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Darius V Echeverría's *Aztlán Arizona: Mexican American Educational Empowerment, 1968-1978*

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REVIEWS

AZTLÁN ARIZONA: MEXICAN AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT, 1968–1978. By Darius V. Echeverría. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2014. 200 pp. ISBN 978-0-8165-2984-1

In just under 200 pages, scholar Darius V. Echeverría provides an exciting analysis of the Chicana/o Movement in Arizona through the lens of the educational experiences of Arizona Mexican Americans. The central theme of the book revolves around the fight for quality educational access and reform by the Mexican American community in Phoenix, Tempe, and Tucson, Arizona. The author employs an impressive array of primary source materials, culled largely from the specialized research collections housed at Arizona State University. Manuscript collections, student newspapers spanning a twenty-five year history, along with oral histories are used effectively by Echeverría to tell a narrative that places students and parents at the center of the fight for educational justice. The author asserts that education was the issue that united Mexican Americans in Arizona during the 1960s and 1970s. It became a gateway to address other social justice issues of concern to the community. For students, parents, as well as community leaders, education symbolized a powerful tool to remedy the long history of social and political inequalities against Mexican Americans in Arizona.

The core of the book deals with the time period of the Chicana/o Movement. The fight for educational access in light of the banning of Mexican American Studies in Tucson in 2010 is briefly addressed, as the author seeks to connect the two movements in his discussion on the legacy of “educational activism” in Arizona. The opening chapter provides a quick study for those unfamiliar with Arizona history and the rampant discrimination against the Mexican American community. It highlights the legal battles for desegregation waged by Mexican Americans in the state, going as far back as the 1925 *Romo v. Laird* case. Even with desegregation victories, this short chapter paints a dismal reality for the state of education for Mexican Americans in Arizona in the early twentieth century. High dropout rates and lack of an inclusive curriculum coupled with institutional racism provided limited educational opportunities for Mexican American youth. Further the lack of Mexican Americans as administrators, teachers, college faculty, and school board members created a “one-dimensional brand of education” where only Anglo interests and Anglo historical perspectives were deemed significant. Mexican American students in the public school system were also not represented in the Arizona school curriculum. Echeverría notes

that high drop out rates, a curriculum that lacked Mexican American representation, institutional racism, and limited educational opportunities all served as an impetus for the rise of educational activism among high school and college students in Arizona. The Chicana/o Movement became the vehicle by which these activists sought to remedy educational inequality.

The strength of *Aztlán Arizona* is in the three chapters that detail student, parent, and community activism at the high school and college campuses (Arizona State University and the University of Arizona respectively). In these chapters, Echeverría best makes the case for the centrality of education as the unifying factor for the Chicana/o Movement in Arizona. These three chapters provide ample evidence of high school and college student demands for quality education and demonstrate the best use of the primary sources by the author. The first of these three chapters details the boycott of Phoenix Union High School in October 1970. The author crafts a rapid-fire behind the scene narrative that shows how parents organized the month-long boycott to demand changes from the school board. When school board members rejected the proposal of the parent committee, students walked out in protest (and with parental support) of what they characterized as an inferior education and racist school policies. Similar walkouts spread to Tucson, Arizona and the author explores how the issue of education became a community concern, as plans for walkouts and boycotts required a vast network of student, parent, and community activism. Echeverría's analysis here explores how the walkouts and boycotts fit into the larger framework of the Chicana/o Movement. From there, the author moves to discuss student activism at the college and universities.

At the university level, students tackled educational inequality as part of a broader strategy to alleviate social inequality. Mexican American student organizations strived to develop recruitment and retention programs along with attempts to establish Chicano Studies programs. Echeverría makes a strong case in these chapters that the issue of education was the rallying point for the movement in Arizona. The work centers on educational institutions in Arizona and the response by Mexican Americans to reform and gain quality access to these institutions. It is difficult to know whether the issue of education was as salient outside of these institutions given that Echeverría's book is one of the first published works to address student activism in Tempe, Phoenix, and Tucson during the Chicana/o Movement in Arizona. Echeverría's assessment of the Chicana/o Movement and the significance of education is a convincing argument.

The book provides an important contribution to the growing literature on the Chicana/o Movement. The author himself addresses the lack of studies on the Arizona experience and the work begins to remedy some of that historical oversight. *Aztlán Arizona* provides a concise and highly readable history of Mexican American activism during the Chicana/o Movement in Arizona. Students and scholars alike will find the book valuable to understanding the Arizona Mexican American experience.

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