"Dr. Cleo, I hope you remember me, Gloria Blanco, Olga's daughter. The one with the glasses whose [sic] allergic to penicillin" (Blanco 1973, 1).[1]

ARCHIVAL MOVIDAS IN THE CLASSROOM: Teaching from the Clotilde P. García Papers

Alexandrea Pérez Allison

Abstract: In this essay, I explore the pedagogical benefits to teaching Chicana primary documents in the classroom by focusing on material from the Clotilde P. García archive. Centering on a letter written to García by a college-aged Chicana, Gloria Ann Blanco, asking for recommendation letter, I unpack a few different interpretative lenses by which to teach and discuss this primary text, including new historicism, feminist theory, and formalist analysis. In doings so, I consider how these different epistemological vantages can lead students to engage more deeply with texts; draw connections to their lived experiences that lead to a sense of empowerment and even healing; and bend the divide between teaching content and skills that often exists within the humanities and other disciplines of higher education. Engaging with García as a historical figure, I unpack her ambiguous activism and examine her role as a women's organizer through Espinoza, Cotera, and Blackwell's notion of Chicana "movidas," and how this perspective can help students dialogue about complicated historical actors with more nuance. Then, taking Margaretta Jolly's ideas about the second-wave feminist epistolary genre, I read Blanco's urgent and vulnerable request as an example of a feminist "articulation of needs" and how this epistolary exchange fits within a feminist "ethics of care." Finally, I close read Blanco's correspondence to examine how her rhetorical choices appeal to a Chicana feminist ethos, and whether or not her "Movement" rhetoric is appropriate to her audience, that is, a seemingly more conservative Mexican American woman. By demonstrating how a single archival text can suit several different critical methodologies, I contend that primary documents are essential in the Humanities—and specifically the English—classroom, because they allow for empowering connections to lived experiences and greater integration between content and skills. Consequently, I see the work of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x digital humanities initiatives as vital to this goal in providing equitable archival access across institutions.

Keywords: *archives, Chicana studies, feminist theory, literary studies, Mexican American, pedagogy*

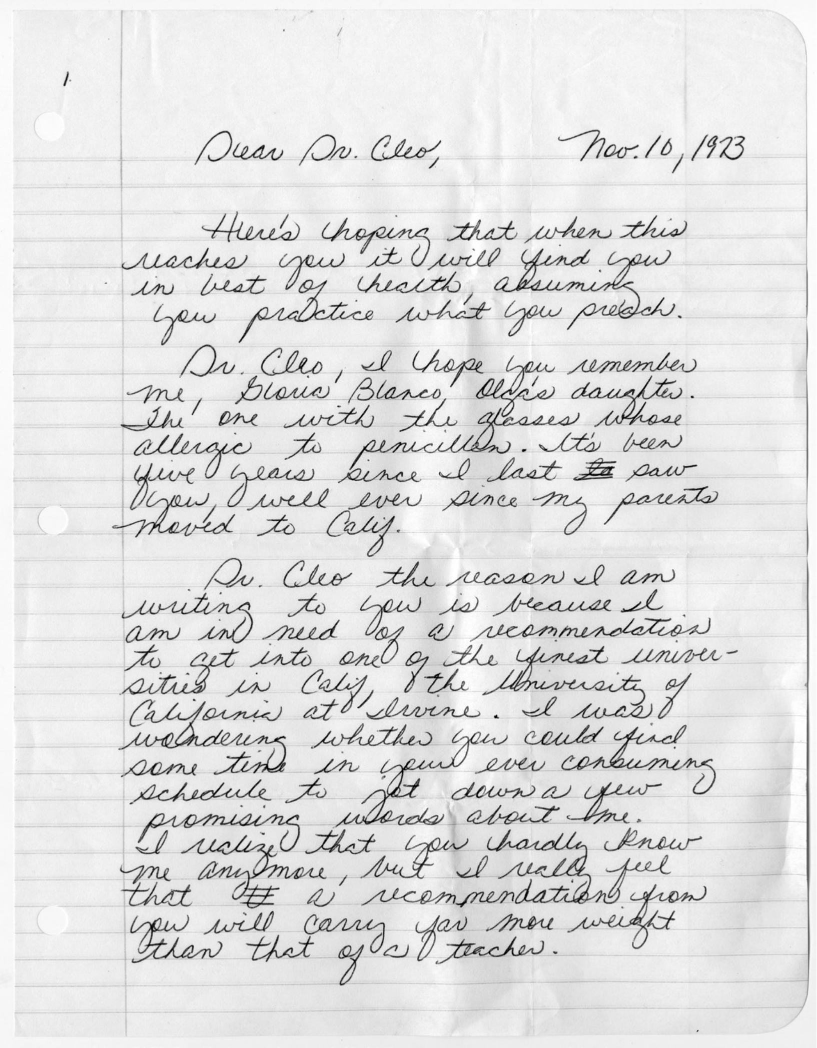
I taught Chicana literature for the first time as a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, under the heading "Ethnicity and Gender: La Chicana": a course which for me possessed a spiritual nature, having learned it was once taught by Gloria Anzaldúa. One of my favorite texts to teach for this class was Norma Cantú's *Canícula* (1995), not only because its genre-bending, experimental nature is captivating to any reader, but because my students were engrossed in the "realistic" elements of the text. When I asked them to compare their experience reading this novel to, say, *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros 1984), students repeatedly answered "this one seems so real" or "the photographs make it like this actually happened, like in my own family." Despite its complicated generic form and lack of a linear plot line, I learned that my students loved *Canícula* because the primary documents provided a non-fictional element that they could more easily connect to their own lived experiences. Akin to Rina Benmayor's work on testimonio in the classroom, "the acts of telling and writing one's life story"—or in my students' case drawing connections to their own life stories—were "key components to an empowerment process," and I desired to foster this process more in the future (2018, 63).

Accordingly, I kept this student feedback in mind as I began planning a Mexican American literature survey course for the following year. With support awarded from the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, I worked with their digital specialists to locate materials from their archival holdings and have them digitized for use in the classroom. Having selected an array of items from the Benson's vast Mexican American holdings, students would have primary documents available to read alongside the literature that related thematically or by time period. As described by literary and archival scholars Patricia M. García and Christina Bleyer and their experiences teaching with the Gloria Anzaldúa papers:

> By working with these unique and often very personal materials, [students] get a feel for the person who created the items and thus discover and engage in a deeper sense of cultural heritage and history. The context of the material and its history comes to life…The first-person accounts of events found in archival materials combined with students' own experiences and perspectives allow them to see things that may have never been recognized before. This is extremely empowering to students since it validates their unique perspectives and experiences. (2020, 185)

Again, we are reminded of Benmayor's "empowerment process" and how the personal nature of primary documents can create a dynamic relationship between the student and the text. Moreover, like Cindy O. Fierros and Dolores Delgado Bernal's research on pláticas as Latina/o/x methodology, teaching with primary documents in the classroom "allow[s] us to engage the personal in the classroom while continuing to engage the academic in our more intimate spaces away from school" (2016, 99). Consequently, I suspected that bringing primary documents from the Benson's archival holdings into the classroom would provide the direct connection to real lived experiences that students expressed they were craving in earlier courses. Yet, after I began sifting through the various Mexican American archives, one primary document held my attention more than any other: a letter found in the Clotilde P. García papers, written in 1973 by a college-aged Chicana, Gloria Ann Blanco, asking García for a recommendation letter for medical school.

Desiring to provide better historical context for my students regarding García, her place in the archive, and the relational dynamic between these two correspondents, I sought the Benson's historical note and the Texas State Historical Association Handbook for more information. Nevertheless, as a literary scholar, I also wanted to understand how Blanco's letter could fit



1.

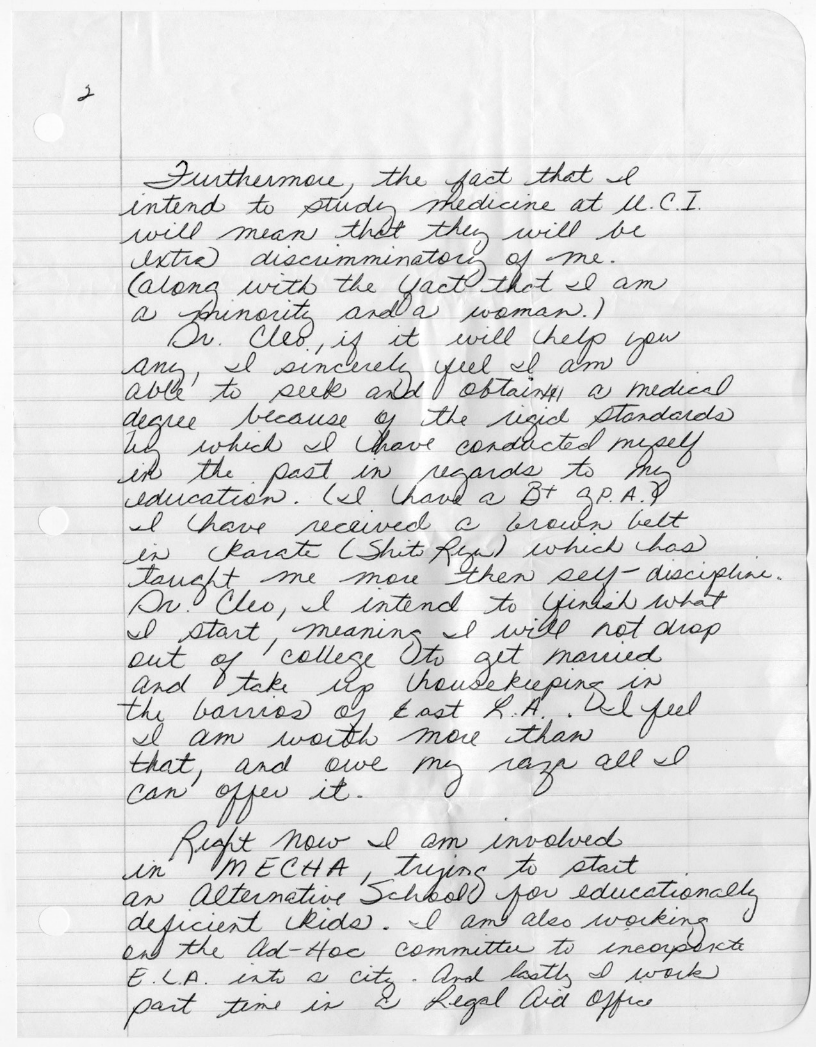
Dear Dr. Cleo, Nov. 10, 1973

Here's hoping that when this reaches you it will find you in best of health, assuming you practice what you preach.

Dr. Cleo, I hope you remember me, Gloria Blanco, Olga's daughter. The one with the glasses whose allergic to penicillin. It's been five years since I last ~~to~~ saw you, well ever since my parents moved to Calif.

Dr. Cleo the reason I am writing to you is because I am in need of a recommendation to get into one of the finest universities in Calif, the University of California at Irvine. I was wondering whether you could find some time in your ever consuming schedule to jot down a few promising words about me. I realize that you hardly know me anymore, but I really feel that ~~it~~ a recommendation from you will carry far more weight than that of a teacher.

Figure 1. Page 1 of a letter to Clotilde García from Gloria Ann Blanco, 10, 14 November 1973, Box 1, Folder 3, Clotilde P. García Papers, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, The University of Texas at Austin.



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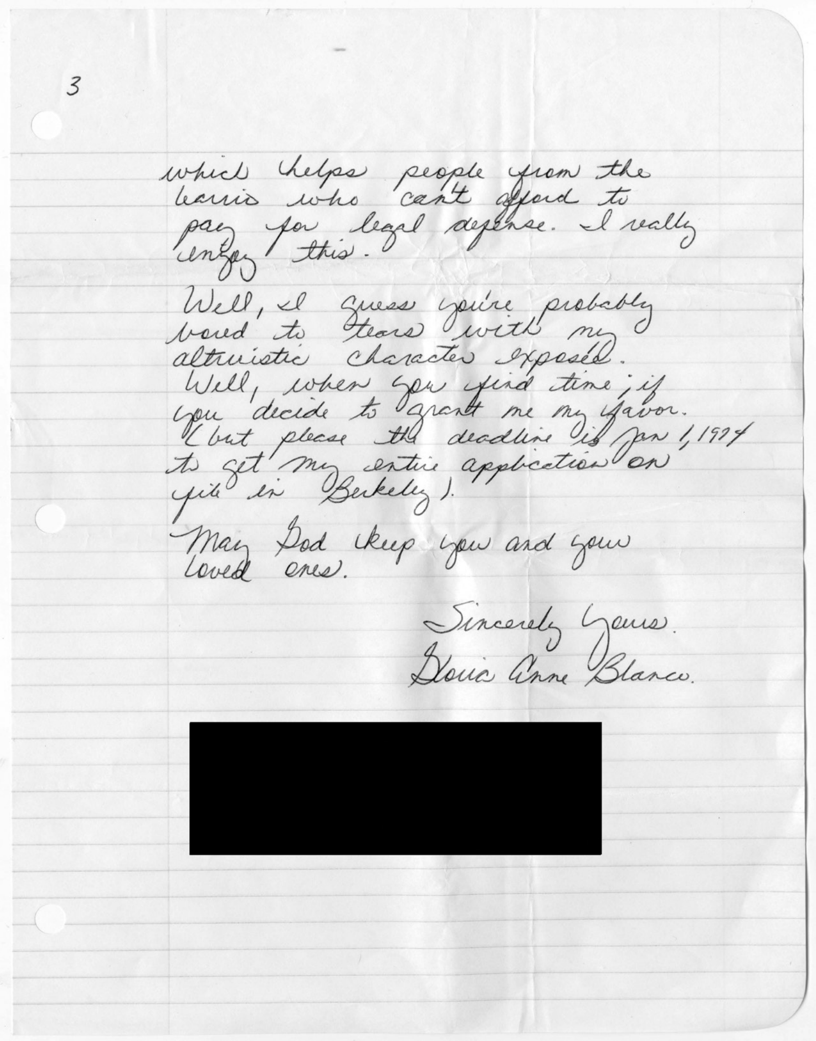
Furthermore, the fact that I intend to study medicine at U.C.I. will mean that they will be extra discumminatory of me. (along with the fact that I am a minority and a woman.)

Dr. Cleo, if it will help you any, I sincerely feel I am able to seek and obtain a medical degree because of the rigid standards by which I have conducted myself in the past in regards to my education. (I have a B+ G.P.A.) I have received a brown belt in Karate (Shito Ryu) which has taught me more then self-discipline. Dr. Cleo, I intend to finish what I start, meaning I will not drop out of college to get married and take up housekeeping in the barrios of East L.A. I feel I am worth more than that, and owe my raza all I can offer it.

Right now I am involved in MECHA, trying to start an Alternative School for educationally deficient kids. I am also working on the Ad-Hoc committee to incorporate E.L.A. into a city. And lastly I work part time in a Legal Aid Office

Figure 2. Page 2 of a letter to Clotilde García from Gloria Ann Blanco, 10, 14 November 1973, Box 1, Folder 3, Clotilde P. García Papers, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, The University of Texas at Austin.



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which helps people from the barrio who can't afford to pay for legal defense. I really enjoy this.

Well, I guess you're probably bored to tears with my altruistic character exposed. Well, when you find time; if you decide to grant me my favor. (but please the deadline is Jan 1, 1974 to get my entire application on file in Berkeley).

May God keep you and your loved ones.

Sincerely Yours.
Gloria Anne Blanco.

[redacted]

Figure 3. Page 3 of a letter to Clotilde García from Gloria Ann Blanco, 10, 14 November 1973, Box 1, Folder 3, Clotilde P. García Papers, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, The University of Texas at Austin.

within an epistolary genre and what pedagogical benefits there were to close reading the text through this lens. Thus, marrying a kind of new historicism with formalist analysis, I found teaching Chicana primary documents to be a generative pedagogical tool in the literature classroom for a myriad of reasons. First, primary documents provided my students with the "real-life" connections they desired, which can also generate better learning retention.[2] Second, I found that primary sources provided an accessible platform by which to engage multiple methodologies of literary analysis: new historicism, formalism, feminist theory, rhetorical theory, and more. Finally, stemming from my commitments as a scholar of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies, I contend that teaching archival material allows Chicana/o/x scholars to take the genealogies formed through archival research and extend them through pedagogical engagement and classroom exposure, thereby establishing new cross-generational ties which can then generate even new levels of understanding.

Accordingly, in this paper, I touch upon the different facets of my engagement with this archival material and the different pedagogical avenues I brought into the classroom, including historical context and representation, second-wave feminist epistolary theory, and formalist close reading. Using this correspondence as a small case study, I will contribute to the growing Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x archival scholarship by considering more deeply the pedagogical benefits of Chicana primary documents in the literature and composition classroom. In doing so, I argue that Chicana/o/x primary documents can lead students to engage more deeply with texts; draw connections to their lived experiences that lead to a sense of empowerment and even healing; and bend the divide between teaching content and skills that often exists within the humanities and other disciplines of higher education.

The Historical Figure of Clotilde P. García

As documented in the Texas State Historical Association's Handbook of Texas, García was a physician, activist, author, and educator born in Tamaulipas, Mexico in 1917. She was one of seven children born to college professor José García and schoolteacher Faustina Pérez García. Wealthy and educated, the Garcías fled the instability of the Mexican Revolution in 1917 and migrated to Mercedes, Texas where they opened up a dry goods store. García's parents stressed the importance of education, and García received her bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin with the intent to enroll in medical school after graduation. However, the Great Depression delayed her plans, and she returned to the Rio Grande Valley and taught throughout the region to support her family. She eventually returned to the University of Texas at Austin and earned a master's in education under the tutelage of George I. Sanchez before finally earning her medical degree from the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) at Galveston. After graduation, García opened a private practice in Corpus Christi, Texas, where she earned a reputation as a "devoted medical practitioner and community advocate" (Abigail and Martinez, n.d.). In addition to her professional duties, García was active in the civil rights movement, alongside her brother Hector, who founded the American G.I. Forum in 1948 (Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, n.d.). As an activist for Mexican American rights, she led the American G.I. Forum Women's Auxiliary, participated in the Valley Farm Workers Minimum Wage March of 1966, and served as national health director for the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) (Nietogomez 2018; Abigail and Martinez, n.d.).

Indeed, García was a champion of Mexican American civil rights and an advocate for her patients and their community. Yet, one might feel hesitant to include her within a conversation of Chicana feminist activism.

As a Mexican American woman who came of age in the early twentieth century, she predates the Chicano Movement and participates in a different generation of activism. Furthermore, as an educated white-collar worker, García does not possess the working-class identity that was then essential to Chicano Movement politics. Additionally, Corpus Christi as a space of Chicano activism has always been ambivalent, and one could map the city's contradictions onto García herself. Unlike the more radical "C.C." that is Crystal City—ubiquitously known for the Chicana/o/x student walkouts and birthplace of La Raza Unida party—Corpus Christi has generally privileged the desires of its elite Anglo population over its Mexican American communities.[3] Indeed, Corpus Christi has often sought to recognize its Spanish colonial history rather than acknowledge its Tejano/Chicano roots, and García was a critical patron of these efforts. As a scholar and genealogist of South Texas colonists,[4] she coordinated Corpus Christi's *Miradores del Mar* cultural heritage site: originally eight Spanish-style gazebos that line the city's Shoreline Boulevard, and each hold a bronze plaque commemorating a key historical figure or episode in south Texas history (Paredez 2009, 62-63). Moving chronologically, these plaques honor the "Karankawa Indians," King Ranch owner Captain Richard King, Spanish explorers Captain Alonso de Piñeda and Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, the shipwrecked Spanish treasure galleons, Spanish colonist Captain Blas María de la Garza Falcón, Spanish missionary Padre Jose Nicolas Ballí, and, finally, U.S. General Zachary Taylor. This "romantic Spanish and Anglo settlement narrative of Corpus Christi's history" was constructed as part of the larger five-hundredth Columbus anniversary celebration, further privileging the region's colonial heritage and neglecting its Mexican American culture—until Selena Quintanilla Perez's statue would be added to the display amid heavy pushback (62-64, 81). Corpus Christi might be considered the doorway to the Rio Grande

Valley, but it differs drastically as a site of Mexican American culture, with a continued struggle for resources and recognition.

Nevertheless, in their anthology *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era* (2018), Dionne Espinoza, María Cotera, and Maylei Blackwell bring together accounts of Chicana organizing, activism, and leadership before and during the Chicano Movement, highlighting figures such as Francisca Flores, Romana Tijerina Morin, Ester Hernandez, Elizabeth "Betita" Martínez, as well as García herself. In the chapter on pre-Movement activism, Anna Nietogomez focuses on The League of Mexican American Women and The Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional from 1958 to 1975 and their feminist leaders Francisca Flores and Romana Tijerina Morin. In her discussion on Mexican American women political activism, Nietogomez also highlights the United Latin American Citizens Ladies Auxiliary (LULACLA) and the American G.I. Forum Ladies Auxiliary (AGIFLA). Describing these organizations, Nietogomez writes:

> Membership in the [League of United Latin American Citizens and the American G.I. Forum] was open to Mexican American men only…the wives eventually enfranchised themselves when they established the United Latin American Citizens Ladies Auxiliary (LULACLA) in 1933 and the AGIFLA in 1956. AGIFLA and LULACALA were interested in gaining equality for all Mexican Americans and *did not start out advancing a feminist agenda*. Nevertheless, the auxiliaries were independent women's activist organizations (2018, 37, emphasis added).

Although these early organizations, LULACLA and AGIFLA, are slightly contrasted with Flores and Morin's feminist activism, they are still honored for the important work they did as independent women's organizations. In fact, as Flores and Morin developed their own Mexican American feminist organization, the League of Mexican American Women, they looked to these earlier organizations for support. García is celebrated as a "physician and founder of AGIFLA" who spoke alongside Flores at the 1967 Women in the War on Poverty conference to help the League of Mexican American Women gain a national platform (43). Rather than being siloed into different categories based on generational ties or political leanings, Nietogomez draws deep connections between García and Movement activists such as Flores and Morin, using the concept of "movida" to break the silences often created by archives and historical frameworks that can separate figures into more discrete categories.

While there could be some ambiguity surrounding García's place within Chicana feminist scholarship, scholars such as Nietogomez have entered the dark "hallways" to uncover the hidden exchanges and collaborations that resulted from inter-generational activism. Thus, I suggest that teaching a figure like García allows students to engage with complicated historical figures, which gives them an opportunity to dialogue and write with a more critical and nuanced perspective. Although students often desire to classify concepts or figures in more discrete categories—prioritizing the "right" answer—learning about historical figures through archival materials can challenge students to consider these figures in more heterogenous terms.

Clotilde García and Chicana "Hallway Movidas" Activism

Indeed, García's identity straddles positions of affluence and activism, and I contend this quality makes her a fitting subject for this project, particularly through the lens of "movidas" as articulated by Espinoza, Cotera, and Blackwell (2018) in their anthology's introduction. For these Chicana scholars, the term "movidas"—which translates into English as "moves"—signifies "a mode of submerged and undercover activity." With connotations of both the strategic and the illicit, "movidas are outside of the specular range of large-scale political and social relations." They take place in "backrooms and bedrooms, hallways and kitchens…undertaken in a context of social mobilization, that seek to work within, around, and between the positionings, ideologies and practices of publicly visual social relations" (Espinoza, Cotera, and Blackwell 2018, 2). For Chicanas who were perpetually locked out of public-facing Movement activities, movidas become a methodology by which to analyze and historize their vast and influential activism—a method by which to "write Chicanas into history" (Pérez 1999, xiii).

Among the array of movidas Chicana deployed to move within and beyond "positionings, ideologies and practices" of patriarchal, racist and classist social relations is the "hallway movida." Indexing how women worked "within, through, and around Movement-era hegemonies," "hallway movidas" describes the ways that women met each other in the hallways of meetings, conferences, and political gatherings to address their exclusion and expand their political agenda. Centering hallway movidas requires researchers to "[focus] on unorthodox sites of political formation" as well as "[shift] our analytical lens away from leaders of social movements and toward the day-to-day activities and experiences that shaped Chicana feminist praxis within, between, and outside of environments" (Espinoza, Cotera, and Blackwell 2018, 12). While these early hallway movidas often were "undertaken within and between movements that did not always address the full array of issues impacting women of color" they nevertheless "reveal genealogical connections between Chicana efforts to establish a number of organizations, service centers, and research initiatives in the 1970s and the work of an earlier generation of activists" (12, 14).

I maintain that this concept of hallway movidas is an insightful way to consider and teach García's pre-Movement activism, and it is especially appropriate to read and interpret her correspondence with Blanco. Predating a woman of color feminist agenda, her work reveals the genealogical connections between an earlier generation of activism and Chicana initiatives in the 1970s. Particularly through her correspondence with Blanco, we witness a direct link from the pre-Movement era of women's organizations to 1970s Chicana feminist organizations, signified by Blanco's Chicana feminist rhetoric and activist work. Although Blanco's post-grad trajectory is not included in the archive, the fact that the letter remains in García's personal papers signifies it was received, thereby suggesting the possibility she completed the favor. Thus, through the archive we witness the hallway movida of writing a recommendation letter for a college girl—an act that goes unseen, is not broadcasted on any political platform, and yet moves La Causa a few steps farther. Espinoza, Cotera, and Blackwell—along with other Chicana scholars and activist peers and predecessors—have labored to "write Chicanas into history," and we as instructors can help bring those marginalized histories into the fold through our pedagogical practices.

Chicana Letters: Feminism and The Epistolary Genre

As a literary scholar, I began analyzing Blanco's letter by revisiting work on the epistolary genre in relation to women's writing. Traditionally, the epistolary genre has been considered a central component of female intimacy and self-expression, and letters have been treated as "part of a culture of relationship…theorized as special to women's values and communities" (Jolly 2008, 3). Although literary scholars have addressed these particularities through traditional literary forms such as the epistolary novel, "modern epistolary critics stress that private letters are pervaded by social, linguistic, and literary codes" and thus should be treated as its own genre of women's literature (6). In particular, more attention is needed to study the epistolary oeuvre of the second-wave feminist movement. In her book *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism,* Margaretta Jolly explains:

> Letters and letter forms constitute a significant literature of the second-wave women's movement, though one that has received no academic attention to date. All letters embody complex social codes; we only have to think of the struggle to compose a job application or condolence card to know this. But the correspondents I investigate… often seem to view letter writing explicitly as a form of women's art, certainly as a creative process. It needs to be explored alongside the striking number of feminist epistolary novels, poems, essays, and "open letters." (2008, 3)

Jolly brings to light how feminist letter-writing is "far more than a simple means of communication," but rather a politicized act for women to articulate their needs to one another and respond to each other with care and action (8). It is within this framework of second-wave feminist letter writing that I situate Blanco's letter to García. Dated in 1973, Blanco's private letter becomes a hallway movida by which she voices her needs to another woman who can help her and perform an "ethics of care." This concept of articulating *needs* among women's letter writing is key, as Jolly explains, "Needs are not the same as rights. Unquantifiable in the same way, they do not translate as easily into programs for legislation, demands or mission statements. But needs intuitively express each individual's particular position *and thus the differences and inequalities between people*" (10, emphasis added). Blanco's medical school application is not the substance of a LULACA or AGLIFA political agenda; instead, it is an articulation of her individual needs. Consequently, the feminist letter form is a vehicle by which Blanco positions difference and inequality to articulate her needs to García, who can then choose to wield her authority and privilege as an act of care.

In tandem with these historical and feminist readings, it is also worth teaching Blanco's letter through literary close reading. Literary critic Anne Bower emphasizes the literary qualities of a private letter, saying scholars "ignore the experimental, postmodern, playful, feminist, and deconstructive possibilities of the epistolary form" (1997, 17). Scholarship on the epistolary suggests "the letter form particularly encourages 'elliptical narration, subjectivity and multiplicity of points of view, polyphony of voices, interior monologue, superimposition of voices, interior monologue, superimposition of time levels, [and] presentation of simultaneous action'" (Bower 1997, 17; Altman 1973, 195). The letter form—like other life writing genres—can be a powerful classroom tool to connect critical reading skills with "real life," as my own students suggested, and therefore worth formalist analysis. In the remainder of this essay, I offer a close reading of the Chicana archive that frames Blanco's letter to García as a hallway movida operating through the feminist epistolary, form, a reading that puts Jolly's "ethics of care" into conversation with the concept of Chicana movidas and thus de-centers white women's feminism while also finding a space of commonality among feminisms. I share this example of close reading to show how engaging formalist and historicist practices of "reading the archive" in my pedagogical approach helps to illuminate a Chicana feminist genealogy within our classrooms while also teaching essential critical skills within a humanities and English curriculum.

"Dear Dr. Cleo": Close Reading Chicana Feminist Letters

On November 10, 1973, Gloria Ann Blanco, age seventeen, writes a letter to Dr. Clotilde P. García. With it, she includes a wallet-size photograph of herself, dated just a few days later. This date change is a mysterious detail,

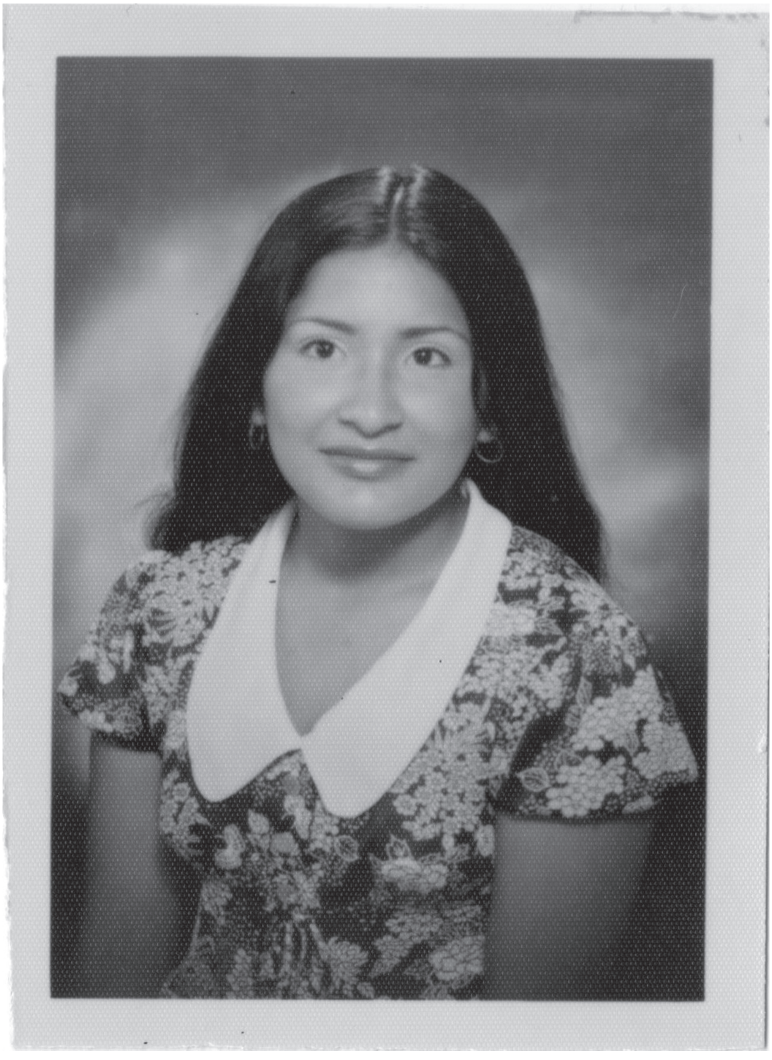
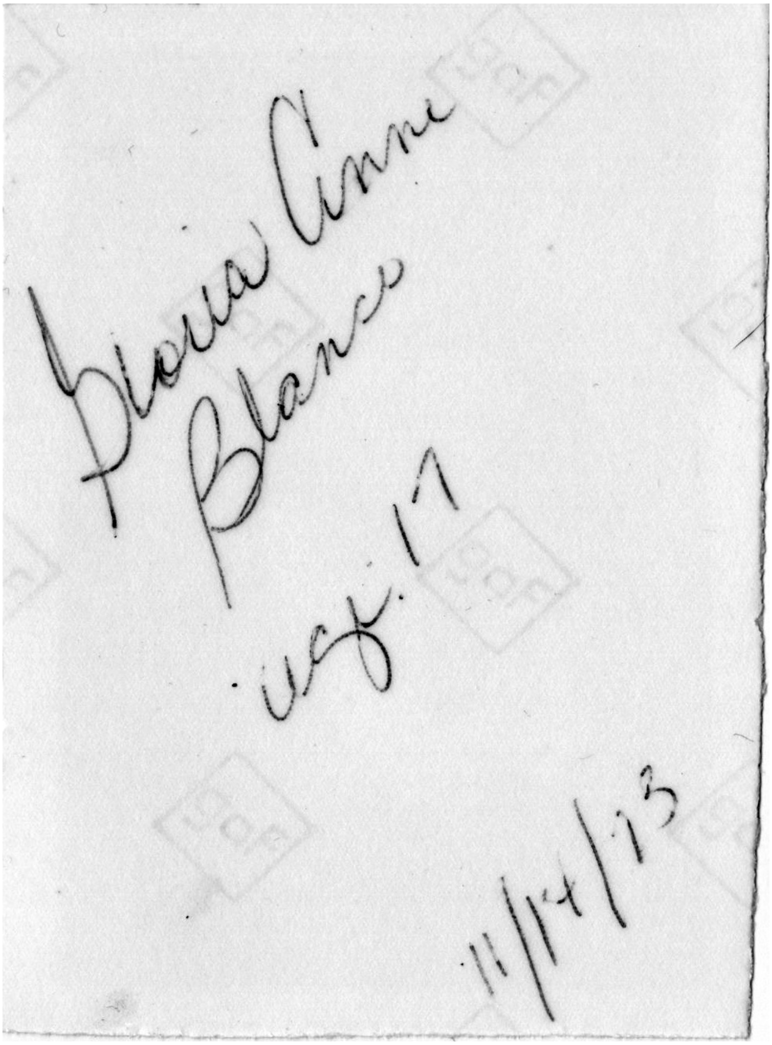


Figure 4. Front side of Gloria Ann Blanco photograph, 10, 14 November 1973, Box 1, Folder 3, Clotilde P. García Papers, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, The University of Texas at Austin.



Gloria Anne
Blanco
ag. 17

11/14/73

Figure 5. Back side of Gloria Ann Blanco photograph, 10, 14 November 1973, Box 1, Folder 3, Clotilde P. García Papers, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, The University of Texas at Austin.

and I read the discrepancy in a couple of ways. One possibility is that Blanco wrote the letter on November 10, sat for the portrait on the 14, and then mailed both items together. In this scenario, Blanco intentionally takes a new photo to provide García with a recent image of herself and offer a face for a name García might not remember. Another possibility is that García herself placed the photograph with the letter after the fact, which suggests that they continued the correspondence, and making it more likely that García agreed to write a letter. Although this might always remain an archival mystery, the photograph is a vulnerable offering, a silent plea to "please remember me." The letter covers approximately three full pages of "college-ruled" notebook paper, as opposed to letterhead or formal stationary. The sheets are paginated in Blanco's handwriting on the top left corners, and it is written entirely in cursive script; the paragraphs are orderly and indented. Visually, the letter presents itself as the thoughtful, attentive work of a student—similar to the likes of a theme paper.

Blanco begins her letter with light-hearted well wishes, saying, "Dear Dr. Cleo, here's hoping that when this reaches you it will find you in best of health, assuming you practice what you preach" (1973, 1). With this opening line, Blanco adopts a humorous tone, rather than a meek or reverent tone one might use when asking an elder for a favor. Already demonstrating a sense of rhetorical agency in her lighthearted introduction, Blanco transitions to establishing her relationship with García, drawing upon their familiar history. In the subsequent paragraph, Blanco writes: "Dr. Cleo, I hope you remember me, Gloria Blanco, Olga's daughter. The one with the glasses whose [sic] allergic to penicillin. It's been five years since I last saw you, well ever since my parents moved to Calif" (1). In first referencing her mother Olga, Blanco invokes matriarchal lineage, alluding to and also subverting the patriarchal lineages of biblical and epic genres, like son of David, or son of Ecgtheow.

Thus, using a kind of epithet,[5] Blanco situates her request within maternal ties and female friendship, perhaps gently reminding Dr. García of the ways her mother and García demonstrated an ethics of care with each other.

After establishing a familiar connection through her mother, Olga, Blanco highlights two other qualities García might use to associate her: "the one with the glasses" and "allergic to penicillin." Notably, Blanco's current portrait that she includes with the letter does not depict a girl with glasses, signifying that she removed them for the portrait, or that she wore them when García knew her as a child. Allergies are also conditions associated with childhood—or at least, childhood is associated with the emergence of allergies. It is also likely that, being their family doctor, García would have known aspects of Blanco's medical history. Indeed, Blanco's choices for her three identifying characteristics—daughter of Olga, girl with the glasses, child with the penicillin allergy—point to three relational ties between her and García: her mother, her childhood, and her health. These three points were also specific areas of care of García, as a mother, sister, and physician. Again, Blanco appeals to—in Jolly's theory— a feminist "ethics of care" in the opening to her letter, as she begins to articulate her needs.

At the third paragraph, Blanco finally makes her request known: "Dr. Cleo, the reason I am writing to you is because I am in need of a recommendation to get into one of the finest universities in Calif., the University of California at Irvine" (1). She presents her request humbly, wondering if García might "find the time in [her] ever consuming schedule to jot down a few promising words" on Blanco's behalf (1). Although the time has affected their relationship and Blanco realizes that García "hardly knows [her]" anymore, she risks the social impropriety of a cold-call and still reaches out, embodying traits of the "movida" in being strategic, and perhaps improper, with her request (1). Blanco claims that García's recommendation would carry "more weight than that of a teacher," most likely because of García's high-achieving status as a doctor (1). However, Blanco ends the paragraph with a stark sense of self-awareness: "Furthermore, the fact that I intend to study medicine at U.C.I. will mean that they will be extra discriminatory of me (along with the fact that I am a minority and a woman)" (2). At this point in the letter, the stakes are raised for Blanco's request, and the tone shifts from simply that of a young woman asking for a recommendation to the voice of a Chicana feminist fighting the systemic obstacles she knows are in front of her and asking for help from a Chicana foremother—the one person she believes can provide her support. One could certainly read this moment as a dialectic of difference,[6] an instance in which this letter both conforms to and resists the U.S. recommendation letter genre. As a result of Blanco's marginalized identity, her request letter cannot inhabit the form comfortably, and instead her request shifts into an act of "movida"—an undercover activity toward social mobilization.

The following two paragraphs outline Blanco's scholastic and extra-curricular achievements, but most notably they illustrate her commitment to the Chicano Movement and use of political language of Chicano activism. Although she begins the section by highlighting her grade point average, brown belt in karate, and strong sense of self discipline, she closes with an invocation of Chicana feminism. She declares: "Dr. Cleo, I intend to finish what I start, meaning I will not drop out of college to get married and take up housekeeping in the barrios of East L.A. I feel I am worth more than that, and owe my raza all I can offer it" (2). Blanco's frank acknowledgement of the stereotypes and obstacles that surround her Chicana identity is stirring, engendering some grief from a reader. While on the one hand Blanco's determination is empowering, her keen awareness of the forces that would hinder her achievements is also disheartening. Because of her identity as a Chicana, Blanco must take the extra time to justify her place in higher education and convince her recommender—a Mexican American herself—that a letter of support is in fact merited. Indeed, she is hyper-aware that society—or even her fellow Chicanas/os/xs—expect her to fail, and she invokes language from El Movimiento to signify commitment to her goal.

Pivoting from reference to la raza, Blanco adds another brief paragraph summarizing her activism, explaining,

> Right now I am involved in MECHA, trying to start an alternative school for educationally deficient kids. I am also working on the ad-hoc committee to incorporate E.L.A. into a city. And lastly, I work part time in a legal aid office which helps people from the barrio who can't afford to pay for legal defense. I really enjoy this. (2-3)

As though supporting her claims to a Chicana feminist identity and use of Chicano Movement terminology, Blanco takes the time to outline her community work. Along with attending university, Blanco is working to incorporate East L.A. (a task activists are still trying to accomplish today), assist in providing pro bono legal options for Mexican Americans, and start an alternative high school. Furthermore, Blanco proudly declares her participation in the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán: a national student organization started in 1969 at the University of California Santa Barbara, which generated El Plan de Santa Barbara and played an important role in the creation and implementation of Chicana/o Studies on college campuses nationwide.[7] Certainly, in this paragraph Blanco does her best to cement her commitment to La Causa, proving to García that she is worthy of her letter of recommendation and will not waste the opportunity.

Blanco's sharp rhetorical shift to a Chicano Movement discourse is striking, as it elucidates the impression that Blanco believes a Chicano activist rhetoric will move García to act on her behalf. After learning more about García's background, my students and I are left wondering whether this shift to Chicano Movement terminology is the best rhetorical choice for Blanco. Would Blanco's left-leaning discourse alienate a more conservative García, leading García to turn a blind eye to her request? Surely, in today's political landscape, this would seem to be the case. Yet, I am inclined to think—based on the care with which the photograph and letter were preserved—that despite García's more moderate outlook Blanco's Chicana feminist identity resonated with her, allowing her to see that they were striving toward similar outcomes. Through an epistolatory display of feminist ethics of care, García could form cross-generational ties to help meet Blanco's needs—using her privilege to pave the way for another woman of color like herself. This is how Chicanas survive within institutional structures that were not created with them in mind: through the individual acts of support that go unseen, deeply hidden in the epistolary genre.

Reading the Archive in the Classroom

I have brought Blanco's letter into classroom discussion for two very different courses. The first instance was in an Introduction to Mexican American Literature class. In this context, I paired each primary text on the syllabus with a piece of archival material. For example, after reading Américo Paredes' *George Washington Gómez* (1990), I asked students to read and analyze Texas Rangers memorabilia from Julian Samora Papers.[8] Blanco's letter was paired with Sandra Cisneros' novel *The House on Mango Street* (1984), and after the students finished the book, they were asked to read and annotate the digitized letter before coming to class. Aside from building skills in close reading through the practice of annotating, students came to class ready to discuss Blanco as a "real-life" Esperanza, attempting to overcome the systemic obstacles that stand between her and her dreams. One of the most significant takeaways from the novel—and then reinforced by the archival document—was the shared, painful reality of leaving family, home, and community behind. Many of the students identified with Esperanza's conflicted response to leaving Mango Street: "the house I belong but do not belong to" (Cisneros 1984, 110). Students shared personal reflections and discussed how it feels to be one of the select few from their families and communities to leave home for school, with the female students describing how they felt more stigmatized for leaving home as single young women. Introducing Blanco's letter into the conversation, several students were emotionally stirred to read Blanco's plea, "I intend to finish what I start, meaning I will not drop out of college to get married and take up housekeeping in the barrios of East L.A." For them, this was a fear that remained even decades later, to leave home and family and not "make it."

In this class discussion, conversations brought up through Cisneros' novel were crystalized by integration with the archival document, nurturing a space like Benmayor's testimonio classroom where students could make connections to lived experiences and achieve a sense of empowerment (2018). Moreover, genealogical ties between Blanco, Cisneros, and the students allowed for a space of catharsis and healing from feelings of guilt or fear students revealed for saying goodbye to their Mango Streets, in a similar vein to Fierros and Bernal's plática methodology as a space of healing (2016, 113).

I used Blanco's letter a second time in an entirely different classroom: Introduction to Rhetoric and Composition, my institution's freshman writing course. The previous class was an upper-level course made up of almost entirely Latina/o/x students, and several of them were Mexican American and Latina/o studies majors and minors. In contrast, this freshman writing course was a more racially diverse group of students (about a third Latina/o/x, as per our university demographics),[9] all entering college for the first time, with little-to-no formal training in rhetorical analysis, close reading, or Latina/o/x studies.

With this group, I used Blanco's letter for a lesson on rhetorical appeals (a subject we had already been working on). I gave my students the digitized letter, along with a transcription I wrote, and asked them to read and answer four discussion board questions before class. These four questions asked students to explain Blanco's purpose in writing, interpret the rhetorical effectiveness of the included photograph, analyze a moment in the text and interpret how it appeals to either ethos, pathos, or logos, and lastly, consider how the context of the Civil Rights Movement affects their interpretation of the letter. Having answered these questions beforehand, I opened the class by highlighting a few student responses, in particular their interpretations of Blanco's rhetorical moves. Although this discussion was less focused on connections to lived experiences and more focused on rhetorical analysis, the primary documents still led to a deep engagement with the text, because students could see rhetorical devices and appeals in a way that related to a student experience. In fact, one student shared that she especially enjoyed reading the letter, because as a new college student she related Blanco's need for help, and she could see the different ways Blanco was trying to demonstrate respect while asking for an important favor.

After the opening class discussion, I conducted a small group activity that asked students to replace specific word choices/phrases in the letter—such as "practice what you preach," "raza," and "discriminatory"—and consider how the new language affected Blanco's tone and persuasiveness. Going through this exercise, students recognized the razor-sharp precision persuasive language requires. Although teaching both skills and content in a writing course can be difficult, using archival materials in this course helped students practice rhetorical analysis while realizing the high stakes of persuasive writing, especially for marginalized populations. Truly, teaching with primary documents in the classroom necessitates a closer relationship between skills and content rather than more division.

Conclusion

For instructors who seek to unite these aspects in their humanities curriculum, the archive is a crucial resource. This is one reason why digital archival efforts like Arte Público's U.S. Latino Digital Humanities Program (USLDH), LLILAS Benson's Digital Collections, and, in particular, Chicana Por Mi Raza's[10] specialists are so vital to both teaching and scholarship. For institutions that do not have robust, in-house special collections, these digital initiatives might be the only means by which faculty and students can access primary documents—whether to use for independent research, pedagogy, or a combination of the two. Particularly with the histories and narratives of marginalized people groups, digital archives might be the only way these historical narratives are brought inside the classroom. Indeed, if it were not for help of digital humanists at my graduate institution, I would not have had the opportunity to bring Blanco's rich correspondence into my course and witness my student's multi-modal engagement with Chicana feminist praxis. It is my hope to witness this same engagement throughout my classrooms in the future.

Notes

[1] From 1973 correspondence to Cleotilde P. García, found in the Nettie Lee Benson Library Collection.

[2] In his work, *Creating Wicked Students: Designing Courses for a Complex World*, Paul Handstedt centers pedagogical success on students assuming authority in the classroom. More specifically, he argues that "the best way to gain a sense of authority is to practice it in meaningful, content-rich contexts" (2018, 7). Thus, for Handstedt, in order to assume real authority of learned information,

students must apply that knowledge in real-world contexts consistently throughout the course—even at the beginning (8). This authoritative, context-based practice will allow students to recall learned information in the future (8-9).

[3] During the mid-nineteenth century, Corpus Christi emerged as the first Anglo-American settlement in the disputed territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande (Paredez 2009, 65). As this disputed area became the impetus for the Mexican American War, Corpus Christi was a training ground for U.S. troops until the war's end in 1848. Over the following decades and into the twentieth century, "power iniquities between Anglos and Mexicans were further solidified by the rise of mechanization during the cattle boom of the 1870s and the explosion of cotton production into the 1880s that coincided with the emancipation of slave labor following the Civil War" (65-66). Wealthy Anglo ranchers began to rely more heavily on Mexican labor, and as Corpus Christi began to emerge as a shipping center for cattle, land-owning Anglo families began to dominate the area. Over the twentieth century, while Mexican immigrants crossed the border in large numbers as a result of the Mexican Revolution, "much of Corpus Christi's growth during the first half of the twentieth century was underwritten by powerful Anglo elite families… who sought to secure their prosperity" (66). Despite much economic growth in the city over the twentieth century, this growth "was accompanied and in fact enabled by institutionalized and later de facto segregation and the continued relegation of Tejano residents to service industry jobs and second-class citizen status" (66). Although the Mexican American population of Corpus Christi rapidly increased over the twentieth century, by 2000 "most of the city's Tejano residents were in the working class, with roughly one-third occupying the semi- and unskilled labor market (67). For further discussion, see Paredez (2009).

[4] García is considered a scholar of South Texas colonists, publishing histories of Captain Blas María de la Garza Falcón (1982) and Captain Alonso Alvarez de Piñeda (1984) which are currently housed at the University of Texas at Austin. An excerpt from García's text on Garza Falcón reads:

> Captain Blas María de la Garza Falcón and his family forged the history of South Texas through their contributions in the field of religion, government, education, language architecture, transportation, mining, surveying, ranching, farming, commerce, and present-day South Texas lifestyles. His descendants left their footprints by exploring, settling and tilling the land; by naming bays, rivers, lakes, creeks, salines, hills, native flora and fauna; by building missions, churches, *presidios*, towns, villages, and *ranchos*, roads bridges, water wells, canals and dams and by bringing the Christian faith, Spanish language, laws and customs to the Indians integrating them into Spanish culture (1982, 15).

From the excerpt here and additional material throughout the book, one can note that García is strong advocate of the colonial project and does not present South Texas colonialism with a critical eye.

[5] The Oxford English Dictionary defines epithet as "adjective indicating some quality or attribute which the speaker or writer regards as characteristic of the person or thing described." Epithets are common in ancient and epic genres, often describing the subject in terms of patriarchal lineage.

[6] For a further discussion, see Saldívar (1990).

[7] "Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán (MEChA) is a national student organization started in 1969 at University of California Santa Barbara. From this first group, came El Plan de Santa Barbara which was the final step in the process of bringing loosely organized, local student groups into a single unified student movement. Their rejection of the term "Mexican-American" meant the rejection of previous assimilation and accommodationist ideologies of earlier generations. MEChA also played an important role in the creation and implementation of Chicana/o Studies which would be the foundation of MEChA's presence on college campuses nationwide" (Suarez, 2018).

[8] Julian Samora was a Mexican American civil rights advocate, educator, sociologist, and anthropologist. His research interests included rural populations in urban settings, the rural poor, and movement of Mexican Americans across the U.S.-Mexico border. In 1979, Samora published *Gunpowder Justice: A Reassessment of the Texas Rangers,* alongside co-authors Joe Bernal and Albert Pefia, critiquing the historically romanticized depiction of the Texas Rangers. His archives can be found at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection.

[9] Schreiner University is a small liberal arts college in the Texas Hill Country. They are recognized as a Hispanic Serving Institution, a designation which requires a minimum twenty-five percent of students identifying as Hispanic. According to 2018 public data, Schreiner's Hispanic student population was thirty-eight percent, which is consistent with its current student population. See "Hispanic Serving Institutions" (2021).

[10] Chicana Por Mi Raza is a digital memory collective of Chicana oral histories and primary materials developed precisely to address the need for wide-spread access to digital archives. Through their public website, they regularly provide access to primary documents to teachers across the country. For more information, see "About" (2021).

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