

Women in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Latin America and the Caribbean

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INDEPENDENCE AND WOMEN'S STATUS

The Participation of Women in the Independence Struggle

As the nineteenth century began, the Ibero-American empire stood poised on the brink of formidable transformations that would bring independence from colonial rule and equality for all. However, the social, political, and legal status of women would remain virtually unchanged despite their valiant efforts and highly visible presence in the struggles for independence.

Many factors contributed to the wars for Latin American independence in the first third of the nineteenth century. Spanish restrictions on colonial political and economic aspirations, the influence of French and English liberal philosophies, and the examples set by successful American and European revolutions—all combined to ignite long-desired changes in the social order. The immediate cause of the New World revolutions was the occupation of Spain by Napoleon's forces in 1808. However, colonial discontent stemmed from the period of the enlightened Bourbon Reforms when the Crown bolstered American defenses against rival European powers, increased colonial revenues, and instituted administrative and political reforms.

The French occupation of Spain in 1808 sparked the onset of the revolutions by providing the opportunity for colonial leaders to take matters into their own hands. Following the example set by peninsular Spaniards in resisting the French invasion, American *criollos* (those born of Spanish parents in America)

established governing *juntas* to fill the administrative void left by the capture of the Crown. Viewed as rebellious and seditious behavior on the part of the colonists, these activities soon led to open conflict between colonial patriots and ruling *peninsulares*.

The restoration of a conservative monarchy in 1814 re-energized Spanish American frustrations and rekindled the struggles which culminated in independence. In South America battles were fought on several fronts. The first, led by Simón Bolívar, occurred in the northern part of the continent or the Viceroyalty of New Granada, whereas the second, under the leadership of José de San Martín, was confined predominantly to the countries of the southern cone, the Viceroyalty of Rio de la Plata. In México the insurrection began in 1810. This movement, under the leadership of Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos, combined the sentiments of independence with a social reform program on behalf of the Indian and *mestizo* (individuals of Indian and European parentage) masses.

Women did not remain passive spectators throughout this period. Cutting across class and racial lines, they joined the movements for independence, took sides on political issues, and participated on many levels. On a personal basis, women could not help but be involved as wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters of those who fought. Some chose to lend their support as combatants, spies, couriers, or informants. Others served as hosts and organizers of political meetings, as quartermasters and camp followers. They donated monies, food, and supplies, and they suffered the loss of loved ones, property, and wealth. Many died for their actions.

There was, after all, sufficient motivation for women's involvement, and they responded to the crisis in many ways. Government policies on taxation affected women's property or inheritances as well as men's. Many openly protested against increased taxation and other regulations.

At another level, women were openly courted, often through gender-specific propaganda, to assist the war

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efforts. Throughout Latin America, particularly among cosmopolitan or urban sectors, the notion of women's social usefulness was gradually replacing more traditional ideas of female seclusion. Institutions such as convents or retirement homes, which had provided cloistered havens away from secular affairs, were on the wane or increasing their social service orientation.

In small numbers, women were spearheading nascent efforts in education by sponsoring *colegios* (secondary schools) for girls and forming organizations. The *Patriotas Marianas*, among the earliest secular female groups in México to support the royalist cause, was but one of the many examples of women's political activities (Arrom 1985: 34).

Not surprisingly, nationalism or political sympathies elicited other forms of resourcefulness. These included more direct participation in the conflicts, for the wars also provided an unexpected opportunity for personal rebellion against legal and social constraints. The latter relegated women to prescribed roles, often in the domestic sphere, in virtually all social classes.

Whatever their reasons for involvement, the fact remains that women were actively present throughout the period of conflict. In México, Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, known as *La Corregidora*, and Leona Vicario were among the many who supported the cause of independence. The former sounded the cry for independence and alerted the rebels of imminent danger, while the latter left a comfortable home "... first to give material aid and then to join the embattled insurgents in rural México" (Macías 1983: 6).

In Venezuela and Colombia, the arena of some of the bloodiest battles, women were not expected to fight, but some, like Evangelista Tamayo, who fought under Simón Bolívar in the battle of Boyacá, joined the armies. Others, like Teresa Corneja and Manuela Tinoco, fought in numerous skirmishes disguised as men. Although the actions of women like Tinoco and Corneja or Domínguez and Vicario were probably the exceptions, many women fought to defend their homes and cities. On at least one occasion Bolívar acknowledged their valiant efforts, but at the same time, he romanticized them in the stereotypical manner of that period.

... even the fair sex, the delights of humankind, our amazons have fought against the tyrants of San Carlos with a valor divine, although without success. The monsters and tigers of Spain have shown the full extent of the cowardice of their nation. They have used their infamous arms against the innocent feminine breasts of our beauties; they have shed their blood. They have killed many of them and they loaded them with chains, because they

conceived the sublime plan of liberating their beloved country! (quoted in Cherpak 1978: 222)

As nurses in field hospitals, women provided vital services. The military hospital in Caracas, for example, benefitted from the volunteer efforts of "the most beautiful and pleasant ladies in the world, ..." noted Trinidad Morán. "Each one of us believed to have in these ladies a mother or a sister interested in our health and I am not mistaken in saying that many escaped and owe their salvation to such merciful offices ..." (quoted in Cherpak 1978: 224).

On the home front, Creole women, particularly from among the upper and middle classes, were more likely to organize and host *Tertulias* or *Veladas*. These were often intellectual, social-cultural gatherings, which provided the meeting ground for political discussions. In Caracas, Josefa Palacios and her husband, José Felix Rivas, were instrumental in bringing together Venezuelan liberals and intellectuals to vent political grievances and articulate viable solutions. In Quito, Ecuador, Manuela Canizares launched the 10th of August insurrection in one of her *Tertulias*. The Puerto Rican María de las Mercedes Barbudo, agent for the island's separatist movement in San Juan, opened her home for that group's meetings until her exile in 1823. Seducers or propagandists, on the other hand, were, in the eyes of the nationalists, women attempted to sway royalist opinion to their cause. Regarding this group, one army officer remarked, "Nothing can be more prejudicial to the troops than the women who dedicate themselves to seducing ... individuals and to deceiving them by telling them fabulous lies" (quoted in Gross and Bingham 1985: 147).

The prevailing attitude that women were innocents, incapable of deception and inappropriate behavior, aided their wartime efforts. As spies and couriers, they took advantage of the unsettled state of affairs to come and go without arousing suspicion. Some confined their activity to espionage and gathered information on royalist troop movement or the state of military affairs in Spain. They supplied the rebel forces with a network for communication. In this regard few achieved the fame or notoriety of the young Colombian Policarpa Salavarrieta, known as La Pola. Nurtured in a family of separatist sympathizers, La Pola employed her skills as a seamstress to gain entry into Creole homes. Once engaged, she could justifiably spend long periods of time working on her assignments. This gave her the opportunity to determine which families supported the royalist cause or shared divided loyalties, to uncover valuable information on troop movements or maneuvers, and to pass it on to the rebels. In 1817, La Pola was captured and sentenced to die in the plaza of Bogotá.

Surrounded by curious onlookers, she admonished the crowd at her execution:

Indolent people! How different would be our fate today if you knew the price of liberty! But it is not too late. Although I am a woman and young, I have more than enough courage to suffer this death and a thousand more. Do not forget my example! (quoted in Henderson and Henderson 1978: 119).

As the wars progressed, attitudes toward women involved in revolutionary activity changed radically. Women's actions had provided alternatives to the stereotypical notion that labelled them as the harmless, gentle, and weaker sex. Their organizational and leadership abilities were acknowledged. As their visibility and effectiveness increased, women insurgents received harsher punishments. Like La Pola, other unfortunate women were also executed as traitors. They were sent to prisons or convents or exiled for their subversive roles. Many exchanged the ravages of war for the unknown and emigrated to those areas, like Cuba and Puerto Rico, more firmly under royalist control. The lot for exiles was dismal, since women often found themselves as heads of households without benefit of the material and emotional resources available to them in their native lands. But others, particularly *castas* (racially-mixed women) who did not enjoy such options as emigration, followed the common soldier into battle, providing food, clothing, and other necessities. As wives, mistresses, or companions of the soldiers they extended invaluable domestic and personal services. They guided the armies along familiar ground, ministered to the wounded, and buried the dead. Many bore their children on the battlefield.

The *Rabonas* of Peru, for example, sometimes viewed as the precursors to the modern women soldiers, or *soldaderas*, of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, maintained a semblance of normalcy throughout a period of extreme stress and chaos. They were described as ". . . women who provide for all the soldiers' needs, who wash and mend their clothes, receive no pay and have as their only salary the right to steal with impunity" (quoted in Gross and Bingham 1985: 45). These women were not married but lived with the soldiers, ate with them, and experienced the same dangers.

Unlike its Spanish colonial counterpart, Brazil escaped with a bloodless revolution and entered its imperial epoch when Napoleon invaded Portuguese shores in 1807. Protected by the British royal navy, the entire Portuguese court fled to safety in Brazil. There Dom Joao VI severed ties with Lisbon's commercial monopoly by opening Brazilian ports.

Distressed by what he perceived as a backward society lacking libraries, printing presses, academic faculties, and commerce, the Portuguese monarch created new institutions in exile. These included a national library, museums, and a botanical garden. Professionalism was fostered in the plastic arts and foreign immigration encouraged. Fourteen years later when the restored monarchy in Portugal attempted to curtail Brazilian autonomy, Dom Pedro I defied Lisbon and remained in Rio. He convened a Constituent Assembly to proclaim the country's independence and in the process launched the period of empire in Brazilian history.

Even in Brazil, where the road to independence was largely devoid of the bitter hostilities to be found in surrounding republics, women participated in liberation efforts. One fanciful incident is described by Graham, regarding a young, ardent nationalist, María de Jesús, who donned men's clothing to join a regiment.

She is illiterate, but clever. Her understanding is quick, and her perceptions are keen. I think, with education she might have been a remarkable person. She is not particularly masculine in her appearance, and her manners are gentle and cheerful. She has not contracted anything coarse or vulgar in her camp life, and I believe that no (scandal) has ever been substantiated against her modesty. One thing is certain, that her sex never was known until her father appealed to her commanding officer to seek her (Graham 1969: 294).

While Latin Americans waged long, arduous battles to gain their independence, the Caribbean islands of Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico followed a different path. As a direct result of the French Revolution, the slave rebellion led by Toussaint L'Ouverture in 1804 concluded with the proclamation of Haitian independence. Santo Domingo, the eastern half of the island shared by Haiti, declared its independence from Spain in 1822 only to suffer a Haitian invasion and occupation that would last until 1844. In the aftermath and devastation of the Haitian Revolution, Cuba supplanted many of the activities of the former French possession and developed into a major sugar producer and slave entrepôt. Immigration from Florida, Louisiana, and Santo Domingo contributed to expansion and diversification of trade, and the introduction of large-scale sugar production. As a result, Cuban elites generally favored the economic changes that had led to increased prosperity and, fearing slave rebellions similar to those fought in Haiti, remained loyal to Spain.

In contrast to the very visible *criollo* leadership forged in Cuba, Puerto Rican national consciousness

was in its early stages when the Wars of Independence erupted. Although armed confrontation hardly took place in the Spanish Caribbean, similar sentiments and grievances were already being articulated regarding the position of Creoles in colonial society. As the islands were key in the colonial defense network, they served as points of disembarkation for Spanish troops deployed throughout the continent. Although Latin American, particularly Venezuelan, rebels sought to secure Antillean independence, it was virtually impossible to do so given the heavy Spanish military presence. By 1824, Cuba and Puerto Rico were all that remained of the Spanish empire. Throughout that century, Spain would try to recoup her losses by intensifying the colonialization and production of both.

We know little about the direct involvement of women in these early stages of political activity, but by mid-century their presence was indisputable. Throughout the decade of the sixties, small bands of women collaborated with separatists who persisted in their efforts and struggles to attain Antillean independence. These revolutionary movements peaked simultaneously in 1868, with the proclamations of the *Grito de Yara* in Cuba and the *Grito de Lares* in Puerto Rico. Independence and the abolition of slavery were the primary goals of the insurgents, but the Pact of Zanjón, which brought hostilities to an end, accomplished neither. By the decade of the nineties the movement for Antillean independence was rekindled, and exiles formed the Cuban and Puerto Rican Revolutionary Party to obtain, as the patriot José Martí declared, "with the united effort of all men of good will, the absolute independence of the island of Cuba, and to foment and aid that of Puerto Rico" (quoted in Keen and Wasserman 1984: 407). In spite of the gender reference made in the statement, women were integral to the insurrections and political conflicts of both countries, but they achieved limited modifications in their own legal or social status as a result. Elite women like Lola Rodríguez de Tió, credited with writing the revolutionary anthem, and Mariana Bracetti, who sewed the banner of Lares, were instrumental in the Puerto Rican cause. Less prominent sympathizers joined secret societies that orchestrated the revolts. More often than not, these societies included a membership related by blood or marriage, intent on protecting class interests.

In Cuba, elite and non-elite families were brought directly into the conflict when hundreds were imprisoned, exiled, or executed for the deeds of their loved ones. Following the examples set by people like Mariana Grajales, the mother of insurgent Antonio Macéó, and María Cabrales, his wife, women provided shelter, safety, and provisions for the rebel armies. In her sixties when the war shattered her

past life, Mariana was able to put the experiences of a comfortable lifetime behind her. She watched over the families of the soldiers and nursed the wounded. Her daughters and daughters-in-law joined the women of the fighting men to work beside her in providing refuge.

The poet-patriot of the Cuban Revolution, José Martí, described Mariana Grajales in the newspaper *Patria* as a faithful revolutionary, who, as her husband lay dying, urged her compatriots to continue the battle. She nursed the wounded on the battlefield—Spaniard and Cuban alike. On bleeding feet, she followed the stretcher carrying her wounded son, Antonio Macéó, but admonished his followers against despair. In Martí's words, this was truly the mother of the Cuban nation.

Arrom 1985; Cherpak 1978; Graham 1969; Gross and Bingham 1985; Henderson and Henderson 1978; Jiménez de Wagenheim 1985; Keen 1986; Keen and Wasserman 1984; Lavrin 1978; Lynch 1973; Macías 1983; Zavala and Rodríguez 1980.

Women's Status Following Independence

The image of woman as the long-suffering mother, provider of shelter, warmth and nourishment, was a traditional one in keeping with Ibero-American heritage. For the most part, the activities of the women who emerged in participatory roles throughout the period remained within prescribed boundaries. In the aftermath of independence, women were fully expected to return to their traditional and proper sphere as wives and mothers. However, women also demonstrated admirable intelligence and capability, particularly with regard to organization and insurrection, throughout the first quarter of the century. Their ability to support and pursue political stands on behalf of their nations afforded adequate preparation for full and equal participation in the affairs of the new republics. Yet, despite the fact that some transformations in women's roles were evident in the period before independence, their social and legal status remained virtually unchanged regardless of class or color. Contradictions abounded in countries where constitutions promoted theoretical equality, qualified male suffrage, and abolition of slavery but denied women emancipation and the franchise. In effect, women could not hold public office, vote, advocate, or be a witness in a court of law, or adopt or become a guardian over minors. With few exceptions they formed part of a disfranchised group that included minors, slaves, invalids, criminals, and the retarded.

With the exception of Cuba and Puerto Rico, which remained directly under the corpus of Spanish law, civil codes were enacted throughout Latin America that, more often than not, upheld the legal status of

women based on Hispanic law. Under such laws male authority predominated in society and in the home. Neither single sons nor single daughters became independent during the father's lifetime. Although personal and juridical independence could occur at twenty-three to twenty-five years of age, single women often remained at home under the protection of male relatives. Widows and single emancipated women on their own could exercise a substantial degree of control over their legal matters, but married women were less privileged. Although they could inherit and bequeath wealth, hold property, retain custody of children in most separations, and keep their maiden surnames, married women were almost completely subordinate to their spouses. It is known that some women sued for the dissolution of their marriages, but in general, divorce was rare (Arrom: 1985). Matrimony continued to be the institution that accorded husbands administrative control over their wives' properties even though some exceptional women succeeded in negotiating favorable marriage contracts that gave them some control. For the most part, women could not enter into legal contracts, work, or utilize their wages without their husbands' approval. Moreover, the *patria potestas* that had given fathers legal, personal, and economic authority over their children throughout the Colonial period remained in effect.

Historians contend that the transformations of the early decades of the nineteenth century had minimal effects on women's roles. With few exceptions, attitudes regarding women remained intact in spite of women's demonstrated ability for full participation and integration into all levels of the society. Periods of violence, political unrest, economic instability, and pronounced foreign influence characterized many of the new republics in the first four decades of the nineteenth century. Frequent shifts in government between liberal and conservative orientations necessitated a preoccupation with establishing sound political systems rather than social reforms.

To be sure, class, status, race, and work continued to separate women much as they had done in the past. For most women, life centered in the countryside where Indians, blacks, *mestizos*, and *mulattoes* formed the bulk of an agrarian labor force as they had done in centuries past for wealthy landowners and their families. The gap between elite wives, sisters, and daughters, and all other women was wide, but the upper classes set rigid standards of behavior, nevertheless, over less-prestigious social groups. Ideally, women were expected to live and die within the context of patriarchal societies, strictly ordered on gender roles sanctioned by legal and cultural foundations. In more practical terms, while they were subordinate to men in each class, women continued

to execute pivotal roles in society. Upper- and middle-class women could be found as heads of households, owners of mines and *haciendas*, active entrepreneurs, and benefactors of religious and charitable institutions. Among the lower classes, women participated in the economic life of the family through agricultural production, as shopkeepers, market vendors, and artisans. If land was available for subsistence farming, patriarchal households predominated among Indians and *mestizos*. However, when the numbers of people within the household surpassed the availability of land, family configurations shifted. Lynn Stoner (1987) suggests the emergence of a market economy, commercialization of land and labor, and a reduction in accessible land often resulted in an increase in female-headed or extended households (Stoner 1987: 114). In fact, the existence of parallel-structured, female-headed households at all levels of society is evidenced by census and baptismal documentation (Lavrin 1987: 110; Arrom 1985: 78).

At another level, women found strength and power in home and family. They supervised their children's training and education, and some administered well-staffed homes with servants, cooks, and extended-family members. Protected by church and state, women fulfilled their predestined roles as wives and mothers through wedlock. Marriage ensured legitimacy, and, while the state protected the institution through legislation, the church sanctioned its moral codes. Along with Indians, blacks, and *castas*, white women outside elite circles were less restricted in terms of marriage. Many among the lower and lower-middle classes lived in consensual unions rather than legal matrimony. Regardless of the type of bonding and the configuration of the home, the family and women's place within it continued to be regarded as the pillar of society.

Ancestry predominated as a key factor in social mobility throughout Spanish and Portuguese America and in the islands of the Caribbean. By the mid-nineteenth century, a few elite family networks came to dominate regional and national affairs. In some cases, ties continued between old colonial families and "new" ones founded by eighteenth-century immigrants who married into Creole families, but the breakdown of administrative and financial structures following independence also paved the way for new familial ascendancy. Through the careful manipulation of marriages and kinship and its relationship to the state, families achieved and expanded their power into the public arena. Indeed, connections between powerful families dating from the late colonial period and the political parties of the national period are well documented (Balmori *et al.* 1984). Interconnected family networks extended their

hegemony beyond the provincial and regional levels through the political party structure. It was precisely through the construction of notable or dynastic families, founded on kinship and marital alliances, that nineteenth-century economic activities translated into power, prestige, and wealth. The placement of family members into key government positions assured protection and patronage for the interests of the group. In the cities, small groups of well-to-do, old families also united to one another for generations through marriage, dominating the political and economic structure. In all, these networks operated on a common understanding that enabled them "to expand their power and preeminence until they dominated Latin American society at all levels" (Balmori *et al.* 1984: 43). By the first decades of the twentieth century, the influence of elite family networks gave way to interest-based political and bureaucratic structures. Significantly, contemporary non-elite families utilize marriage, ritual kinship, business association, and political influence as did the earlier elites, "thus confirming the strength of cultural traditions supporting the institution of the family regardless of class" (quoted in Lavrin 1988: 6).

Arrom 1985; Balmori *et al.* 1984; Lavrin 1987, 1988.

EDUCATION

By the mid-nineteenth century enlightened leaders in many Latin American countries, cognizant of the strides necessary for the progress of the young nations, proposed reforms intended to raise social and economic standards and formulated the first opportunities to bring about changes in women's status. These included expansion and revisions in secular education. In general, education for women was perceived as one way to eradicate backwardness and promote national progress. In countries like Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil, movements for the abolition of slavery in the last third of the nineteenth century paralleled attempts to integrate women into expanded educational structures. Emancipation for slaves, it was generally believed, would spark awareness of the lack of consideration, equality, and opportunity where women were concerned. However, other Caribbean nations in which slavery had already been abolished experienced limited educational growth through lack of either financial or social support. In some countries, financial support for education was problematic regardless of gender. Where strict separation of the sexes in public affairs was customary, nations were not prepared to establish coeducational, secular school systems where boys and girls would be educated together. The need to educate women was perceived by some people as frivolous, but others

interpreted and feared the move as the initial steps toward future demands for equality.

In the West Indies, different traditions developed regarding education. Because of an intensive plantation economy that exported sugar to a global market, slavery accounted for a majority population of African descent. West African heritage had included greater freedom for women, who were expected to control village trade and manage individual households in polygamous marriages. Slavery in the Americas frequently meant the breakup of family structures, underscoring what current research indicates as functioning and viable matrilocal households (Bilby and Steady 1981; Mathurin 1975). West Indian Maroon societies, for example, established by runaway slaves throughout the Caribbean, were also matrilocal in organization. In both Maroon and slave communities women, although subordinate to men in general, represented a valuable and stable element. This was particularly true with the conclusion of the slave trade in 1807. Women cultivated the land, controlled the Sunday markets, and provided the basic necessities of the family. In shaping their societies, women forged their African heritage with the culture of resistance, survival, and solidarity that evolved in many West Indian slave communities. These traditions aided the survival of the slave family in the past and now functioned as the foundation for the free agrarian societies that characterized many of the islands throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Therefore, based on the different, more independent role played by women, and the degree of influence exerted by the metropolises, island colonies like Barbados and Jamaica posed no difficulty in supporting education for both sexes. As a result, educated women were valued and rapidly became employed in conventional feminine professions, such as teaching and nursing, early on (Gross and Bingham 1985: 68).

Initially, education throughout Latin America was intended to strengthen women's primary role within the context of the family, as reproducers of the work force and transmitters of culture. Women teachers emerged from these early educational systems and returned to reform them. Once educated, a cadre of experienced, often middle-class, women turned their attention to their own emancipation, demanding their rightful place in the developments of their countries. In México, considered a fair barometer for change in Latin America before independence, developments in education advanced significantly after the Bourbon Reforms (Arrom 1985: 34). As early as 1807, the *Diario de México* supported the rights of women to an education in the belief that, once enlightened, they would contribute toward the state's progressive aspirations. The writer Fernando Lizardi, focused

his novel, *La Quijotita* (1817), around the theme of educational reforms for women. Between 1831 and 1843, legislation was proposed regarding the establishment of schools for girls in Puebla, México's second largest city. Arguments about the education of women were utilitarian-based. One priest, director of the *Colegio de Enseñanzas de Nuestra Señora de los Gozos*, remarked:

It does not escape you how much influence mothers have in the education of their children and once mothers are educated, in great part will public customs improve, since their example will at least serve to moderate the violent passions of their children (Vaughan 1986: 28).

By 1842, legislation in México City approved mandatory education for both sexes, ages 7 to 15 (Arrom 1985: 18). The earliest schools for girls in México City appeared in 1869, followed in the next five years by similar establishments in other provincial cities. By the decade of the eighties, legislators supported compulsory education and the adoption of a single, well-defined school curriculum.

If the curriculum established for Puebla serves as a prototype for other cities and provinces, it can be assumed that religion played a significant role in the secular schools. Children were taught reading and writing from catechisms. At public examinations, catechism was recited for government officials. Before class, children prayed *salves* to the Virgin and added the rosary on Saturdays. Many of these activities took place in classrooms adorned with holy images. By 1842, President Santa Anna decreed the Virgin of Guadalupe as Holy Protectress of all the schools in México (Vaughan 1986: 18).

Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century liberal reformers included influential individuals such as President Benito Juárez, educator José María Vigil, and legislator Justo Sierra. This group generally approved secular education for women, not only as a means of achieving equality but also to lessen conservative-supported, Catholic Church control over females and, consequently, the family. Well-prepared teachers were expected to graduate from the normal schools purified of "superstition and thoroughly imbued with the values of science, work, time, patriotism and citizenship" (Vaughan 1986: 30). Educated women were expected to become supportive wives, efficient homemakers, and enlightened parents of strong, active, and decisive children. Widows and other single heads of household also needed the skills acquired through education in order to make a living for themselves and their families. It was, after all, the family that wove together the fabric of Mexican society. Sierra believed, for example, that Mexican schools were

forming men and women for the home; this is our supreme goal. In doing it, we believe firmly that we are performing a service beyond comparison with any in the benefit of the Republic . . . The educated woman will be truly one for the home; she will be the companion and the collaborator of man in the formation of the family (Vaughan 1979: 66-67).

Within this context the notion of earning advanced degrees beyond the basics met with considerable resistance, and it was not before 1888 that women were permitted to study for the professions. Matilda Montoya, the first woman to attend classes with male students at the National School of Medicine, inspired Columba Rivera to matriculate and graduate as México's second female physician. By 1904, Anna Macías points out there were at least three practicing female physicians in México City, with twice that many enrolled in the medical school (Macías 1983: 56). In addition, vocational schools assumed the responsibility for preparing countless young women for employment in clerical, telephone, telegraph, and other industries.

Education for women became a symbol of progress and culture in many of the new republics, in Brazil, and in the Caribbean. In Argentina, the earliest institutions to promote educational opportunities for girls came about with the establishment of the Society of Beneficence of Buenos Aires (1823-1948). This organization was charged with operating a public elementary school system. Administered by a cross-section of government-appointed elite women, the Society provided the model for other charitable institutions and a place for the talents of academically prepared women but had minimal effect on mass education. In time, the Society shifted focus to social welfare projects and offered a wide range of services for women and children.

By mid-century, leading intellectuals and reformers like Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento advanced progressive ideas regarding the place of women and public education in Argentine society. Exiled during the Rosas régime, Sarmiento and others viewed firsthand the educational processes under way in Europe and the U.S.A. Sarmiento, who had the opportunity to put many of his ideas into practice during his presidency (1868-1874), was convinced that government-supported free public schools were essential for national progress. He founded a secular coeducational school system in Paraná, which trained the nation's first generation of normal school teachers. Normal schools, established by the state along the lines of North American pedagogical philosophies and methods, emphasized questioning, reasoning, self-discipline, physical fitness, and manual labor. Since female students in

particular would generate great influence over Argentine youth, their program of study combined domestic economy with courses in scientific child-rearing, furniture purchasing, budgeting, and household management.

In Argentina education went beyond the primary levels to include vocational training that prepared women for diverse types of employment. By 1870, commercial progress resulted in a demand for workers in numerous sectors. Industrial, trade, agricultural, and commercial institutions emerged to prepare young people to meet the challenge. Commercial schools for women added classes in typing, telegraphy, accounting, stenography, and other subjects to their curriculum. By 1907 aspirations to study on the secondary level were met with the opening of the National Girls' High School #1 in Buenos Aires. The curriculum encompassed coursework in chemistry, natural history, anatomy, psychology, and geography. Domestic science, needlework, music, and physical education completed the women's program. Interestingly enough, it was middle-class youth and those of immigrant stock who readily availed themselves of such opportunities. Centers of learning such as those described would produce the educated elite responsible for the initial transformations in women's roles in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, as Cynthia Little cautions, despite the degree of academic proficiency or comprehensive preparation for a career, "the restrictive nature of the Argentine Civil Code as it related to women hindered them from competing as equals in business. For example, a married woman had to receive her husband's permission before engaging in any profession, and she could not sign a contract" (Little 1978: 241).

Among the northern republics of South America, Colombia's earliest public schools appeared in 1821, following precedents set in the late eighteenth century when instructional centers for boys and girls were established sporadically in some of the provinces. At that point plans to expand educational opportunities, especially for girls, had been hindered by lack of resources. By 1832 however, intent on improving the condition of women, the *Colegio de la Merced* opened its doors offering, in addition to a traditional curriculum, courses in Spanish, French, drawing, and music. Efforts were renewed in 1870 to unify public instruction throughout the nation and to establish normal schools for teacher training in each state. The inauguration in 1872 of the first normal school class of eighty students in Bogotá signalled an important but lengthy process in increasing the educational opportunities for women.

Education in Brazil was largely the prerogative of those entitled to its benefits by birth, color, or gender.

As Hahner illustrates, the Brazilian census of 1872 counted a total population of 10,112,061. However, only some 1,012,097 free men, 550,981 free women, 958 slave men, and 445 slave women were able to read and write. In 1873, nearly 5,077 primary schools, public and private, were established in the empire. These schools had a total of 114,014 male and 46,246 female pupils. Significantly, the children of wealthier families were often educated at home rather than in the frequently poorly run schools (Hahner 1980: 69).

As early as 1827 girls had been admitted to primary schools in Brazil and instructed in domestic science. Normal schools for teacher training appeared almost a decade later, and these offered a rare opportunity for female education. The lack of co-educational facilities, and higher education in particular, inhibited women from advancement. Those persistent few who clamored for learning left the country to pursue their own aspirations. Before women like Rita Lobato Velho Lopes could study in Brazil, many like María Augusta Generosa Estrella and Josefa Agueda Felisbella Mercedes de Oliveira came to the United States to train as physicians. By the end of the century, the health field, which included nursing and midwifery, gained social approval as a career for women and, along with education, provided the few outlets available to women.

Significantly, although Cuba and Puerto Rico remained Spanish colonies, the islands experienced intellectual currents that reflected the rest of Latin America. Liberal reforms in education, emancipation, and the rights of working-class women merited consideration along with the abolition of slavery (Puerto Rico in 1873; Cuba in 1886) and the passbook—a legal document that restricted workers' mobility. Building on the legacy of pioneers like Celestina Cordero, a Puerto Rican educator of the 1820s, women founded organizations advocating the expansion of education for women (Acosta-Belén 1986: 5). Liberal reformers implored women to free themselves from injustice and contribute productively to society. Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, for example, wrote numerous plays that illustrated the important role of women in Puerto Rican society, and historian Salvador Brau went so far as to defend the education of peasant women and laborers. By the last third of the century, an educator, Eugenio María de Hostos, was instrumental not only in establishing the island's public school system but in extending his educational philosophies to Chile, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and other countries throughout the hemisphere.

Throughout Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean, similar patterns emerge regarding

women's education. Resistance against educating women rested on the belief that they would overstep their proper place in the home and society, challenging male authority in the process. Whereas some individuals maintained that women would merely abuse the privilege of literacy, others feared educated women might be thought too worldly for marriage. Moreover, education had been traditionally reserved for the upper classes. The notion of mass education, which included indigenous non-Spanish speaking people as well as the lower classes heightened class prejudices.

More often than not, the curriculum designed for girls differed from the one prepared for boys. It was intended to prepare young women for roles as enlightened housewives rather than as active, equal partners in society. The only accessible road beyond the primary school for women was the normal school. This resulted in the feminization of the school systems, most evident at the primary levels. It is not surprising, therefore, that significant movements to initiate changes in women's social and legal status, particularly from the 1880s to the 1930s, would disproportionately come from teachers. In addition, this period was one in which women were primary players in rural to urban migrations, and increasingly mobilized into an industrialized workforce. It gave rise to numerous workers' organizations, imbued with socialist or anarchist ideology, which ultimately challenged the status quo, demanding social justice and economic reforms.

Acosta-Belén 1986; Arrom 1985; Bilby and Steady 1981; Gross and Bingham 1985; Hahner 1978, 1980; Lavrin 1978, 1987; León de Leal 1977; Little 1978; Macías 1982; Mathurin 1975; Picó 1986; Rivera 1986; Vaughan 1979, 1986.

SOCIETIES IN TRANSITION: 1880s-1930s

Depending on geography and resources, pace and progress throughout Latin America varied greatly in the decades bridging the centuries. Women's traditional roles and status underwent transformation generally because of factors affecting society at large. Cuba's and Puerto Rico's entrance into an international market, characterized by an intensification of a modern and technologically improved sugar-production system, was drastically curtailed when the islands passed into American hands in 1898. Regionalism increased in Brazil throughout the last third of the nineteenth century, but the advent of the railroad, steamships, and

communications stimulated development in southern urban centers. Brazilian wealth and power rested firmly on a traditional coffee plantation economy until the nation exploded into the modern age with the establishment of the Republic in 1888. In México, Central, and South America, politics and economics responded to European industrialization by accommodating foreign investment and technology, which in turn created the necessary infrastructure for expansion but bound nations into neo-colonial relationships. Economically, many Latin American countries continued to depend on the export of raw materials, either agricultural or mineral production; however, industrialization in countries like Argentina, Chile, México, and Brazil became a significant factor before the onset of the twentieth century. Urban societies emerged, and the economic growth of such sectors projected population movements from country to city, promoting a growing proletariat in the process. In addition, the period witnessed massive European immigration, especially to Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, which satisfied a growing demand for labor but also introduced new social and political ideologies.

In the cities urbanization and industrialization coupled with the search for equal rights. By the turn of the century, increasing numbers of women were employed as seamstresses, artisans, and food processors. Throughout the continent they entered domestic service, and although those in that sector disproportionately suffered abuse and exploitation, it became the middle-passage between rural and urban life. Teaching, nursing, and clerical employment offered the first opportunities for middle-class women to work outside the home, while factories incorporated women of the lower classes as a cheap source of labor.

Agricultural Economies

The continuing demand by Europe and the U.S. for raw materials (sugar, coffee, wheat, *hènequen*, copper, and nitrates) intensified land and labor expansion throughout Latin America. As land became concentrated in large plantations or *haciendas*, a landless peasantry formed, one which was forced to trade or sell its labor for survival. *Haciendas* were self-sufficient, large farms based on semi-feudal labor relations, and plantations were large land holdings often based on slave labor. They exported commercial agricultural products to a world market. As in the past, women of the lower classes in rural, non-industrialized areas continued

to perform important social and economic functions as producers and reproducers of the labor force. Peasant families were bound to the *hacienda* through coercion, often debt peonage, but they had access to the land for subsistence farming. Women's work in the fields was augmented by their responsibility to process food, cook, sew, weave, and raise livestock. In addition to sustaining their own families, they provided for the well-being of the *hacienda* family.

In Indian communities where land was useful for commercial export production, it became fair game for appropriation. Many displaced Indians became laborers on the *haciendas*, with some exceptions. In areas like southern México, Central America, and the Andean region, where agricultural production was controlled by the peasantry, or where Indian exploitation was less direct, these communities became vulnerable but were not destroyed (Greishaber 1979). Various systems emerged, depending on the region and its resources, to draft Indians as contract laborers for the *haciendas*. Such arrangements led to significant community relocation and, at least in Guatemala and Peru, to a re-indianization of the coastal areas.

One response on behalf of the Indian communities to resist the changes exerted on their internal social organization was a conscious effort toward non-assimilation, isolation, strict adherence to indigenous traditions, and protection for land and way of life. Current research indicates women played key roles in these efforts as agents of resounding cultural and economic impact. Indian women transmitted the customs and work ethics of their ancestors, maintaining communities impervious to the dominant cultural and religious order. They operated village and small urban markets supplying woolen goods, farm produce, and household crafts to townspeople. Testimonials like those of Rigoberta Menchú (Burgos-Debray: 1985) and Domitila Barrios de Chungara (Barrios de Chungara and Viezzer: 1978) represent a steady, unbroken chain of traditional behavior passed from one generation to the next in indigenous societies. Here, women's roles are not only vital for the survival of the group, but for the ancestral community as well.

Barrios de Chungara and Viezzer 1978; Deere 1979; Greishaber 1979; Keen 1986; Keen and Wasserman 1984; Menchú 1985; Nash and Safa 1986; Towner 1979.

Caribbean Societies

Slave society characterized Brazil and the islands of the Caribbean for a good part of the nineteenth

century. In these societies race, color, and ethnicity were facts of life, the "indelible badge of status and condition" (Knight 1978). Generally speaking, the broadest social base represented the vast majority of slaves. Originally most slaves were African-born, but the end of the slave trade in 1807 had contributed to an increase in the numbers born in the Americas. Individuals of mixed ancestry were found within this group. The middle group consisted of free people of color—blacks and *mulattoes*—who enjoyed few of the privileges of the ruling class. The smallest group—the white population—controlled the political and economic apparatus and exercised enormous social influence.

Black women worked the land, and some researchers believe that prior to emancipation (1833 in the British colonies and 1848 in the French) they toiled longer in the fields than did male slaves (Higman 1979: 101). *Mulatto* female slaves were often found as house servants, where many were said to have enjoyed advantages denied to field slaves. They were accorded more leisure, for example, endured less coercion, and had greater opportunities for manumission. Yet the actual contributions of both female slaves and free women of color, in the social and economic development of Caribbean plantation society, are still to be detailed.

After abolition, a small independent peasantry arose that farmed less productive land; but the status of former slaves as free men and women made little difference in the social or economic order. In most of the Caribbean islands, whites continued to form a small but powerful minority. Following emancipation, women were the first to retire from agricultural work, but differential migratory patterns—at first rural to urban, then in the twentieth century from colony to metropole—often left women as the sole support of their children. Females in Caribbean households frequently made a living not only by owning their own farms but by marketing their produce and working as agricultural laborers on a part-time basis (Henshall 1981: 44).

In Cuba and Puerto Rico, Creoles accounted for a sizable portion of the total population of both islands, the remainder composed of a free mixed contingent and slaves. This condition had motivated the creation of a legally enforced system of labor. Regimented through a passbook system, in effect from 1849 to 1873, the work and mobility of peasant men and women over the age of sixteen was regulated. Free women of lower socioeconomic status had therefore been accustomed to agricultural and other types of work. The picking and thrashing of the berries in the coffee fields was virtually a woman's task, and in the tobacco industry women worked as strippers,

classifiers, and bundlers of tobacco leaves. In the towns women took in laundry, and girls were hired out as domestics at an early age. Commonly referred to as *criadas*, they worked day and night subject to the whims and demands of the employing family. As the century came to a close, however, women of the middle and upper classes were already found in the teaching and nursing professions.

Bilby and Steady 1981; Gross and Bingham 1985; Henshall 1981; Higman 1978; Knight 1978; Mathurin 1975; Rivera 1986.

WOMEN AS FEMINISTS AND WORKERS

Aware of the challenges posed by societies at different stages of transition, aggressive leaders sought to broaden their electoral bases by adopting legislative and educational reforms relevant to the requirements of a growing economy and alleviating social conditions. Within this climate small groups of women, often educated and middle class, led an important struggle to transform the status of women. Although they did not represent a majority of the female population, their movement offered a viable ideology for coping and explaining transitions in women's roles at a critical historical juncture. In many countries it coincided with another movement stressing equality and rights for women and children workers led by the rank and file of the working class.

The idea of gender equality, referred to as liberation or emancipation in the literature of the period, was considered by some individuals as the logical evolution of the relationship between the sexes. However, significant numbers of women, as well as men, opposed such views, fearing that equality spelled the initial breakdown of home and family. Many women supported traditional gender roles that oriented women toward the home, while men, accustomed to societies that stressed male values and roles, were understandably reluctant to compromise their legally sanctioned domination. Therefore, advancement for women, by attempting to restructure the civil codes, increase education, improve wages and work conditions, and subsequent political enfranchisement, meant confronting formidable opposition. It proved to be a lengthy and uneven process throughout the hemisphere.

Essentially women's concerns covered a wide range of issues. They wished equality before the law: to make their own decisions, eliminate the double standard, expand their educational horizons, and aid in the progress of their countries. Women wanted to become self-sufficient. They were concerned about the deplorable conditions affecting working women, children, and the poor and articulated the need for

protective legislation in this regard. Although the term "feminism" was rarely used, by the last third of the nineteenth century an ideology of activism oriented around issues of concern to women became evident. This continued into the early decades of the twentieth century culminating in a second feminist wave in modern times, which influenced the reforms of the civil codes and secured the vote for women.

For some, feminist consciousness evolved as a result of education. Asunción Lavrin (1986) suggests changes in women's status in Argentina accrued primarily from the impetus of middle-class, educated women. And both June Hahner (1980) and Anna Macías (1983) highlight the extraordinary work of teachers in Brazil and México, respectively, in fomenting feminist ideology through their writings and organizational activity. For others, it was inspired as a result of travel abroad or awareness of the impressive gains made by women in progressive European countries or the U.S.A.

Cecilia Grierson, for example, Argentina's first female doctor and author of several medical treatises, traveled extensively throughout Europe, where she studied the latest techniques in the treatment of the blind and hearing impaired. In her native country, Grierson organized one of the earliest academies for the study and teaching of retarded children. The Brazilian feminist Bertha Lutz was also educated in Europe, and the Chilean Amanda Labarca, who organized reading circles between 1915 and 1918 on the writings of earlier feminists, received her academic foundations in the U.S.A.

Feminism and its goals were defined in many ways. Writing in *La Ondina de Plata*, published in Buenos Aires in the 1870s, María Eugenia Echenique debated the benefits deriving from the emancipation of women to the individual and society. To Echenique, emancipation meant "absolute freedom to work and to carve their own destinies, although remaining as men's companions" (Lavrin 1986: 4). Uruguayan feminist María Abella y Ramírez defined feminism as "nothing else than a new doctrine of freedom for the woman who proclaims herself as an enemy of all slavery. . . . When feminism triumphs, we will not be dominated by men; we will enjoy freedom and so will be as happy as they are, because being free is one of the greatest things in the world" (quoted in Lavrin 1986: 6). The Argentinian, Adelia de Carlo spoke of freedom in the 1920s, when she defined feminism as liberation from the state of "servitude" and a "return of their human integrity to women." By the decade of the thirties, Isabel Andréu de Aguilar, among the first graduates of the University of Puerto Rico, described feminism as a doctrine that "establishes equality between the sexes as a

fundamental principle, equality in duties and rights in order to build a more perfect society within its ideology of liberty" (quoted in Valle-Ferrer 1986: 77).

Latin American feminists were concerned about their gender image from the inception of the movement and dedicated enormous energy to clarifying their position. In formulating feminist ideology, gender roles, so much a part of Latin heritage, were not discarded. One of the underlying premises in feminist thinking was that the philosophy enhanced the traditional role of women as wives and mothers. In her 1901 study on the subject, Elvira López emphasized the fact that feminism in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay was not the struggle of women against men. Rather, it was a battle to gain economic and educational opportunities similar to men's. A similar outlook was proposed by the Argentinian socialist feminist Dr. Alicia Moreau de Justo. "For me, feminism is not apart from social reality. The woman liberates herself along with the man and not against him. That liberation is a particular form of the struggle against capitalism and social injustice" (quoted in Corbiere 1982: 73).

Education was valued among feminists precisely because it would make women better mothers. The editors of *La Mujer Mexicana* (1904-1908) stressed education along with equality as the ultimate strength of the home and society. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Cuban feminists advocated changes in women's status by praising motherhood and upholding the sanctity of the home. The Brazilian Bertha Lutz, generally more radical in her approach to feminism, also viewed the emancipation of women as beneficial to society. Initiating the suffrage movement in 1918, Lutz qualified the establishment of a League of Brazilian women in the following manner.

I am not proposing an association of "suffragettes" who would break windows along the street, but, rather, of Brazilians who understand that a woman ought not to live parasitically based on her sex, taking advantage of man's animal instincts, but, rather, be useful, educate herself and her children, and become capable of performing those political responsibilities which the future cannot fail to allot her. Thus, women shall cease to occupy a social position as humiliating for them as it is harmful to men. They shall cease being one of the heavy links that chain our country to the past, and instead, become valuable instruments in the progress of Brazil (quoted in Hahner 1979: 203-4).

The initial steps taken to dramatize emancipation and other women's issues lay specifically in the publication of journals, essays, and books; the mobilization of women into associations; and organizational

participation in regional, national, and international forums. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, Brazilian feminist newspapers and journals such as *O Jornal das Senhoras* prioritized the "social betterment and the moral emancipation of women" (quoted in Hahner 1978: 257). Edited by former school teacher Joana Paula Manso de Noronha, the journal operated on the premise that women were intelligent, capable, and merited equality. The journal portrayed women as integral and contributing partners in the home, dispelling stereotypical images of the female as doll-like, spoiled, one-dimensional reproducers of children. If men were truly concerned about their sons' futures, the editors reasoned, mothers would be respected as the first educators. Subsequent editions connected women with the Virgin Mary and stressed their veneration based on their perceived emotional and spiritual superiority. Other publications accepted the elevated position of women in society in principle but chose to concentrate on improving their lot in the practical world.

The 1870s witnessed a surge in the publication of feminist materials in Brazil. Another former teacher, Francisca Senhorinha de Motta Diniz, published *O Sexo Feminino*, dedicated to "the education, instruction and emancipation of women" (quoted in Hahner 1978: 262). This was followed by *O Domingo, Jornal das Damas*, and *Myosotis. Echo das Damas* appeared under the guidance of Amelia Carolina de Silva Couto. These journals reiterated the importance of education for individual as well as public gains, but while earlier endeavors concentrated on ameliorating male opinion toward women, the latter focused on bringing about change to benefit women directly. Feminists like Francisca Diniz stressed the economic and moral benefits accruing to a country whose women became active participants in its national life.

In Argentina the feminist struggle for women's civil rights, education, improvement in the conditions of the working class, and suffrage assumed international proportions, and solidarity with corresponding women's groups in other countries—Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Chile—with the celebration of the Congress of 1910. The First International Feminist Congress in Buenos Aires, coordinated by Drs. Cecilia Grierson and Petrona Eyle, debated civil rights issues, progressive and special education, divorce, female health concerns, and the application of domestic economy to the home. The congress aimed to establish unity among all women of the world and orient women of diverse social positions to a common understanding. Some participants were more concerned with portraying a positive feminist ideology that would ultimately benefit the family,

society, and the nation. Others hoped to modify prejudice among the classes in an effort to better the social conditions of all women (Landaburú *et al.* 1982: 62-67).

Determined to promote feminism as well-intentioned and intelligent, an influential force that transcended the individual, the congress drew support from the leading feminists and professional women of the period. These included Dr. Julieta Lanteri Renshaw, founder of the National Feminist Party and proponent of women's suffrage; Fenia Chertkoff, one of the first to promote the defense of children's rights and denounce the social, sexual exploitation of women; and Dr. Alicia Moreau de Justo, socialist founder of the Committee for Women's Suffrage and the National Feminist Union. The congress established wide feminine networks by drawing on a multi-national audience, which included notables like the French scientist Marie Curie and the Italian educator Maria Montessori. The importance of this first attempt to unite women the world over is evidenced by the wide range of official languages utilized in the proceedings: Spanish, English, Russian, French, Italian, and German.

By the decade of the twenties, Argentine groups such as Julieta Lanteri Renshaw's Nationalist Feminist Party and Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane's Women's Rights Association lobbied for political and civil emancipation. The urgent need to present a progressive and enlightened image to the outside world culminated in the reforms of the Civil Code in 1926. Women earned limited rights to their own earnings, to inherit in any amount, and to engage in contractual agreements. These reforms and other legislation regulating the working conditions of women and children were due in no small measure to persistent feminist activity.

The Mexican feminist movement, on the other hand, had a character all its own, according to Anna Macías (1983), primarily due to the critical role of the governors of Yucatán. Before the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, small groups of educated women began to demand educational opportunities for all women, decent wages, and reform of the Civil Code with a view toward eliminating the double standard and inequality. Under the leadership of socialist governors Salvador Alvarado (1915-1918) and Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1922-1924), the progressive state of Yucatán, well-endowed with the profits of the *henequen* industry, emerged as the center for the advancement of women. As early as 1870, poet and school teacher Rita Cetina Gutierrez had set precedents for feminist action by founding the journal *La Siempreviva*. The journal's editors established a

secondary school that eventually became the government *Instituto Literario de Niñas*, an institution credited with the preparation of generations of teachers.

Along with Cetina Gutiérrez, Consuelo Zavala y Castillo and Dominga Canto y Pastrana, Governor Alvarado was instrumental in calling the first two feminist congresses in Mexican history, in January and November 1916. Their agendas included the role of women in the political sphere, the primary school, and the work force, but issues on divorce, birth control, and the vote were also discussed. Attended predominantly by teachers, the congresses approved resolutions favoring progressive education, increased vocational and educational opportunities, political participation for women, and reforms in the Civil Code. Carrillo Puerto, who succeeded Alvarado as governor, continued many of his predecessor's programs and accelerated others, including proposing the right for women to vote in municipal elections and run for public office.

Although electoral participation was half-heartedly embraced in México throughout this period, it was overwhelmingly endorsed almost a decade later by the feminists who attended the First Feminist Congress of the Pan American League in México City in 1923. Participants were sent from twenty Mexican states, many of whom also represented the various women's organizations of the period. In addition, participants from the National League of Women Voters, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Parent Teachers Association, the YMCA, the Los Angeles Council of Catholic Women, and the American Birth Control League ensured international support.

Feminism throughout Latin America and the Caribbean directly benefitted middle-class women and drew support from an urban, professional, or white-collar sector. There was, however, a conscious effort on the part of some feminists to address the needs of all women, regardless of class. In achieving this goal, feminists quite naturally extended their agendas to include the poor and the working class that were increasing at an alarming rate throughout the continent. Despite the fact that feminists attempted to civilize rather than incorporate poor and working-class women within their circles, the concerns of the latter frequently meshed with those of the feminists.

Throughout the continent women's working conditions were brutal. Women were expected to work long hours for low wages, and provisions for childcare, health, or sanitary considerations were unheard of. As mechanization increased, jobs became highly skilled and working conditions declined even further. The early decades of the twentieth century also

witnessed an increase in internal migration in search of better-paying industrial employment. In Colombia, for example, the Civil War of 1899 aided migration, industrialization, and the emergence of a salaried labor force. Women were incorporated into this labor force in domestic service and textiles in record numbers (Leon de Leal 1977: 205).

In México, the era of the *Porfiriato* (1876-1910), with its emphasis on progress through industrialization, paved the way for middle-class women to enter the professions, but it also brought countless women into textile factories, railroads, and other commercial-industrial enterprises. These industries were notorious for exploiting their workers. Moreover, industrialization also meant internal migrations and urbanization. According to Anna Macías (1983), the numbers of women who came to the cities and became domestic servants or prostitutes rose dramatically. In 1895, Mexican population reached 12.7 million. Of these over 275,000 were domestic servants. By 1907 México City numbered twice as many prostitutes as Paris, even though the former contained one-fifth the population. Moreover, 30 percent of Mexican mothers were single parents, while 80 percent of the adult population lived in consensual unions. In the journal *La Mujer Mexicana*, published in México from 1904-1908, Professor Esther Huidobro de Azúa lamented, "Unless educated women come to their aid, many such women would swell the already large ranks of prostitutes" (quoted in Macías 1983: 14).

Increasing numbers of women and children in the work force paralleled the growth of factories in most urban areas. This translated into urgent preoccupation over the administration of women's earnings and property, exploitation, unemployment, and decent wage scales, particularly for female heads of households. In many countries socialist or anarchist workers' groups had already begun to advocate equality before the law and protective legislation to ensure justice for women in the work force. Thus, working-class women responded to feminism as part of a broader concept of social and personal freedom. Rather than finding contradictions, working women interpreted compatibility between feminist ideology and workers' goals.

In 1907, for example, Puerto Rican activist Gregoria Molina, president of the Ladies' Union, urged women to form unions as a weapon for the workers' struggle. She reported that women were no longer timid beings tied to their homes but rather the vanguard of the workers' army in the war against oppression. Between 1911 and 1916 the Puerto Rican socialist and union organizer Luisa Capetillo agitated for emancipation for women and improvement of working class conditions in the pages of her

publication, *Ensayos literarios, Mi opinión sobre las libertades, derechos de la mujer como compañera, madre y ser independiente*. Capetillo denounced the double standard as well as those state and religious institutions responsible for over-burdening the working class.

Capetillo also went beyond the feminist point of view by criticizing the class-based attitudes and abuses of middle-class women toward the poor. For the most part, middle-class women reflected moderate thinking focusing on moralistic and legal methods to improve the conditions of the poor. They seldom invited working-class women into their ranks, and argued that until these became respectable, decent or proper women could only respond to the needs of the working class or poor through philanthropic, charitable works. The predominant attitude among the middle class was that women were expected to remain at home. Work was unfeminine and women were not meant to work for wages.

The Cuban socialist Ofelia Domínguez Navarro shared Capetillo's sentiments. Under her direction the *Alianza Nacional Feminista* attempted to include women of all classes. However, like their counterparts throughout the hemisphere, the Cuban feminist movement was also predominantly middle class. The average feminist was a wife, mother, and a professional. Seventy percent of the feminist leadership were married to wealthy men, employed three to seven servants, and had 2.6 children as opposed to 4.5 in the average Cuban family. Thus, their emphasis, in addition to advancing the rights of women, was understandably the preservation of home and family according to their standards (Stoner 1987: 104-5).

Workers' unions and organizations were critical instruments for more accurately articulating the needs, issues, and concerns of working-class women. As early as 1880, strikes led by organized women workers in the tobacco and textile industries were already taking place in México. In general, Mexican unions demanded higher salaries and improved working conditions in the factories. By 1905 the goal of numerous workers' groups, such as the *Hijas de Anahuac*, (Daughters of Anahuac), which organized women in the textile industry, included minimum wages and an eight-hour day. Such groups ultimately fought against the government of Porfirio Díaz in 1910 and in the revolution which ensued. Their concerns were ultimately recognized and addressed in some measure by the government.

It is interesting that even in the newspapers of the worker's organizations, contradictions sometimes appeared regarding working women. Newspapers like *El Socialista*, *La Internacional*, and *La Comuna*

denounced the oppression of women and defended their right to work, but they, too, were known to publish articles that connected women's oppression to their female nature (Towner 1979: 54).

In Puerto Rico organized groups of women workers formed before the turn of the century. By 1901 Josefa Maldonado appealed to her fellow workers to fight for equal pay in the newspaper *Pán del Pobre* (Workers' Bread). Within the first decade of the twentieth century, unions such as *La unión de damas de Puerta de Tierra* (Women's Union of Puerta de Tierra), *La unión de escogedoras de cafe* (Coffee Pickers' Union), and *La unión de obreras domésticas de Ponce* (Domestic Workers' Union) strove for recognition and collective bargaining. Many of these groups unfurled the banner for women's rights, and, since most were affiliated with the island's Socialist party, political gains for women were also defended (Silvestrini 1986: 59-74).

In Chile, working-class women addressed key issues of wage earnings and exploitation in their organizations long before university graduates discussed the tenets of women's liberation in 1915 (Lavrin 1986: 24). Journals like *La Alborada* and *La Palanca* aligned themselves with working-class interests and feminist ideals.

By the decade of the thirties the Argentine Socialist Party's women's journal, *Nuestra Causa*, along with others like the Chilean *El Mercurio* and *La Mujer Nueva*, reiterated the sentiments of the earlier publications when they once again stressed the conditions of working-class women and the need for protective legislation.

Whether the impetus came from feminist groups or workers' organization, agreement existed on the need to improve the status of women.

Acosta-Belén 1986; Corbiere 1982; Gross and Bingham 1985; Hahner 1978, 1979, 1980; Landaburú 1982; Lavrin 1986, 1988; Macías 1983; Picó 1986; Silvestrini 1986; Stoner 1987; Towner 1979; Valle-Ferrer 1986; Vaughan 1979.

POLITICAL ACTION AND ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

Following the First World War, feminists broadened their agenda to include the vote for women in the belief that social change would only be achieved if women were politically empowered. "Winning the vote," as Lynn Stoner surmised, "depended upon three conditions: a crisis in democratic rule; the organization of feminist groups and the involvement of feminists in national struggles for political order" (Stoner 1987: 108). Past experience in the feminist

movement, with socialist, anarchist, and workers' organizations, had paved the way for mobilizing women around common interests and raised levels of awareness about the effectiveness of group pressure. Moreover, the participation of women across class and color lines in such revolutions as the Mexican in 1910 and the Bolivian in 1952 reinforced the dismal reality that women were still subordinate in spite of the limited advancements they had achieved.

However, opposition to female suffrage was formidable. In countries like México that had experienced violent confrontations between church and state, it was feared that women would be unduly influenced by the Catholic Church in their political decisions. In some nations, the very idea that women were capable of reaching decisions on national affairs was difficult to accept. Still others judged women to be politically astute, quite capable of political action. The concern in the latter case often centered on the fear that women would support conservative policies as they had done in Spain's second republic (Macías 1983; Lavrin 1986). In the final analysis, politics was viewed as a masculine game, and women, by their very nature, were not allowed to play.

Among the earliest countries to grant the vote to women, Cuba (1934) and Puerto Rico (1932) generated suffrage movements similar to Latin America, even though both islands were heavily controlled by U.S. economic and political interests. Puerto Rico was ruled directly as an American colony during this period, while Cuba endured the earliest in a series of independent but weak and corrupt governments. By 1930 the U.S.-supported President Machado exercised oppressive control over Cuba, but mounting opposition to his régime included university students, intellectuals, Communists, labor unions, and feminists. Until then, the Cuban feminist movement had been divided between moderates and radicals, split over the issues of illegitimacy and unwed motherhood. The Cuban Committee for the Defense of Women's Suffrage, however, directed by Pilar Jorge de Tella and Ofelia Domínguez Navarro, united all feminists in 1928, regardless of political orientation. The impetus for unity developed when President Machado, in an attempt to buttress an eroding electoral base, promised but then rejected the idea of universal suffrage. His ouster from office in 1933, uniformly supported by feminist groups, cleared the way for granting suffrage in the next administration (Stoner 1987).

The vote was secured for women in Puerto Rico in 1932. In spite of the fact that feminism as a movement had become diffuse, 113 women were elected to the municipal councils in following elections. The first woman to be elected to the island's House of

Representatives was María Luisa Arcelay-Rosa. The owner of a needlework factory in Mayaguez, Arcelay-Rosa was among the earliest proponents of a day-care system, improved working conditions, and progressive managerial techniques. By 1936, María Martínez de Pérez Almirotty was elected to the Senate, signalling a consistent electoral female representation, which continues to the present. On the municipal level, the election of the well-known Felisa Rincón de Guatier as mayor of San Juan from 1948 to 1968 was but one example of the many women elected to that post throughout the island. In a period of thirty years, thirty-nine towns or *municipios* out of a total of seventy-seven elected women mayors in Puerto Rico.

Also granted the vote in 1932, Brazilian women built on the achievements of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminist pioneers, but unlike their predecessors, who struggled for substantive changes for all women, they demanded merely some of the rights reserved for men of their own class. Some made use of the vote, but the majority of Brazilian women did not. Omitted from leadership positions, often because of prejudices regarding the role of women in public life, many remained behind the scenes of a male-dominated society.

Women in Argentina were granted the vote in 1947, one year after General Juan D. Perón was elected to office. Between 1911 and 1946 fifteen separate bills favoring women's suffrage had been defeated by a Senate dominated by conservatives. Perón supported yet another bill which was approved overwhelmingly.

Peronism epitomized a populist ideology that emphasized the dignity of workers, including women, who through their work and home contributed to Argentine development. By mid-century, women comprised close to 22 percent of workers in all of Argentina. They constituted over half of the country's textile, garment, and chemical workers. Under the Peronist government, the first special women's Division of Labor and Assistance was created. This agency took on the responsibility of proposing legislation affecting women. Subsequent legislation prohibited piecework in any industry, and the principle of equal pay for equal work was established in many others.

Perón's years in office were strongly influenced by his wife and political partner, Eva Perón. A dynamic and charismatic figure, Eva provided a critical conduit between the people and Juan Perón. Although she was not formally part of his government and never held an elected post, she exerted a great deal of influence because she was his liaison with labor, head of the Eva Perón Foundation, and president of the Peronist Women's Party. Under her auspices centers were formed in poor and working-class

districts—*unidades básicas*—which extolled Peronist ideology and consciousness of women's rights. They functioned to create day-care centers; provide a meeting place for women; supply free legal and medical care; offer language skills, painting, and sewing classes; give lectures and conferences; and mount annual exhibitions focusing on women's work. In time, these units were institutionalized and absorbed into the Peronist Women's Party under the banner and direct leadership of Eva Perón.

A separate party for women was a strategic political move because it provided a forum for women to acquire individual political expertise and gave them a sense of involvement. However, the platform of the Peronist Women's Party rested on blind devotion, loyalty, and confidence in Perón. Marysa Navarro points out that by 1952 the party had 500,000 members and 3,600 headquarters. In the next elections it increased Perón's majority by giving him over 63 percent of the new women's vote (Fraser and Navarro 1980: 108).

To be sure, contradictions existed within the Argentine political structure, for women did not transcend their definition as the "second sex," according to Hollander (1979). Peronist ideology perpetuated the concept of women as being different: more peaceful and loving—dispositions necessary for the national happiness and well-being. It was precisely for those reasons that suffrage was necessary, argued the Peronists. In the election of 1951, all the elected female candidates were *Peronistas*. However, as quoted in Hollander (1979), Alicia Moreau de Justo contends that, although in working class districts of Buenos Aires a large percentage of women supported *Peronistas*, in upper-middle-class district votes favored the Liberal Radicals. Moreau concludes, therefore, that women voted more from a sense of class rather than in gratitude for the suffrage law (Hollander 1979: 105).

Along with Mexican feminists, middle-class women in support of suffrage emphasized the example of the *soldaderas* (women soldiers) and their contributions toward the formation of the revolutionary state, as one significant reason for granting the vote. But it was not conceded until 1958. Women's role in the Mexican Revolution of 1910 was both central and peripheral. As they had done previously in other wars, women participated as journalists, propagandists, political activists, and also participated against their will, for it was not unusual for women to be forced into grinding corn and making *tortillas* for the armies. For their services some received government pensions; most did not.

The *soldaderas* were literally part of the Mexican army, yet their role was traditional by its very nature. The Mexican *soldadera*, observed John Reed,

follows her man when he leaves home and joins the army. When he dies, she becomes another soldier's woman (Reed 1982). Another perspective of the *soldadera* experience emerged in the commentary of an American diplomat's wife.

A thick and heartbreaking book could be written upon the *soldadera*—the heroic woman who accompanies the army, carrying in addition to her baby, any other mortal possession, such as a kettle, basket, goat, blanket, parrot, fruit and the like. These women are the only visible commissariat for the soldiers: they accompany them in their marches; they forage for them and they cook for them; they nurse them, bury them; they receive their money when it is paid. All this they do and keep up with the march of the army, besides rendering any other service the male may require (quoted in Gross and Bingham 1985: 48).

As campfollowers, their primary concern was to provide for their men in battle, but *soldaderas*, like the famous Zapatista *La Coronela*, were also known to bear arms and participate in actual fighting. Ironically, the *soldadera*, who demonstrated a traditional aspect of women's service to the nation, became an essential part of the campaign to gain suffrage. Between 1929 (Ecuador) and 1961 (Paraguay) the right to vote was secured for women throughout Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean, but this did not guarantee women's full integration, equality, or participation in the affairs of their nations. Most countries, including México, Bolivia, and Colombia, extended the franchise after the 1950s, but opposition to women's electoral participation or running for office remained high. Some heads of state, such as Trujillo of the Dominican Republic and Odría of Peru, extended the vote in an effort to enhance their own political image. Indeed, the general inertia in incorporating women into the political arena, in part responsible for their limited present-day performance at the ballot box, has also resulted in their casting the decisive vote in critical elections. Women's votes were critical for Perón in Argentina and Allesandri in Chile.

Acosta-Belén 1986; Beezely and Ewell 1987; Chaney 1971; Fraser and Navarro 1980; Gross and Bingham 1985; Hahner 1980; Hollander 1979; Keen and Wasserman 1984; Lavrin 1986, 1987; Macías 1983; Randall 1979; Reed 1982; Stoner 1987.

Socio-Cultural and Political Change

The status of women improved somewhat by the mid-twentieth century as they began to use the ballot and hold electoral or appointive office. They entered the universities, professions, the work force, and business in greater numbers. Notable women were

appointed to public office. Chilean Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral, for example, served as special ambassador to the League of Nations and the United Nations; the Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos and Carmen Naranjo of Costa Rica were ambassadors to Israel. In some countries, Brazil and Argentina for example, professional women outnumbered men; but in decision-making and positions of responsibility, the ratios were reversed. However, in the areas of family relationships, divorce, the double standard, and work, progress was less evident. For the most part, entrance into the work force did not redefine traditional gender relations within the family and society. Throughout the continent, changes in the laws affecting women proceeded slowly. In Argentina, for example, the *patria potestas* (authority over one's children) was not extended to women until 1985. In México, as another case in point, it can still be said that "The Mexican family is founded upon two fundamental propositions: (a) the unquestioned and absolute supremacy of the father and (b) the necessary and absolute self-sacrifice of the mother" (quoted in Keen and Wasserman 1984: 481). With some exceptions, this commentary describes many Latin American societies today.

However, both Cuba and Nicaragua have taken giant strides in abolishing gender discrimination in law and practice. In 1960 the Federation of Cuban Women was founded as the vehicle through which women would be integrated into every facet of the revolutionary process within the general framework of the nation's developmental policies. An important outcome of the Cuban Revolution was the emphasis placed on achieving an egalitarian and collectivist society. Encouraged to move toward total integration, women's specific goals were articulated in a manner that coincided or overlapped with overall national priorities. Ideally, the combination of government policies and women's aspirations would produce substantive changes, but in many cases the latter's goals were out-voted. As Max Azicri observed:

Hence rather than pursuing goals on the basis of a status achievement orientation and hard core individualism of a self-seeking feminist ideology as their counterparts in the United States would do, Cuban women are struggling seeking full political participation and real social equality along with and within the parameters established by the government (Azicri 1978: 3).

Inherent in this perspective was the belief that to bring about full social equality and massive political participation, all men and women were obliged to share in nation building. The rewards would accrue to themselves and, more importantly, to future

generations. Although the Cuban Federation of Women originated under government mandate, it emerged as a distinct and effective organism for women's mobilization. It successfully articulated women's aspirations to the revolutionary government while simultaneously communicating state policies and programs to the nation's women. The basic tenets that defined the role of women in the state apparatus were implemented through the establishment of educational and health programs, Children's Circles, Literacy Brigades, women's militia, Women's Improvement Plan, schools for directors of Children's Circles, the Ana Betancourt School for Peasant Girls, and schools for Children's Circle Workers. Fourteen years after its inception, the Federation represented 54 percent of the total female population.

Full integration, however, was far from complete. In 1974, the year of the Federation's Second Congress, Castro addressed this issue when he said, "there remains a certain discrimination against women. It is very real, and the Revolution is fighting it . . . (it) undoubtedly will be a long struggle . . ." (Azicri 1978: 11). In an attempt to reduce gender discrimination the Family Code was introduced in 1976. This legislation mandated the division of household labor and childcare between men and women (Randall 1981).

Yet obstructive factors—a combination of external and internal social structures such as a lack of jobs, boarding schools, and day care, coupled with persistent traditional concepts and prejudices regarding women's place—continued to inhibit full integration. In the workforce, men were still preferred to women. Women were thought to be unreliable because of their maternal duties, and childcare fell heavily upon female shoulders, although the Cuban Constitution stated in Article 43, "Women have the same rights as men in the economic, political and social fields as well as in the family."

Gender issues preoccupied the committees charged with institutionalizing the revolution. Those areas where sexual exploitation was most rampant, such as domestic service and prostitution, were targeted for reform through education and sound economic programs. Many women who came through these programs became productive members of the revolutionary society. They succeeded in securing employment and played active roles in community committees.

For Cuban women social change was initiated following the actual revolution, within the framework of newly-created government policies. Because changes were imposed from above, Cuban society was often reluctant to accept transformation, and conflicts of interest between women's true aspirations and government ideals were not infrequent. In Nicaragua, however, women have been integral to the process of

social transformation since the inception of the revolution. In both rural and urban areas, women fought Somoza's forces by providing food and sustenance for the rebels; they served as spies and organized communication networks. Women assumed high-ranking positions in the rebel army and, following the Sandinista victory in 1979, were incorporated at every level of the new government. Thus, women have had a voice in the design and implementation of all the programs for social, economic, and political reconstruction.

Randall 1981; Stone 1981.

Women as Activists. By the decade of the seventies women's potential impact on political issues became apparent through the mobilization of working- and middle-class housewives in protest of repressive or unpopular governments and through the resurgence of women as significant literary figures. In Chile, right-wing women's groups organized to protest the government of Salvador Allende in 1974 (Mattelart 1980: 279). This contingent denounced disruptive economic conditions spurred by the new political order. Serious rationing and the fear that traditional values were eroding motivated women to take their concerns to the streets, the media, and the home in well-orchestrated protests. *El Poder Femenino* was cited by more than one scholar as a harbinger to the fall of Allende's socialist government. But Pinochet's Chile has also elicited fierce response from women, particularly in protest of the *desaparecidos*—missing persons—and the abuse of human rights. The *arpilleristas*, composed predominantly of women, form one such method of protest. The Catholic Church sponsored the Vicariate of Solidarity, which in turn created the *arpilleras* to aid the relatives of missing persons. Born in the spirit of resistance, the *arpilleras* are tapestry-like, artistic wall hangings where scraps of material are adhered to a broader backing cloth. The themes of each work convey the stories of torture, missing persons or general oppression which grips the nation (Agostín and Scott 1987: 209).

Irma Muller, a Chilean mother who protests against the present [Pinochet's] government, belongs to the Association of Relatives of Detained-Missing Persons. Their activities include demanding information on the whereabouts of approximately ten thousand persons missing between 1973-1983. She articulates her commitment:

The best memorial I can give my son is to take up his standard and fight, and in a way that is what I've done. I am an active member of the Association . . . and have been an officer in

that same organization. I make *arpilleras* and use the embroideries as a method of denouncing the human-rights abuses, and this I have done practically from the moment my son disappeared (Agostín and Scott 1987: 214).

In Brazil, Chile, and Argentina, groups such as Muller's monitor and bear silent witness to the abduction and terrorism directed against student protesters and other dissenters. While grandmothers and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo keep constant vigil in gathering and disseminating vital information on the disappeared, others seek to sway public opinion through their writings.

The image of the writer as activist is well ingrained in the history and traditions of Latin America, but for women their achievements came at the cost of great energy and frustration. Works such as *Diary of Helen Morley* and autobiographical novels such as Rachel de Queiroz's *The Three Marias* testify to the status and role of gifted women who dared to be ambitious. Some, for example the Peruvian Clorinda Matto de Turner (1852-1909) and the Chilean Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), gained recognition beyond their national boundaries. For others the decision to write barely elicited support within their own families. Argentine publisher and writer Victoria Ocampo recalls, "My parents were as afraid for me of the road that I proposed to follow, as they would have been for a son—intent on exploring a country of cannibals" (quoted in Gross and Bingham 1985: 41).

The evolution of Latin American literature in the sixties was characterized by a move to a universal and creative language: the use of fantasy to challenge the landscape of Latin American reality and an innovative synthesis of literary traditions. All of these features combined to inspire women to take their rightful place in the literary arena (Meyer and Fernández-Olmos 1983: 3). Within this spirit of change, women wrote from a female perspective that included social criticism and protest against political and gender restrictions. Relatively few rejected their native countries or sought emigration as a viable solution. All viewed the writer as a person of grave responsibilities.

Silvina Bullrich focuses on the problems of Argentina in her novel *Reunión de directorio*. She presents the nation as an island, alienated from the rest of the world. Revolutions effect no change and serve only to perpetuate the lack of concern on the part of the people. In the very popular *Bodas de cristal*, she captures the essence of the Argentine woman's reality. Bullrich feels deeply the obligation of the writer is to

bear witness and in order to do this he should be present. There are people who never go to the cemetery because it is painful. They do not think that it hurts even more for those of us who do go. The same thing happens to me with Argentina. I cannot count myself among those who cross it off with the stroke of a pen. At times it seems that its air and earth run through my veins, mixed with my blood. I adore it and hate it. I judge it and rebel against it. That is the definition of love. I go away often. I always return. The day I don't return I will have renounced my vision as a writer (quoted in Meyer and Fernández-Olmos 1983: 60).

The Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska also conveys the sense of responsibility to the nation in her writings. She chooses to focus on Mexican history, traditions, and revolutions. Her characters are often in conflict. They struggle against imposed gender roles, physical handicaps, class and racial discrimination, and—the severest of all—poverty. Her sense of justice is not limited to her nation, but rather encompasses all of the Latin American world.

Although these disappeared are not writers, among the fundamental tasks of the writer is that of giving voice to those who have none, to speak for those whose rights—their rights as human beings—have been destroyed . . . We can agree or disagree with the politics of the disappeared; what we cannot do is stop raising our voices in protest against the infamy to which they are subjected (quoted in Meyer and Fernández-Olmos 1983: 74).

Among the current writers are many who experienced repression and exile in the formation of their political consciousness. Gioconda Belli sharpened her political awareness as a university student under the Somoza régime in Nicaragua. Many of her poems are revolutionary, epitaphs to the fallen heroes of the struggles.

The time that has passed since
I have seen a blue sky
with its heavy clouds of raw cotton
knows that the pain of exile
has made cypresses flower in my body.
I grieve at the memory of damp earth,
the daily reading of the newspaper
that says that more atrocities
happen each day,
that friends fall prisoners and die
that peasants disappear
as if swallowed by the mountain. (quoted in
Meyer and Fernández-Olmos 1983: 8)

Isabel Allende, on the other hand, does not consider herself a political writer but admits that politics play a key role in any Latin American novel. "After

all," she remarks, "we have a few hundred years of exploitation and brutality. Not one country has been left out from that exploitation—whether by the Spanish, English or American" (New York Times February 4, 1988).

Others, of which Alfonsina Storni (1892-1938) of Argentina and Julia de Burgos (1917-1954) of Puerto Rico are good examples, focus on their experiences as women. Storni was born in Switzerland but raised in Argentina. A single parent, Storni maintained her career as a teacher while writing poetry. Through her work she spoke out against women's subordinate social role. Burgos was also a teacher. She began her life in Puerto Rico but died penniless and unknown in the streets of New York, a victim of the migration experience. Her verses cover a wide range of experiences, for she wrote against the social and political conventions of her day. Burgos favored independence for Puerto Rico and defended the rights of workers, blacks, and women. In her search for personal authenticity, her poetry reflects the fine line between the public and private person.

I wanted to be like men wanted me to be;
an attempt at life, a hide and seek game with
myself.

But I was made of todays,
and my feet planted over the promised land
could not stand to walk backwards,
and went forward, forward . . .

("I Was My Own Path.") (quoted in Acosta-Belén 1986: 13).

Through their works, Storni and Burgos hoped to change the political and social landscape by articulating the sentiments and attitudes of women in a male-dominated society.

The harsh reality of daily existence produced a new type of activist whose complex, frequently urban, experiences are conveyed in the testimonials. Throughout the modern period, governments have viewed intensive industrialization as the panacea for Latin American progress, but, more often than not, the result has been growth without development. Rising inflation and the stresses resulting from increased population have not been adequately addressed. Structural and institutional changes have not accompanied industrialization, and the gap between rich and poor has widened in spite of the steady growth of the middle class. Some countries have chosen to meet the challenges of modernization through repression. By 1975 dictatorships existed in

three-fourths of the governments of Latin America. Both immigration, particularly to the U.S., and the emergence of transnational workers, *maquiladoras*, have become common phenomena.

In nations plagued by poverty, family planning and population control were also perceived as progressive solutions along with industrialization. The case of Puerto Rico, where the use of sterilization predominated as a means to control the growth of population, cannot be underestimated in this regard. Puerto Rico is the country with the highest sterilization rate in the world. "At least 35 percent of Puerto Rican women of reproductive age are sterilized, a percentage higher than in the United States where it stands at 30 percent" (Acosta-Belén 1986: 14). Between 1950 and the late 1970s the total fertility rate in the island was reduced by 48 percent. Sterilization was tacitly sanctioned by a government that failed to promote other contraceptive means at a time when female employment shifted from the home to the factory. According to current investigators, a clear relationship exists between sterilization and the incorporation of women into the work force.

It is against this hemispheric climate that testimonies are created. In *Child of the Dark*, (1962) Carolina María de Jesús illustrates the meaning of survival in the squatter settlements of modern-day Sao Paulo. The mother of three illegitimate children, each born of a different father, de Jesús describes the gnawing hunger of body and mind that circumscribes her daily existence. The aspirations of Domitila Barrios de Chungara, revealed in her testimony *Let Me Speak!* (1978), to bring about substantive change in the conditions of life for the miners and peasants of Bolivia bears much in common with the struggles of de Jesús and with Rigoberta Menchú. Finally, the political actions and awareness of the *guerrillista*, Menchú (1984) point to a constellation of unresolved conflicts between Indian and non-Indian, male and female, democracy or dictatorship, in the daily lives of the rural and urban poor. Works such as these demonstrate the complexity of the dynamics between the lives of ordinary people and social change. These political writings convey another valid portrait of women's place within Latin American reality that can no longer be ignored.

Acosta-Belén 1986; Agostín and Scott 1987; Azicri 1979; Barrios de Chungara 1978; Beezely and Ewell 1987; Casals 1980; de Jesús 1962; Gross and Bingham 1985; Keen 1986; Mattelart 1980; Menchú 1984; Meyer and Fernández-Olmos 1983; Randall 1981.

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The list of works included here is far from comprehensive and covers mostly Spanish and Portuguese Latin America because these are the areas where most of the new research has been centered. Titles marked with an asterisk are suitable for student use.

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