Chicago Latina Trailblazers

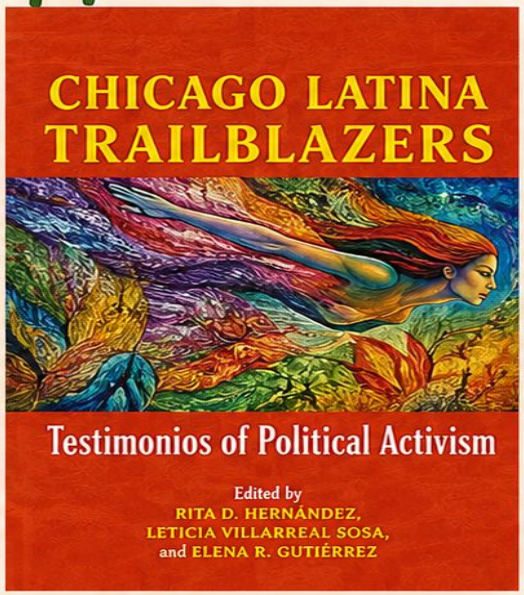
Video: Chicago Latina Trailblazers

Commonalities of Chicago Latina Trailblazers:

- **Most of the women were college educated**,
  - more than ½ of those with post-graduate degrees.
  - 3 have doctoral degrees.
- **Most were/are professionals**: educators, professors, lawyer, writers, religious, i.e. ordained ministers, national speakers and organizers, activists and organizers.
- **Many worked**, if not full-time, part-time **in media**, on-air and off-air; some wrote & produced TV shows mainly in Spanish and some on major mainstream networks. Some wrote for newspapers, including the Chicago Tribune and Chicago Sun-Times.
- They **built community infrastructures** by establishing health/medical and human services organizations and research centers.
- **They did community work and engaged in activism, advocacy and policy work while being married and raising families of their own.**
- They had a **great support network** (family, friends, co-workers, etc)

Leadership
Immigration
Social Justice
Education
Visionary
Bilingual
Empower
Spanish
Coalition
college educated
doctoral degrees
Opportunities
Civil Rights
Activist
Organizer
Community
Infrastructures
Establish
- health/medical services
- human services
- organizations
- research centers

Women's Contributions to Public Life
Culture
History
Children
Policy
Equity
Access
Expectations
Career
Opportunities
Community Work
Engagement
family
friends
co-workers
support network
Marriage
Raising Families
Medicine
Politics
Labor
Cooperation
Representation
Resilience
Determined
Courage
civil rights • assimilation • discrimination • sexism



Rita D. Hernández, Ph. D.

- Provided the Vision for this Book.
- She has had a longstanding interest in community activism and history, who is a community-based scholar
- Initiated documentary projects, including, “A Portrait of Eight Mexican Leaders” from South Chicago (1978), and “Latino Murals of Chicago” (1979) with artist and educator, Vicente Mendoza.
- Co-curator of the Museum of Mexican Culture and History of Chicago.
- Held Chicago’s first Hispanic Civil Rights Conference (1994)
- Initiated the annual Mexican/Chicana Educational Summits (2002-2006).
- Author of *The Silent Minority: Mexican Americans in CPS, 1970-2001*.
- Currently, Board Member of national organization, Mexicanos 2070.

What we see
vs.
What they have accomplished

Chicago Women Trailblazers . . .

Guadalupe A. Reyes
1918-2020

- Daughter of immigrants grew up in poverty as part of migrant farmworkers.
- Had 11 children, one, Bobby, was disabled.
- Founder of Esperanza, a school for children with disabilities.
- Founder of El Valor, a social service organization serving children and adults with disabilities and their families.
- Founder of Fiesta del Sol.
- Organized seniors & led the campaign for a new field house at Harrison Park in Pilsen, a Chicago Mexican barrio.
- Served as Trustee of the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA).

Mary Gonzales
1941-present

- A disciplined professional organizer who spent most of her adult life exercising three important skills – to agitate, strategize, and train.
- Co-Founder Gamaliel, a national leadership development organization.
- Co-Founded, Esperanza School And El Valor, together with her mom, Guadalupe Reyes.
- Co-founder, United Neighborhood Organization that empower community to take actions to solve social justice issues.
- Director of Pilsen Neighbors Community Council; later, President of the Board.
- Lead the Campaign with other trailblazers to open Benito Juarez HS.
- She is retired and mentors young Latinx as community organizers, exemplifying “Lifting while Climbing” concept.

Carmen Mendoza
1925-2000

- Born on the Southeast side of Chicago.
- Acted on behalf of Latino immigrants for the Cardinals Committee.
- District Director of AFL-CIO District Council 19.
- Fought for the Rights of healthcare workers in Chicago hospitals.
- Launched the Development of Claretian Medical Center in South Chicago (now Chicago Family Health Center-a FQHC)
- Consultant in the development of Alivio Medical Center.
- Instrumental in the development of 53-units senior housing, Villa Guadalupe in South Chicago.

Carmen Chico 1929-present

- South Chicago roots.
- Bilingual educator, who fought for equity in CPS schools.
- Strongly supported steel workers unions.
- Entered politics, ran for Ward Committeewoman.
- In 1972 she became a Delegate for the Democratic National Convention.
- Ran for State-wide position as IL Representative.

María Cerda
1934-2020

- Born in Lares, Puerto Rico, seat of the independence movement, “el Grito de Lares”.
- Helped bring ASPIRA to Illinois.
- Marched with MLK in Marquette Park.
- In 1969, was the 1st Latina appointed to the Chicago Board of Education.
- Introduced Bilingual Education to CPS.
- Established as Executive Director the Latino Research Institute, the first national policy institute for Latinos in the Midwest.
- Was a part of Mayor Harold Washington’s transition team.
- Appointed by Washington to head the Office of Employment and Training.
- Mentored many Latinx Leaders, exemplifying “Lifting while Climbing” concept.

Aracelis F. Figueroa 1936-present

- Born in Collores de Humacao, Puerto Rico.
- A grassroots educator who challenged the system by supporting organizations, parents, and students fighting for equity Latinas/os.
- One of the first Puerto Rican principals at Avondale Elementary School in 1977.
- Became District Superintendent in Chicago Public Schools.
- She also produced, directed, or was co-host of various radio & television shows, including “Oiga, Amigo” on ABC-TV.
- Co-Chair of Mayor Harold Washington’s Transition Team on Hunger.
- Member of Board of Directors of Humboldt Park Social Services.
- Mentored many Puerto Rican educators, exemplifying “Lifting while Climbing” concept.

Dr. Elena Mulcahy
1937-present

- Born and raised in Chicago.
- Director of the Bureau of Multilingual Education, the first and highest-ranking Latino/a administrator at the time in Chicago Public School system.
- Institutionalizing bilingual education and recruitment of bilingual teachers and empower teachers to decide the best program for their children.
- Held various positions at Truman College promoting equity for Latinx students.
- Mentored many Latina/o educators, exemplifying “Lifting while Climbing” concept.

Carmen Velásquez
1939-present

- Fierce Advocate for undocumented immigrant rights.
- Social activist and community organizer & health care champion in Chicago.
- Founding Director/CEO of Alivio Medical Center—a federally qualified health center (FQHC).
- Founder of Healthy Illinois Campaign, a Coalition working to provide healthcare coverage to all Illinois residents, regardless of immigration status.
- First Mexican American Chicago Public School (CPS) Board Member, lobbying at state level for bilingual/bicultural education
- Co-owner of Décima Musa Restaurant, a gathering place for social change and community activism while also providing space for Latin American art and music.

Dr. Aida L. Giachello
1945 - present

- Born in Puerto Rico, also raised (age 3-10 years) in Spanish Harlem, NYC.
- Involved in community activism, politics and community mobilization to organize Latinx communities around health.
- Formed numerous local, regional and national health organizations.
- Established in 1993-2015 the UIC Midwest Latino Health Research, Training and Policy Center, where she developed Community-based Participatory Action Research (CPAR): This approach addresses health disparities & health equity through individual & community empowerment strategies.
- Recipient of more than 45 awards and recognitions, e.g. on TIME magazine cover (2005) as one of 25 Most Influential Hispanics in America.

Ada Nivia López
1947-present

- Born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico came to Chicago in 1953.
- Developed community organizing tools to address social justice.
- First Latina to win statewide election to become a member of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees.
- Former President of the National Agenda Conference of Puerto Rican Women (NACOPRW)
- Puerto Rican Agenda of Chicago, Co-chair of Education Committee.
- Board Member of the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois (ACLU).
- Author, *Así Somos/ Who We Are.*

Virginia Martínez, J. D. 1949-present

- Born and raised in Chicago.
- One of the First Latinas to become a lawyer in Chicago.
- Strong advocate for Women and Children.
- Co-founded DePaul University's Latino Law Student Association.
- Co-founder, The IL Maternal & Child Health Coalition; The Nat. Coalition Against Domestic Violence.
- Helped bring Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) to the Midwest and was first Regional Counsel.
- Currently writing children's book series: *Adventures with Abuela*.

Luz María Solís
1951- present

- Born in Durango, Durango, Mexico and raised in Chicago.
- Advocate for young Mexican/Latino Children & their families.
- Helped to spearhead Early Childhood Dual Language & Bilingual Education in Chicago Public Schools (CPS).
- Launched the Reggio Emilia Approach in the Office of Early Childhood Education in 13 CPS schools.
- Produced the award-winning TV series, “Mi Escuelita,” the first Spanish language educational show for young children in the US.
- Founder & Chairperson of the Chicago Día de Los Niños Parade, awarding scholarships to DACA student recipients.

Pastora Emma Lozano 1953-present

- Champion of Immigrants Rights and Social and Political activist
- Born in Harlingen, Texas.
- Moved to Gary, Indiana and then to Pilsen community, Chicago.
- Came of age during the Black Panther's movement and her brother Rudy's activism (later on killed while being the Chicago Vice-Mayor in the City Council).
- Founded the Centro Sin Fronteras.
- Gave sanctuary to Elvira Arellano, Mexican citizen.
- Currently, a Pastor in her church, Lincoln UMC, in Pilsen and continues working toward the improvement of long-standing immigrants in Chicago.

Dr. Ana Castillo
1953-present

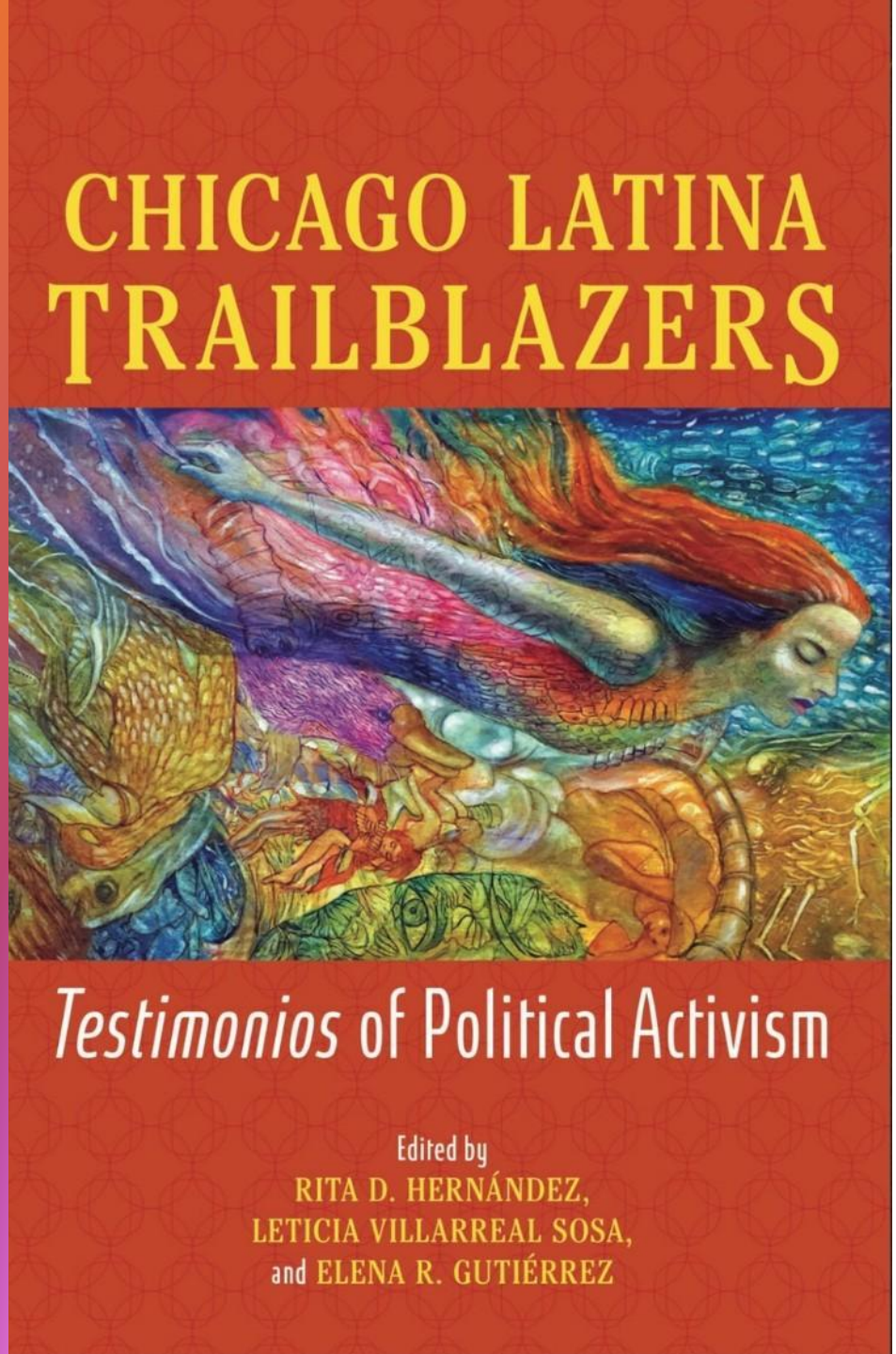
- Born, raised and educated in Chicago, IL.
- Novelist, poet, short story writer, essayist, editor, playwright, & translator.
- An internationally distinguished Chicana feminist author, independent scholar and activist.
- Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Bremen, Germany (1991).
- Author, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma,* and countless other works.
- Author of seven books of poetry, e.g. *My Book of the Dead: New Poems* (2021).
- Recipient of many awards, e.g. Fuller Award for Lifetime Achievement (2022) by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame, and a Carl Sandburg Award.
- Authored memoir, *Black Dove: Mamá, Mi'jo, and Me* (2016).

Leticia Villarreal Sosa, Ph. D.

- Born and raised in Illinois.
- Lived in Chicago barrio for last 29 years; currently residing in Rio Grande Valley, TX.
- Part of May 5, 1992 protests at University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana as undergrad that led to Latina/o Studies Program.
- BSW UIUC, MA; PhD from University of Chicago, SSA as the first Mexicana graduate.
- Focus on Latina feminisms, school equity, and community based participatory projects.
- First Mexicana promoted to full professor in executive leadership at Dominican University.
- Now, full Professor and Associate Dean at UTRGV; nominated for endowed professorship.

Elena R. Gutiérrez, Ph. D.

- Ph. D. in Sociology from the University of Michigan.
- Chicana feminist scholar and reproductive justice activist.
- Associate Professor of Gender and Women's Studies and Latin American and Latino Studies at University of Illinois, Chicago for 23 years.
- Author, *Fertile Matters: The Politics of Mexican Origin Women's Reproduction and Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice.*
- Director of Chicana Chicago Documentation Project.



Editors:

- **Rita D. Hernández**
- **Leticia Villarreal Sosa**
- **Elena R. Gutiérrez**

college educated
doctoral degrees
professionals
Spanish
bilingual
educator
professor
lawyer
writer
religious
minister
speaker
organizer
activist
Education
establish
Visionary
Coalition
Civil Rights
Deindustrialization
services
Opportunities
Courage
Immigrant
Social Justice
Spanish Immigration
human services
organizations
and research
centers
Latinas
Resilience
Advocate
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Language
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Advocate • Community • Education • Determined