Feminista Frequencies

Monica De La Torre, Ph.D. Dissertation

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Feminista Frequencies: Tuning In to Chicana Radio Activism in the Pacific Northwest, 1975-1990

My study fashions an innovative theoretical and methodological approach to the first study of farmworker women, technology, and media within community radio institutions. Radio KDNA in Granger, Washington—the nation's first full-time Spanish-language noncommercial radio station—serves as a case study of Chicana/o-controlled Spanish-language community radio. Thematically, my research examines community radio broadcasting as a site of strategic intervention and political mobilization for Chicana/o producers and audiences. Noncommercial radio served as a cultural force in the late 1970s and through the 1980s to communicate with and mobilize local migrant farmworkers through culturally relevant Spanish-language programming. Chicana/o movement activists in rural central and eastern Washington used community radio as a tool for community building and social justice work. A study of KDNA provides a platform for analyzing the political possibility of noncommercial radio, in Spanish, for immigrant communities today. My research methods utilize oral history, textual analysis, digital media tools, and archival research. As one of the first in-depth studies of Spanish-language radio programming produced by and directed to farmworker women of Mexican descent, this dissertation brings together oral histories I conducted with Chicana/o community media activists and cultural texts informally archived at community radio stations and in personal archives (artifacts include photographs, founding documents, and program guides).

As the first in-depth study of KDNA, I situate the emergence of Chicana/o-controlled community radio in the 1970s when social movements inspired a reimagining of public broadcasting as a free-form format that was communal and activist-driven. In this research, I demonstrate that Chicanas, specifically farmworker women both U.S. born and immigrant, were early adopters and innovators of community radio technologies through a process I call Chicana radio activism. Chicana radio activists radically deployed community radio technologies by occupying positions of leadership within the radio station, training women as radio producers, creating content and radio programming unique to the Chicana experience, and implementing anti-sexist practices within the radio station. Recording feminist activism within community radio stations is of particular importance to Chicano movement historiography because it uncovers new evidence of Chicana grassroots leadership. Chicana radio activism was a political movement manifested through the act of producing aural cultural representations within the broadcast platforms Chicana radio producers helped create. Through an integration of feminist policies and woman-centered programming, Chicana broadcasters ruptured predominantly male-dominated media spaces while countering the cultural nationalism that centered male experiences.

Status of Research or Work: Completed/published

Research Type: Graduate
- Dissertations

Related Fields: Activism
- Chicana/o
  - Communication
  - Hispanic Studies
  - Radio
  - Women
  - Women of Color