that Black lives matter. We're not saying Black lives are more important than other lives, or that other lives are not criminalized and oppressed in various ways. We remain in active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation and we know that our destinies are intertwined.[30]

This leadership approach and understanding of the interconnectedness of the struggles of those on the margins is vital to the imagining and bringing into being of an alternative reality and society where the human dignity of all is acknowledged and respected. As Khan-Cullors has articulated in her advocacy for the reform L.A. jails initiative, "[w]e can imagine a Los Angeles that isn't reliant on caging the most vulnerable populations – Black, undocumented, poor, women, queer and trans, and disabled. These are the communities we should be fighting for."[31] Although BLM has been perceived and even misunderstood as only focusing and advocating for Black lives the reality is that BLM is a global movement for human dignity that seeks to build solidarity and coalition with all people for the recognition of our collective human dignity.

In a recent interview conducted with Khan-Cullors about African Americans and the issue of immigration she shared, "I think as Black Americans, we should be the first ones to be standing up for other people's rights in this country. I think a lot of what happens is that we feel like not enough people stand up for us, so why should we stand up for them?" She

follows up with the assertion that now more than ever "marginalized communities need to come together."[32] When I read Khan-Cullors' reflections about why some people in the Black community do not take a stance on immigrant rights or rather agree with the sentiments of the current presidency despite the fact that she acknowledges immigrants rights is a Black issue I was shaken. That feeling quickly dissipated and turned into motivation and determination. These sentiments that Black people may feel that no one stands up for them is one important reason among so many why I have chosen to write this political biography and social history. Black and Brown people have a historical legacy of collaboration, coalition, political solidarity, and dignity work between our communities. My dissertation is a contribution to the historical dignity work that the leadership of BLM is building on and is an effort to document our shared struggle in order to empower and create hope in our current moment for a different world.

The history of Escalante and her efforts in the struggle for welfare rights, economic justice, and human dignity is a testament to our shared legacy. We as a people and a society need more of these histories as we are faced with an immense uphill battle against the various human rights crises here in the U.S. and across the globe. Escalante's and the ELAWRO's history and many others that have yet to be written have the potential to inform current struggles for human dignity about our legacy and genealogy of collective struggle and visions for a different world where all human life is acknowledged and valued. Escalante's story teaches us the critical role of individual as well as collective, grassroots leadership, the essential need to honor and build bridges across difference, and the forging of coalitions in furthering movements for equality, social justice, and human dignity.

Introduction

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Chapter One

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Chapter Two

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[64] NWRO, "Statement regarding Judge Halleck," April 23, 1968, Washington D.C., Box 33, Folder 1, Dr. George A. Wiley Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Escalante, interview by Rosie Bermudez, 10 November 2012.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

Chapter Three

[1] Carlos Muñoz Jr., *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 1989); Dolores Delgado-Bernal, "Grassroots Leadership Reconceptualized: Chicana Oral histories and the 1968 East Los Angeles School Blowouts," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 19:2 (1998): 113-142; Mario T. Garcia, *Blowout: Sal Castro and the Struggle for*

Educational Justice (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2011); *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

[2] Joe Razo, Interview by author, Alhambra, California, September 23, 2017; Alicia Escalante, Telephone interview by author, 16 February 2018; Personal communication with Alex Escalante, April 17, 2019.

[3] Josh Kun and Laura Pulido, "Introduction," Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 13.

[4] Joe Razo, Interview; Carlos Montes, Interview by author, Los Angeles California, January 18, 2018; Garcia, *Blowout*; "Raul Ruiz," in *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

[5] Father John Luce was the descendent of a wealthy Boston Brahmin family. Eliezer Risco a Cuban refugee worked on the UFW newspaper *El Malcriado* in addition to supporting the farmworker struggle along with Stanford graduate and Connecticut native Ruth Robinson. Caribbean Fragoza, "La Raza: The Community Newspaper the Became A Political Platform," Artbound, The Autry Museum of the American West and the Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA, April 4, 2018.

[6] Joe Razo, Interview by author; Mario T. García, "Raul Ruiz," in *The Chicano Generation*; Fragoza, "La Raza: The Community Newspaper the Became A Political Platform."

[7] Alicia Escalante, Interview by author, Sacramento, California, November 10, 2012; Joe Razo, Interview by author.

[8] Mario T. García, "Raul Ruiz," in *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 39.

[9] Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Marisela R. Chavez, "'We have a long beautiful history' Chicana feminist Trajectories and legacies," In *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, Nancy A. Hewitt, Ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 77-97; George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: ethnicity, culture, and identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); David Gutiérrez, *Walls and mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican immigrants, and the politics of ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Delgado-Bernal, "Grassroots Leadership Reconceptualized,"; Ernesto Chavez, *"Mi raza primero!" (My people first!): nationalism, identity, and insurgency in the Chicano movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[10] Delgado-Bernal, "Grassroots Leadership Reconceptualized," 122.

[11] Alicia and Lorraine Escalante, Interview by Antonio Vale Jr, East Los Angeles California, November 13, 1968, California State College, Fullerton, Oral History Program. Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, Box 19, Folder 32, University of California Santa Barbara.

[12] Mario T. García, "Raul Ruiz," in *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement*

[13] Gordon Mantler, *Poor to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 97.

[14] Alicia Escalante, "WRO," *La Raza Newspaper*, vol. 1 no. 12, May 11, 1968, pg. 7

[15] Mantler, *Poor to the Poor*, 134.

[16] "3 Buses Take L.A. Poor to 'March on Washington'," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 16, 1968, pg. A1; "Remembering Dr. James H. Hargett," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 3, 2018, https://lasentinel.net/remembering-rev-dr-james-h-hargett.html.

[17] Paul Houston, "123 People Leave Watts for Washington: Marchers Will Stay 8 Days at Capitol; Many Children Along," *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1968, pg. 3.

[18] Escalante, Interview by author, November 10, 2012.

[19] Ibid.

[20] "3 Buses Take L.A. Poor to 'March on Washington'."

[21] Houston, "123 People Leave Watts for Washington."

[22] Mario T. García, "Gloria Arellanes," in *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 161.

[23] Carlos Montes, Interview by author; Ralph Ramirez, Interview by author, Fullerton, California, July 14, 2018. Ramirez recalled that Risco had been contacted by Walter Bremond one of the founders of the Los Angeles based Black Congress which had been established in 1962 and the Brotherhood Crusade established in 1968.

[24] Houston, "123 People Leave Watts for Washington."

[25] García, "Gloria Arellanes," in *The Chicano Generation*; Carlos Montes, Interview by author; Ralph Ramirez, Interview by author; Mantler, *Poor to the Poor*, 145.

[26] Escalante, Interview by author, November 10, 2012.

[27] "3 Buses Take L.A. Poor to 'March on Washington'."; Houston, "123 People Leave Watts for Washington."

[28] Mantler, *Poor to the Poor*, 147; Carlos Montes, Interview by author; Ralph Ramirez, Interview by author.

[29] Mantler, *Poor to the Poor*, 152.

[30] Escalante, Interview by author, November 10, 2012; Mantler, *Poor to the Poor*, 156.

[31] Mantler, *Poor to the Poor*, 206-207.

[32] Alicia and Lorraine Escalante, Interview by Antonio Vale Jr, East Los Angeles California, November 13 & December 9, 1968, California State College, Fullerton, Oral History Program, Box 19, Folder 32, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[33] Mantler, *Poor to the Poor*, 161.

[34] Alicia Escalante, Interview by author, 27 February 2018, Sacramento, California.

[35] "Linea Abierta: The Emerging Role of the Mexican American Woman," Broadcast Transcript, Community Television of Southern California, Maravilla Housing Project, East Los Angeles, February 3, 1969, Box 19, folder 28, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[36] Mario T. García, "Raul Ruiz," in *The Chicano Generation*; Garcia, *Blowout*, 214-218.

[37] Lydia Lopez, Interview by author, Alhambra, California, February 16, 2018.

[38] Alicia Escalante, "Chicana Mother," *Chicano Student Movement*, vol. 1, no. 6, October 1968.

[39] "BPLO," *Los Angeles County Welfare Rights Organization Newsletter*, vol. 1, no.2, November 1, 1968, 3, Box 24, Folder 13, Dr. George A. Wiley Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin; "Walter Bremond, A Black Activist," The New York Times, July 1, 1982, https://www.nytimes.com/1982/07/01/obituaries/walter-bremond-a-black-activist.html

[40] "BPLO," *Los Angeles County Welfare Rights Organization Newsletter*, 3.

[41] Ibid.

[42] "A Message to the Black Social Worker," *LACWRO Newsletter*, 6.

[43] "Victims Sue the Police Department," *LACWRO Newsletter*, 2.

[44] Ibid, 6.

[45] Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow & Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 167-170.

[46] Recent scholarship has begun to acknowledge and historicize the collaboration between Black and Brown welfare rights organizing in Los Angeles, see: Alejandra Marchevsky, "Forging a Brown-Black Movement: Chicana and African American Women Organizing for Welfare Rights in Los Angeles," in *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Actiivsm and Feminism in the Movement Era*, Dionne Espinoza, Maria Eugenia Cotera, and Maylei Blackwell, Eds. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 227-244.

[47] Conchita, "Welfare Rights and Community Continue Battle Against Welfare Department," *Chicano Student Movement*, vol. 2, no. 1, March 1969; "The Battle for Welfare Rights: welfare xmas demonstration," *La Raza Newspaper*, vol. 2, no. 5, March 1969, 3.

[48] "The Battle for Welfare Rights," *La Raza Newspaper*, March 28, 1969, pg. 3; Conchita, "Welfare Rights and Community Continue Battle Against Welfare Department," *Chicano Student Movement*, vol. 2, no. 1, March 1969.

[49] "WRO," *La Raza Newspaper*, vol. 2, no. 8, July 1969, 3.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Conchita, "Welfare Rights and Community Continue Battle Against Welfare Department."

[52] "WRO," *La Raza Newspaper*, vol. 2, no. 8, July 1969, 3.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ray Zeman, "Civil Service Board Asked to Review Suspension Ruling," *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1969, D1.

[55] "Social Workers Win Union Suspension Case," *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1969, B4.

[56] Conchita, "Welfare Rights and Community Continue Battle Against Welfare Department," *Chicano Student Movement*, vol. 2, no. 1, March 1969.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Welfare Issues Committee, "Welfare's 43," Social Welfare Department Records, R350.051. Los Angeles County Files, Box 84, Folder 1 [Restricted Access], California State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento, California.

[59] "Correspondence from California state director John C. Montgomery to Alicia Escalante," February 24, 1969, Social Welfare Department Records, R350.122. Coded Files, Box 159, Folder 6 [Restricted Access], California State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento, California.

[60] Ibid.

[61] "The Battle for Welfare Rights," *La Raza Newspaper*, March 1969, pg. 3. Lydia Lopez, Interview by author, 16 February 2018, Alhambra, California; Carlos Montes, Interview by author, 15 January 2018, East Los Angeles, California.

[62] Lydia Lopez, Interview by author, 16 February 2018, Alhambra, California; Carlos Montes, Interview by author, 15 January 2018, East Los Angeles, California.

[63] "The Battle for Welfare Rights," *La Raza Newspaper*, March 1969, pg. 3; Conchita, "Welfare Rights and Community Continue Battle Against Welfare Department," *Chicano Student Movement*, vol. 2, no. 1, March 1969; Ralph Ramirez, Interview by author.

[64] "WRO," *La Raza Newspaper*, vol. 2, no. 8, July 1969, pg. 3.

[65] Rosalio Urias Muñoz, Telephone interview by author, 4 February 2018; Lydia Lopez, Interview by author, 16 February 2018, Alhambra, California; Carlos Montes, Interview by author, 15 January 2018, East Los Angeles, California; Martha Cotera, Telephone interview by author, 4 January 2018; 10 January 2018; Gloria Arellanes, Interview by author, 30 March 2018, El Monte, California.

[66] Ralph Ramirez, Interview by author.

[67] Joe Razo, Interview by author.

[68] Alicia Escalante, Interview by author, 27 February 2018; Lydia Lopez, Interview by author; Joe Razo, Interview by author; Richard Cruz and Mario T. García, *Chicano liberation theology: the writings and documents of Richard Cruz and Católicos Por La Raza* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., 2010).

[69] Alicia Escalante, Interview by author, 27 February 2018; Alicia Escalante, "Letter to Community," May 26, 1972, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[70] Alicia Escalante, "Letter to Community."

[71] Ibid; Lydia Lopez, Interview by author; Joe Razo, Interview by author. Others who would serve jail time for their participation following the trial included Joe Razo, Ricardo Cruz, and Richard Martinez.

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[73] SSWM, "Alicia Escalante Needs Our Support," Flier printed and distributed by SSWM, n.d., Box 15, Folder 16, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[74] John R. Taliaferro, "Letter of behalf of Alicia Escalante," n.d., Box 15, Folder 16, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[75] Issac Fuhrman, "To Whom It May Concern," May 12, 1970, Box 15, Folder 16, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[76] David Lee Billhimer, "To Whom It May Concern," May 18, 1970, Box 15, Folder 16, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[77] Richard Strayer, "Dear Sir," May 20, 1970, Box 15, Folder 16, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[78] Aurora Rubio, "To Whom It May Concern," May 18, 1970, Box 15, Folder 16, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[79] Frances Feldman, "Letter to Phyllis Magill, LA County Probation," May 19, 1970, Box 15, Folder 16, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[80] Cited in Oropeza, *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No!*, 61.

[81] Escalante quoted in, Oropeza, *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No!*, 141-142; *People's World*, 27 December 1969.

[82] Oropeza, *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No!*, 148.

[83] "National Chicano Moratorium," *La Causa*, February 28, 1970, pg. 12.

[84] "National Chicano Moratorium," La Causa, February 28, 1970, p. 12; Escalante, interview by Maria E. Cotera, 23 & 24 February 2012.

[85] Mario T. García, "Rosalio Muñoz," in *The Chicano Generation*, 293-294; Rosalio Urias Muñoz, Telephone interview by author.

[86] Jenna M. Loyd, Health Rights are Civil Rights: Peace and Justice Activism in Los Angeles, 1963-1978 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2014), 146-148; Rosalio Urias Muñoz, Telephone interview by author, 4 February 2018.

[87] Rosalio Urias Muñoz, Telephone interview by author; Lydia Lopez, Interview by author, 16 February 2018, Alhambra, California; Carlos Montes, Interview by author, 15 January 2018, East Los Angeles, California; Martha Cotera, Telephone interview by author, 4 January 2018; 10 January 2018; Gloria Arellanes, Interview by author, 30 March 2018, El Monte, California.

Chapter Four

[1] Eva Bertram, *The Workfare State: Public Assistance Politics from the New Deal to the New Democrats* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Cybelle Fox, "Unauthorized Welfare: The Origins of Immigrant Status Restrictions in American Social Policy," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 102, no. 4 (March 2016): 1051-1074; Premilla Nadasen, "From Widow to 'Welfare Queen': Welfare and the Politics of Race," *Black Women, Gender, and Families*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 52-77.

[2] By the early 1970s the ELAWRO had changed its name to the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization. The name change, I argue, is a reflection of the development of a feminist sensibility that corresponded with the larger push by women nationally for equal rights. The organization was also known as the National Chicana Welfare Rights Organization and La Causa De Los Pobres which reflected the organization reaching out to a wider national audience in an effort to build a national organization.

[3]Martha P. Cotera, *Diosa y Hembra: The History and Heritage of Chicanas in the U.S.* (Austin: Information Systems Development, 1976); *Profile on the Mexican American Woman* (Austin: National Educational Laboratory Publishers, 1976); Rodolfo Acuña, *A Community Under Siege: A Chronicle of Chicanos East of the Los Angeles River* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center Publications, 1984); *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, Third ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988); Carlos Muñoz Jr. *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (London: Verso, [1989] 2007); Vicki L. Ruiz, From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Virginia Espino, "'Woman Sterilized as Gives Birth': Forced Sterilization and Chicana Resistance in the 1970s," in Las Obreras: Chicana Politics of Work and Family, Vicki L. Ruiz, ed. (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Publications, 2000), 65-81; Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); Rosie C. Bermudez, "Alicia Escalante, The Chicana Welfare Rights Organization and the Chicano Movement," In *The Chicano Movement: Perspectives from the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Mario T. Garcia (New York: Routledge Press, 2014), 95-116.

[4]Dionee Espinoza, Maria E. Cotera, and Maylei Blackwell, "Introduction," in *Chicana Movidas!: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era* (University of Texas Press, 2018), 4.

[5] "Where It's At," *TIME Magazine*, vol. 93, issue 20, May 16, 1959.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] "A Message On World Hunger and Nutrition," *Nutrition Seminar Report UPCUSA*, Summer 1969, Box 10, Folder 5, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Alicia Escalante, "Around the World to Expose Hunger in the U.S.A.," *La Raza Newspaper*, vol. 2, no. 9, November 1969, 12.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] "Where It's At," *TIME Magazine*.

[16] Escalante, "Around the World to Expose Hunger in the U.S.A."

[17] "Chicana Symposium," *La Raza*, vol. 2, no. 10 (1969): 4; MEChA-UCLA, "Event Announcement," *UCLA Daily Bruin*, 24 November 1969, vol. LXVII, no. 37, p. 3; Debbie Ashin, "Symposium to focus on role of Chicana," *UCLA Daily Bruin*, 25 November 1969, vol. LXVII, no. 38, p. 1.

[18] "Chicana Symposium," *La Raza Newspaper*, vol. 2, no. 10, December 1969, 4.

[19] Gloria Arellanes, Interview by author, El Monte, California, March 30, 2018.

[20] Mario T. García, "Gloria Arellanes," in *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 161.

[21] Arellanes, Interview by author; García, "Gloria Arellanes," 192-194.

[22] García, "Gloria Arellanes," 193-196; Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 149.

[23] Ibid, 193-194.

[24] Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*

[25] Alicia Escalante Interview by author, November 10, 2012, Sacramento, California; Alicia Escalante Interview by author, January 24, 2014, Sacramento, California.

[26] García, "Gloria Arellanes," 195.

[27] Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 134-135.

[28] Premilla Nadasen, "From Widow to 'Welfare Queen': Welfare and the Politics of Race," *Black Women, Gender + Families*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2007): 52-77; Eva Bertram, *The Workfare State: Public Assistance Politics from the New Deal to the New Democrats* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Julilly Kohler-Hausman, *Getting Tough: Welfare and Imprisonment in 1970s America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Susan W. Blank and Barbara B. Blum, "A Brief History pf Work Expectations for Welfare Mothers," *The Future of Children, Welfare to Work*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1997): 28-38.

[29] Susan W. Blank and Barbara B. Blum, "A Brief History of Work Expectations for Welfare Mothers," 31.

[30] Bertram, *The Workfare State*, 78.

[31] By the early 1970s Escalante and the ELAWRO became increasingly identifies as a woman's organization advocating for Chicana needs. This change in the organizational name reflected the shifting politics of the leadership and organization.

[32] "Resolution," 21 November 1972, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Bertram, *The Workfare State*, 6-7.

[35] "East Los Angeles Welfare Rights Organization, "Talmadge Amendment," typed document, [1973], Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[36] "ELAWRO Committee on Current and Proposed Welfare Legislation," n.d. [1972], typed document, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[37] Anna NietoGomez has a long history of activism and leadership. She was active in the Chicano student movement and co-founded an early Chicana feminist student organization, Las Hijas de Cuauhtemóc. She built connections with long-time feminist, activist, and community scholar Francisca Flores of the League of Mexican American Women and the Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional. She was also associated with the Chicana Service Action Center and worked with Alicia Escalante and the CWRO in the battle against the Talmadge amendment. For more on Anna NietoGomez please see Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*.

[38] Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 146.

[39] Ibid, 149.

[40] *Regeneración* developed out of a community-based newsletter, *Carta Editorial* that reported on political activities in the Mexican American community. Flores was apart of its foundation in 1963 and served as its co-associate editor and regular contributor before taking over as the sole lead editor and changing the name to *Regeneración* in 1970. Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 135.

[41] Anna NietoGomez, "Chicana Welfare Rights Challenges Talmadge Amendment," *Regeneración*, vol. 2, no. 3, (1973), pg. 14; "What is the Talmadge Amendment," *Regeneración*, vol. 2, no. 3, (1973), pgs. 14-16; Anna NietoGomez, "Madres Por Justicia," *Encuentro Femenil* vol. 1, no. 1(1973): 12–18.

[42] The article was also published in *Encuentro Femenil*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1974), 13-14.

[43] Francisca Flores, "A reaction to discussions on the Talmadge amendment to the Social Security Act," Regeneración, vol.2, no. 3 (1973), 16; *Encuentro Femenil*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1974), 13-14.

[44] Ibid, 13.

[45] Ibid, 14.

[46] Alicia Escalante, "A Letter from the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization," *Encuetro Femenil*, vol. 1, no. 2 (974),

[47] Alicia Escalante, "A Letter from the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization," *Encuentro Femenil*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1974), 15.

[48] Ibid, 16.

[49] Ibid, 19.

[50] Escalante, "A Letter from the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization," 18.

[51] Ibid

[52] For more on Francisca Flores see, Marisela R. Chavez, "'We have a long beautiful history' Chicana feminist Trajectories and legacies," In *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, Nancy A. Hewitt, Ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 77-97. Also see Anna NietoGómez, "Francisca Flores, the League of Mexican American Women, and the Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional, 1958-1975," *Chicana Movidas! New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era* (University of Texas Press, 2018), 33-50.

[53] "Chicana Service Action Center: Proyecto de La Comision Femenil Mexicana Inc.," *Regeneración*, vol. 2, no. 3, (1973), pg. 6.

[54] Yolanda Nava, "The Chicana and Employment: Needs Analysis and Recommendations for Legislation," *Regeneración*, vol. 2, no. 3, (1973), pgs. 7-8.

[55] Alicia Escalante, "Canto de Alicia," *Encuentro Femenil* vol.1, no. 1, (1973), 10.

[56] Clemencia Martinez, "Welfare Families Face Forced Labor," *La Raza Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 7, n.d. pg. 41.

[57] Sandra Ugarte, "WELFARE," *La Raza Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 8, n.d., pgs. 16-17.

[58] I reviewed issues from the first two years of *La Raza Newspaper/Magazine* and tallied the total number of instances in which an article or advertisement about either Escalante and the EALWRO emerged.

[59] "ELAWRO Committee on Current and Proposed Welfare Legislation," n.d. [1972].

[60] The first convention of the NWPC was held February 9TH through February 11th 1973. http://www.nwpc.org/about/nwpc-foundation/

[61] Martha P. Cotera, Phone interview by author, January 4, 2018; Martha P. Cotera, "Mujeres Bravas: How Chicanas Shaped the Feminist Agenda at the National IWY Conference in

Houston, 1977," in *Chicana Movidas! New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era* (University of Texas Press, 2018), 53. Unfortunately though the resolution was voted on and received support at the 1973 conference, the following year the vote was overturned and the Chicana caucus remained but without an real political power within the NWPC.

[62] Evey Chapa, "Report from the National Women's Political Caucus," *Magazín*, vol. 1, no. 9, September 1973, pg. 37-39. Reprinted in Alma M. Garcia, *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 174-177.

[63] Cotera, Phone interview by author.

[64] "National Women's Political Caucus," February 10, 1973 "Resolution passed by the workshop on Welfare Rights," Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[65] Cotera, Telephone interview, 10 January 2018.

[66] Lupe Anguiano, "Letter to NWPC Chairwoman Frances T. Farenhold," April 30, 1973, Box 16, Folder 2, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[67] "Workers and Welfare Recipients Unite Against Forced Work Programs," Flyer, n.d. [1973-1974], Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[68] Congressman Edward R. Roybal, "Correspondence to Alicia Escalante," November 5, 1973, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[69] Congressman Edward R. Roybal, “Correspondence to Alicia Escalante,” February 8, 1973, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[70] Congressman George E. Danielson to Alicia Escalante, “Correspondence,” January 11, 1973, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[71] Senator Mervyn M. Dymally to Alicia Escalante, “Correspondence,” February 20, 1973, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[72] Senator Clark L. Bradley to Alicia Escalante, “Correspondence,” January 8, 1973, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[73] Escalante, “Canto de Alicia,” p. 10.

[74] NietoGomez, “Madres por Justicia,” p 18; Escalante, “A Letter from the Chicana Welfare Rights Organization,” p. 17.

Conclusion

[1] Alicia Escalante, “Hand-written agenda and notes,” March 29, 1974, Alicia Escalante Papers, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archive, University of California Santa Barbara.

[2] In 1972, Escalante served a few months in the Sybil Brand Institute, which was a women’s jail in Los Angeles for her role in the well-known St. Basil’s Christmas Eve demonstration organized by Católicos Por La Raza in 1969. Unlike her many other co-defendants Escalante was also charged with destroying Church property amounting to $10,000. She was accused

of throwing a cement ashtray at the glass doors of the church, which was preposterous considering Escalante's small frame.

[3] Escalante, "Hand-written agenda and notes," March 29, 1974.

[4] Alicia Escalante, Interview by author, 10 November 2012, Sacramento, California.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Helen Schlegal, "National Migrant Referral Project: Facilitating Migrant Health Care for Fifteen Years," *Migration Today*, vol. 12, no. 4/5 (1984): 15-19.

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