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Jacob Chagoya April 13, 2021

Revered, Reappropriated, Rejected:

The Development of *Aztlán* from the 1960s to the Present

by

Jacob Chagoya

Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández

Advisor

Department of English

Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández

Advisor

Mandy Suhr-Sytsma

Committee Member

Sergio Delgado Moya

Committee Member

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Abstract

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This thesis analyses the development of the concept *Aztlán* from its creation in 1969 to the present. *Aztlán* is the mythological concept that the Aztecs originated from what is now the U.S. Southwest before migrating south. The concept was created during the Chicano Movement to promote Chicanx pride and combat the racist idea that Chicanx do not belong in the U.S. Yet, despite such positive intentions in its creation, the concept has faced backlash due to problematic notions that it reinforces related to mestizaje, masculinity, the heteropatriarchy, and appropriation, resulting in an evolution of the concept over time. In chapter one, I argue that *Aztlán* originated to prioritize heterosexual males of a mestizo identity, seen through the epic poem "I am Joaquín" by Rodolfo Gonzales and the novel *Heart of Aztlán* by Rudolfo Anaya. Chapter two then shifts to the 1980s, as I analyze how feminist scholars attempted to reappropriate the concept to make it more inclusive, evidenced by Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. I argue that this reappropriation does not sufficiently account for the notions of settler colonialism that *Aztlán* perpetuates by excluding certain Indigenous groups. In chapter three, I then analyze the evolution of *Aztlán* in the 1990s and into the present. I argue that the simultaneous appropriation and erasure of Indigenous cultures embedded in *Aztlán* is evident through an analysis of the performance art piece *Couple in the Cage: Two Amerindians Visit the West* (1992) by Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco. Though the piece criticizes the use of Indigenous bodies for public consumption, Instagram posts reveal that many Chicanx people continue to perpetuate the same appropriation of Indigenous cultures that Gómez-Peña and Fusco criticize.

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Introduction

Time stood still, and in that enduring moment he felt the rhythm of the heart of *Aztlán* beat to the measure of his own heart. Dreams and visions became reality, and reality was but the thin substance of myth and legends. A joyful power coursed from the dark womb-heart of the earth into his soul and he cried out I AM AZTLÁN!

- Rudolfo Anaya*, Heart of Aztlán*

After losing his job, falling victim to alcoholism, and alienating himself from his family, Clemente Chavez, the protagonist of Rudolfo Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán*, finds himself at his lowest point, lost in a society that takes his job, his culture, and his pride away from him. Yet, by the end of the novel, Clemente's fellow Chicanx revere him, electing him as their leader in the fight for liberation. It is the power of *Aztlán*, "the mythical homeland from whence the Mexica, or Aztecs, migrated to Tenochtitlán…conceptualized by Chicano nationalists as the present-day U.S. Southwest," that enables Clemente to rally from his internal struggles in order to become a leader in his community (Murrah-Mandril 136). Anaya's novel, written in 1976 in the midst of the Chicano movement, a movement of Mexican-American empowerment, grapples with a variety of themes, both intentionally and unintentionally: barrio life, Indigeneity, Chicanx nationalism, labor rights, hetero-masculinity, and the role of women. These themes are not limited to Anaya's novel, however, and it is the concept of *Aztlán* in relation to these themes that I will explore in this thesis.

The Chicano Movement refers to the era of social activism among Chicanx in the United States. Though historians differ on the exact dates of the beginning and ending of the movement, the general consensus is that the movement began in the mid-1960s when "Many Mexicans, now calling themselves Chicanos and Chicanas, embarked on their own campaign to improve

socioeconomic conditions and win full recognition of their rights as U.S. citizens" ("The Chicano Movement" 245). Though the movement utilizes the word "Chicano," in this thesis I utilize the word "Chicanx" when referring to Mexican American individuals in general, as well as Latinx when referring to individuals of Latin American descent within the U.S. Though some critique the use of the "x" in Chicanx and Latinx, citing its abnormal sound when speaking Spanish,[1] I believe that this is the best terminology to provide inclusivity. Because the terms "Chicano/a" and "Latino/a" have connections to the Spanish language, they are inherently gendered.[2] To avoid misgendering individuals, Chicanx and Latinx serve as terms that recognize that there is not a man-woman binary, but instead a spectrum of gender and racial identities.[3] Thus, throughout my thesis I utilize Chicanx and Latinx when referring to individuals in general, and Chicano/a and Latino/a when referring to people who identify with such titles.

This thesis analyzes *Aztlán* as a concept of empowerment in Chicanx consciousness since the 1960s. My research is important given the ongoing fight for social justice. In *Heart of Aztlán*, after Chicanx march for better pay, cops begin to shoot into a crowd of protesters as the proceedings turn violent, resulting in a riot. Innocent Chicanx are shot dead by the police; yet, the fight for justice does not stop, as *Aztlán's* power encourages Clemente and his people to continue in their struggle. This gruesome shooting that Anaya describes is eerily reminiscent of the senseless murders that happen today due to police brutality, such as when Los Angeles police shot and killed Andrés Guardado, a young Latinx man in 2020, despite Guardado committing no crimes. The protests currently sweeping the nation due to outrage at the lack of justice over the shootings of unarmed Black people, such as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Jacob Blake, have resulted in an increase of social activism.

It is important to note that violence against Mexican Americans, Central Americans, and African Americans cannot be lumped together as the same formations of violence. Violence against African Americans stems back centuries to the use of slave labor, resulting in systemic and physical violence that continues to disadvantage and target Black people. Central Americans, like Guardado, very often are the victims of border violence. With an influx of immigrants into the United States, Central Americans, as well as Mexicans, are targeted given the mounting rhetoric inciting fear of immigrants in American society. Mexican Americans also face such violence due to associations with immigrants, and they also faced hateful retaliation for their social and political activism during the Chicano Movement, reflected in *Heart of Aztlán*. Yet, while these different groups have distinct experiences of violence, they are united by the fact that the violence is state sanctioned. Police systemically target people of color, especially African Americans and Latinxs, and laws are in place that disadvantage and target these groups to keep them in a cycle of oppression. Agencies like the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) keep both Black and Latinx immigrants in harmful conditions without basic human necessities.[4] As a result, current social justice movements aim to combat these different oppressions and forms of violence, and thus *Aztlán* as a literary concept can help contextualize the Chicano Movement and its influences in today's movements.

How, then, does the concept of Aztlán, a mythical homeland that once fueled many Chicanx in the 1960s and 1970s, figure into current social struggles about racial inequality? How has *Aztlán*, as a concept, developed over time and what does its conceptual evolution reveal about the larger Chicanx community? What does the utilization of Indigenous mythology and ideas reveal about Chicanx nationalism and its historic appropriation of Indigeneity? As younger generations have mounted social justice movements, they utilize social media to spread

information. Has social media, specifically Instagram, altered or re-appropriated the concept of *Aztlán*? What does social media reveal about the importance of *Aztlán* for different generations? These are the questions I grapple with in this thesis.

Academic work on the topic of *Aztlán* is decades old, stemming back to the 1960s with the creation of the concept in the manifesto *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (The Spiritual Plan of *Aztlán*). The manifesto "was written at the First Chicano National Conference in Denver, Colorado in 1969, [and] is the ideological framework and concrete political program of the Chicano Movement because of its emphasis on nationalism and the goal of self-determination" ("El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" 5). After the release of this manifesto, much literature discussing *Aztlán* and Chicanx appeared. At first, much scholarship sought to make meaning of the emergence of a Chicanx identity. Juan Gómez-Quiñones's 1970 essay "Toward a Perspective on Chicano History" does not deal with *Aztlán* directly, but maps the history of Chicanx and the creation of their identity and history. Gómez-Quiñones writes, "Chicano history is, and must continue to be, innovative," seemingly advocating for concepts such as *Aztlán* to help make meaning out of Chicanx history. Fernando Peñalosa's "Toward an Operational Definition of the Mexican American" (1970) takes a sociological approach to understanding the Chicanx identity, as Peñalosa asks and answers questions about the Mexican American population, charting their identity and cultural makeup.

In the latter half of 1970s and into the early 1980s, much of the literature focusing specifically on *Aztlán* depicted the concept as a positive force, one that empowers Chicanx. In Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales's 1976 speech "Message to Aztlán," Gonzales addresses "all the people of Aztlán" to call for unity in the fight against oppression (Gonzales 76). In *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland*, which includes essays mostly written in the 1970s and early

1980s, scholars discussed *Aztlán* from different perspectives (Nigro 75). Luis Leal, Cosme Zaragoza, and Alurista engaged with the concept of *Aztlán* through a literary and historical lens, as they focused on two major works from the time period: *Peregrinos de Aztlán* by Miguel Mendéz and *Heart of Aztlán* by Rudolfo Anaya (Nigro 75). Other scholars viewed *Aztlán* through a more historical and anthropological lens (Nigra 75). For example, Michael Pina in "The Archaic, Historical, and Mythicized Dimension of Aztlán" researches the development of the *Aztlán* myth and how Chicanx utilized it as a living myth that continues to hold power. In general, Nigro details the essays of the 1970s as "representing the first efforts of the Chicano essayist to speak as self, not as other – thus the defiance, the energy, the high stakes of these essays," resulting in a more favorable view of *Aztlán* (Nigro 76).

Heading into the latter half of the 1980s and into the 1990s, scholars, particularly feminist activists, published more intersectional analyses of *Aztlán*. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera* is one of the most notable examples, as she discusses *Aztlán* while calling for a more intersectional approach to Chicanx communities and their diversity. Daniel Cooper Alarcon, in his 1990 essay "The Aztec Palimpsest: Toward a New Understanding of Aztlán, Cultural Identity and History," also argues for a more interdisciplinary approach to Chicanx studies, claiming that there needs to be more nuance in the understanding of different Chicanx cultural diversity. Rafael Pérez-Torres, meanwhile, in "Refiguring Aztlán" (1997) argues that the concept is too often regarded as entirely problematic or entirely positive. He traces *Aztlán's* development to discuss why the concept holds so much power in Chicanx thought, believing that, despite its problems, Chicanx "cannot abandon Aztlán, precisely because it serves to name that space of liberation so fondly yearned for" (Pérez-Torres 217). Cherrié Moraga in her essay "Queer Aztlán: The Re-formation of Chicano tribe" represents a radically different approach to *Aztlán*

compared to the 1960s. She mourns the end of the Chicano Movement while also recognizing that it was not created with the intention of including queer people. As a result, she calls for the creation of a "queer" *Aztlán* that would "embrace a full range of racial diversities, human sexualities, and expressions of gender" (Moraga 235). Moraga thus "offers a comparative, historical, and contemporary look at strengths and blind spots of past movements, offering a radically intersectional revision" (Accomando 113). Her term "Queer Aztlán" represents the changes to the concept that scholars introduced post 1980s, recognizing the original idea as problematic and a reinforcement of the hetero-patriarchal norms that dominate Chicanx culture.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the literature on *Aztlán* primarily views the concept as historical, associated with the era of the Chicano Movement. Many authors analyze what *Aztlán* meant for Chicanx identity formation, as opposed to what it continues to mean in contemporary society. Adam Spires, in "The Utopia/Dystopia of Latin America's Margins: Writing Identity in Acadia and Aztlán" (2008) analyzes how Chicanx utilized *Aztlán* to rewrite their colonial history. Erin Murrah-Mandril, in "The Discontinuous Inheritance of Mexican American Literature," views *Aztlán* as a concept of the past in relation to Mexican American literature. Jacqueline M. Hidalgo's 2016 book *Revelation in Aztlán: Scriptures, Utopias, and the Chicano Movement* goes back to the 1960s to analyze spiritual rhetoric about *Aztlán*, again demonstrating how authors writing about *Aztlán* in the twenty-first century view it as a historical concept.

My thesis follows the literary tracks of *Aztlán*, as a concept, chronologically with three chapters. Chapter one examines *Aztlán* in a male-dominated movement during the 1960s and 1970s. The chapter begins with an analysis of Rodolfo Corky Gonzales's epic poem "I am Joaquín." Published in 1967, "I am Joaquín" is an influential text that talks about both

Indigenous and European ancestry of Chicano nationalists and reveals the importance of Aztec mythology in the movement. This poem is then contrasted with Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán* to discuss the impact of *Aztlán* in the Chicano Movement in the 1970s. The two texts highlight prevalent themes from the 1960s and 1970s, such as assimilation to American society, the strategic use of Aztec ancestry as a source of pride which establishes mestizaje as the norm, and the preference of masculinity in the Chicano Movement and the creation of *Aztlán*.

Chapter two shifts to the late 1980s - early 1990s, as Gloria Anzaldúa released her groundbreaking text *Borderlands / La Frontera: the New Mestiza*, bringing intersectionality to the forefront of the Chicano movement and redefining the dominant rhetoric to be more inclusive of sexual and gender difference. *Borderlands* is a vital text in analyzing the development of *Aztlán* away from male centric viewpoints and, in a broader sense, establishing a space for different identities. While much literature about this text exists, I analyze Anazldua's theories in relation to her poetry, an often-neglected aspect of her work.

Chapter three explores visual art from the Chicano Movement, including works from the 1990s to the present to discuss contemporary usage of *Aztlán* as a concept. I begin with an analysis of the importance of Chicanx performance art, as documented by Ella Maria Diaz in *Flying Under the Radar with the Royal Chicano Air Force*. After establishing performance art as a pertinent form of cultural critique, I analyze the performance art piece *Couple in the Cage: Two Amerindians Visit the West (1992)*, performed by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, as it highlights how *Aztlán* appropriates Indigenous culture. While there currently exists much scholarship about how the performance critiques the displaying of Black and Indigenous bodies in museums, both in colonial times and in the present, this chapter focuses on how Fusco and Gómez-Peña physically embody the concept of *Aztlán*. I then compare performance art with the

depiction of *Aztlán* by different social media accounts via Instagram, exposing current representations of *Aztlán* after decades of evolution. Social media, similar to performance art, is a unique medium that depicts not only how concepts are embodied through visual art, but also reveals intent from average posters. Social media thus allows me to analyze how anonymous Chicanx users engage with *Aztlán* to understand whether it is still a prevalent and/or relevant concept for Chicanx rhetoric in the current movements for social justice.

While previous research on the topic of *Aztlán* is decades old, my thesis is unique given the infusion of literature, performance art, and social media. While much scholarship discusses authors written about herein, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Rudolfo Anaya, and Rodolfo Corky Gonzales, my thesis fuses their works and other texts through a comparative lens that analyzes the development of *Aztlán* over time. Furthermore, there is not much literature about *Aztlán's* contemporary usage, nor how it developed over time into what it means today. Lastly, my thesis uniquely focuses on the role of social media in relation to Chicanx literature prior to 2000, performance art, and contemporary social justice movements. My thesis ultimately addresses the literary gap about *Aztlán*'s contemporary usage and how it came to be, as I explore whether *Aztlán* holds the same power today that it did during the Chicano Movement.

Notes

[1] For example, Daniel Hernandez, in an Op-Ed for the *Los Angeles Times* titled "The case against 'Latinx,'" argues that the use of the *–x* sounds too unnatural, preferring the term "Latin." If one were to replace "Latino" with "Latinx," he claims that person has to replace all gendered endings with the *–x* which would result in impossible pronunciations that would impede comprehension of language. Lourdes Torres, meanwhile, in her article "Latinx?" claims that she prefers the term "Latin@" because it "both preserves the original, gendered term and complicates it."

[2] Rigoberto Marquéz in his article "What's in the x of Latinx?" believes that the *–x* should be used with purpose to support those who identify as queer and trans in order to move past gendered constrictions.

[3] Guidotti-Hernández, in her article "Affective communities and millennial desires: Latinx, or why my computer won't recognize Latina/o," writes "In the negation of gender choice and the pan-ethnic signifier Latin, Latinx encompasses the unknown, the diverse, the queer as it defies Spanish language norms of gender in language and previous nationalist articulations of identity" (147). She explores how the use of the *-x* came about, and although once hesitant about using it, she finds that its use by millennials "centralize[s] queer, trans, ability, and racial-ethnic diversity" (157).

[4] In the article "Black Immigrant Lives Are Under Attack," The Refugee And Immigration Center For Education and Legal Services details how in 2020, Haitians made up the largest nationality of immigrants detained by the U.S. In addition, they claim that Black immigrants are more likely to be deported and face higher bonds for release from ICE custody. Estafania Casteñeda Perez in the article "The Continuum of Legal Violence Against Central American Migrants" discusses how Central American immigrants face medical and sexual abuse with no legal protections.

Chapter One: *Aztlán* as a Male Dominated Concept

While *Aztlán* would not become a concept in the Chicano Movement until 1969, the foundation for it appeared earlier in the form of the epic poem "I am Joaquín" by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales. The poem does not explicitly discuss *Aztlán*, but establishes many of the themes that *Aztlán* would encompass, such as Chicano rebellion against white society, mestizo pride, and struggles of assimilation. "I am Joaquín" would inspire others in their own literary exploits, evidenced by Rodolfo Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán*, a novel that parallels "I am Joaquín" in theme and explicitly explores what *Aztlán* means to Chicanos in their quest for liberation. These two texts are influential as early Chicano Movement treatises in the late 1960s and 1970s, marking them as some of the first Chicanx texts to rise to prominence. As such, the two texts' emphasis on men to the exclusion of Chicanas and gender-sexual non-conforming peoples reveals how the Chicano Movement and *Aztlán* started out as a hetero-masculine dominated concept.

Before analyzing "I am Joaquín" and *Heart of Aztlán*, however, it is important to explain the origin of the word "Chicano," and how it establishes Mexican American men as the dominant group in the movement. According to Gutiérrez, "The term Chicano stems from the ancient Nahuatl language of the Meshica (Meh Shee Ka) peoples, also known as the Aztecs. Shicano is a shortened version of Meshicano; later pronunciation changed to Chicano and, for some in spelling, Xicano" (25). In essence, the inclusion of the Nahuatl language in the creation of the Chicano Movement indicates an inherent tie between the Movement and Indigeneity.

In addition to Nahuatl, Spanish, the dominant language of Mexico, also has a clear impact on the Chicano Movement and the word "Chicano." While Spanish and English are of the same linguistic family, a major difference between the two is that Spanish is a very gendered

language. That is to say, inanimate objects have genders, often assigned by the articles "el" or "la." Whereas in English a table is gender neutral, in Spanish a table (la mesa) is feminine; a book (el libro) is arbitrarily masculine. Endings to words also often designate gender, with *-o* endings generally indicating masculinity while *-a* endings typically indicate femininity. In addition, when referring to groups of people that contain both men and women, the default is to utilize a masculine ending to encompass the group. While this infusion of gender into the Spanish language may initially appear benign, it's impact can actually pervade the way Spanish speakers think. One linguistic study found that because Spanish speakers gender a bridge as masculine and German speakers gender it feminine, speakers of the two languages held different associations of a bridge; Spanish speakers described bridges as "dangerous," "strong," and "sturdy" while German speakers used adjectives such as "beautiful," "elegant," and "fragile" (Boroditsky 127). English speakers are also susceptible to these gendered influences when learning a second language (Boroditsky 127).

The use of "Chicano," then, harkens to Spanish's gendered language. While the word originates from Nahuatl, many Chicanx are Spanish speakers. Much of the language utilized by Chicanx involves code switching (shifting between different languages) of English, Spanish, Pachuco slang, and Nahuatl. Yet, consistent throughout this code switching is the word "Chicano." The ending of "Chican*o*," coupled with the Spanish article *el* when saying Chicano in Spanish ("El Chicano / Los Chicanos") clearly designates that the word maintains masculinity. Even though the movement encompasses the work of women, the default is to utilize "Chicano" or "Chicanos" to refer to the group as a whole, thus, revealing who the movement is for: men.

One of the men who shaped the Chicano Movement and reinforced the idea that it primarily served Mexican American men is Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales. Born in 1928, Gonzales

grew up in poverty, working in the fields as a migrant farmer as a young boy in Colorado (Ingen). After graduating high school and attending some college before costs prohibited him from continuing in his education, Gonzales became an amateur boxer which brought him to fame, leading him to unsuccessfully run for political office three different times, "including a bid for Denver City Council in 1955, the Colorado House of Representatives in 1964, and mayor of Denver in 1967" (Ingen). In the 1960s, he found himself struggling with politics and the lack of social justice for Mexican Americans (Ingen). After experiencing racial injustice firsthand and seeing growing movements for civil rights throughout the 1960s, Gonzales wrote the most influential poem of the Chicano Movement, "Yo Soy Joaquín / I am Joaquín." This poem, written in 1967, became widely circulated and served as a rallying cry for Chicanx. While the poem does not explicitly mention the concept of *Aztlán*, it explores many of the themes that would influence the creation of *Aztlán* two years later, such as *Indigenismo*, Chicano pride, masculinity, and assimilation into American society.

Gonzales wrote his epic poem in both English and Spanish, a move that would help capture a broader audience for conveying his message. The poem's bilingualism reflects that of many Chicanx, demonstrating the strong ties between the two languages. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I utilize an English reading of the poem. While I understand the importance of providing a platform for Spanish and other minority languages in American literary studies, I myself am not fluent in Spanish. While I am proficient in the language, there is still much that may get lost in translation if I were to base my analysis on the Spanish version. I also understand that readers of this thesis may not be fluent in Spanish either. Thus, I utilize the English version written by Gonzales in order to better articulate my analysis and provide clarity. I understand that in doing so we may lose meaning that only exists within the Spanish language. It is here that I

acknowledge the importance of multilingualism. For now, an English reading of the poem is the best method possible.

"I am Joaquín" is a poem that rebels against white society to express pride in Gonzales's Chicano identity through the epic poetic form. The epic is a form rooted deeply in the Western literary canon -- literature deemed essential and influential in Western societies. According to Haubold, an epic poem is, "narrative poetry about the deeds of gods and heroes," stemming back to Ancient Greece (277). When thinking of epic poems, the Greek poet Homer often comes to mind, as well as his famous epics *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*. Following these Greek epics are the British epics modeled after them. One of the most well-known examples is John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, also firmly rooted in the Western canon. The poem reimagines the book of Genesis from the Christian Bible, following the precedent set by Homer to narrate the events of Gods and heroes. Yet, while Homer utilized narrative in the epic form to entertain listeners and readers and push the plot forward, Milton utilizes narrative "as a uniquely powerful way to tackle some of the most difficult metaphysical challenges posed by God...Narrative seems to have struck him as a more effective way to address practical *how* questions" (Fallon 35). Milton's epic poem seemingly grapples with more philosophical questions, pondering the omnipotence of God and the fall of Satan. Gonzales utilizes the epic poem in a similar fashion, exploring and pondering his Chicano identity and what it means to be Mexican American, thereby following in the footsteps of the Western writers of the canon before him.

Gonzales, however, does not fully reside in the established constraints of the epic poem, instead flipping the precedents set by Homer and Milton to rebel against the expectations set by the West. While Milton makes minor changes to the epic form in *Paradise Lost,* he still formally adheres to the style and content of Homer's work. Fallon highlights how "the dialogue in heaven

in book 3 [of *Paradise Lost*] is modeled on the dialogue between Zeus and Athena in book 1 of the *Odyssey*, which begins with Zeus protesting the unfairness of humans blaming him for their misfortunes" (46). In these two epic poems, the Fathers, God and Zeus, complain about humans for their ungratefulness to them. These two characters represent the oppressor, those with the power to shape society to their advantage and disregard the cries of those who wish for change. These two western epics provide the oppressors a platform to complain about the oppressed, belittling their plights.

Gonzales, rather than continue this Western tradition of listening to those in power, reverses it by providing a platform for the oppressed – Chicanos – to voice their complaints against their oppressors. Gonzales writes, "I shed tears of sorrow. I sow seeds of hate. / I withdraw to the safety within the circle of life -- / MY OWN PEOPLE" (Gonzales, "I Am Joaquín" 17). Joaquín's expressions of pain throughout the poem are not met with dismissal from the oppressor, but instead he openly and freely laments his social situation. His tears flow unabashed and his only source of comfort is with other oppressed Chicanos. He further exclaims, "I was both tyrant and slave. / As the Christian church took its place in God's name, / to take and use my virgin strength and trusting faith, / the priests, both good and bad, took" ("I Am Joaquín" 17-18). Gonzales paints God as the oppressor by discussing how God's missionaries took advantage of Indigenous people in the colonization of Mexico, a complaint that the God of *Paradise Lost* and Zeus of *The Odyssey* would dismiss. In exclaiming "I was both tyrant and slave," Gonzales reflects upon the settler colonialism spurred upon by missionaries that left Indigenous peoples and African slaves in subservient positions to European colonizers. His Indigenous ancestry relegates him to the status of slave, but because of his European ancestry, he is simultaneously the colonizer as well, making him both God's soldier and God's victim. In

lamenting how priests took from him, Gonzales refers to the Christian missionaries created during the colonization of Mexico. Missionaries utilized slave labor to build churches, resulting in the death of many Indigenous slaves. God's servants thus start the path of oppression that cycles into the lives of Chicanx hundreds of years later. Gonzales, then, takes these established notions of what the epic poem is and utilizes them to rebel against the Western canon while paradoxically remaining within a canonical form. In using the epic poem, Gonzales follows the footsteps of the great Western poets before him, abiding by a form that constricts him in stylistic expression. Yet, despite the formalistic constraints, he rebels in content, highlighting the anguish that Chicanx face at the hands of their oppressors that force them into confined notions of what is acceptable. The need to utilize a Western form to critique the West thus highlights how he wishes to rebel against the American society, but he must reside in it in order to do so.

To continue rebelling against Anglo American society, aside from form, Gonzales emphasizes and praises his Aztec ancestry in contrast with his European lineage. Rejected and othered by Anglo American society, a society that places white skin at the top of the hierarchy, Gonzales harkens to Aztec Indigenous ancestry in his mestizo identity in order to create his own Chicano identity. He writes, "I am Cuauhtémoc, proud and noble, / leader of men, king of an empire," referring to the last Aztec emperor to rule the nation before their colonization (Gonzales, "I Am Joaquín" 17). Cuauhtémoc is a significant figure because he is the closest tie that Gonzales has to Aztec royalty and also represents the last leader that fought against colonization, thereby making him a martyr. By referring to Cuauhtémoc as "noble," Gonzales romanticizes the ruler, creating the image of himself as royalty too. Whereas American society would demonize Indigenous peoples as the caricature of the "noble savage," depicting them as uncivilized and barbaric, Gonzales takes pride in this heritage to create the image of a worthy

and impressive people. His reverence for Cuauhtémoc and the Aztecs thus manifests as a form of Mexican nationalism, as he depicts the Aztecs to be a people that were willing to die in the fight against colonization. Gonzales argues that if Mexicans' ancestors can fight against oppression, then Chicanx can fight against the oppression of America.

Gonzales further displays admiration for his Indigenous heritage by juxtaposing Cuauhtémoc with the Spanish conquistador that overthrew the Aztec emperor: "the gachupín [Hernán] Cortés" (Gonzales, "I Am Joaquín" 17). The term gachupín refers to "the Spaniard who emigrates to North America and establishes himself there," typically holding a derogatory connotation (Griffin 49). Though the term technically does not apply to Cortés, as he did not stay in North America, Gonzales still utilizes it, implying that Cortés is an unwelcome invader, not only in the land of Mexico but also in the blood of Gonzales. Though displaying disdain for him, Gonzales cannot escape Cortés, for Cortés is "also is the blood, the image of [himself]" (Gonzales, "I Am Joaquín" 17). His Spanish ancestry forever ties him to the colonizers, regardless of his feelings towards oppressors. Gonzales thus finds duality in both sides of his heritage, exemplifying it through the interplay between Cortés and Cuauhtémoc, two intertwined figures in history. Their meeting is the creation of the mestizo identity, as the two clashed before Cortés helped overthrow the Aztecs and usher in the Spanish rule. The two ultimately remain in his blood and in his identity.

Gonzales further prides himself on a mestizo identity by again identifying with major figures in Aztec and Western societies. Gonzales writes, "My blood is pure" ("I Am Joaquín" 29), a cry of pride, one that rebels against the racist idea that to be white is to have the purest blood. Gonzales does not care that he has mestizo blood, a mixture of two different races, as he has the best of both sides: "I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ" (Gonzales, "I Am Joaquín"

29). Again, Gonzales harkens to the idea that he is related to major figures in both of his races. By not naming a specific Aztec prince, Gonzales claims the entire lineage, firmly staking himself as a descendant of the most powerful of the nation. The parallelism of the Aztec prince with Christ, too, gives legitimacy to the Aztecs. Christ is one of the most powerful figures in Western societies, and Gonzales insinuates that to be Aztec, or in this case a descendant of Aztecs, is to be just as holy and pure as Christ. Gonzales also depicts himself as a martyr for the Chicano Movement akin to the manner in which Christ is a martyr in Christianity that dies to save humanity from its sins. Gonzales's outcry for Chicano Nationalism puts him at the front of the Movement, and he ascribes himself as a savior that will receive backlash. Furthermore, the comparison indicates the level of trust that Gonzales calls for in the Chicano Movement. Christ is a figure that requires blind faith, one that is all powerful and not to be questioned. This parallel with the Aztec prince, then, also indicates that there is a level of worship needed for the prince. It is not necessarily the prince that needs to be worshipped without question, however, as much as it is the Chicano Movement. For Chicanx, to be both Christ and Aztec Prince means placing faith not only in one's mestizo and Chicanx identity, but doing so without question. After colonization, the Spaniards imposed Christianity on Mexico, erasing and/or altering Indigenous religions and gods. Gonzales likewise imposes Aztec Indigeneity on the Chicano Movement, an adoption of the methods in which the Mexican state sponsors nationalism by establishing a mestizo identity as the norm.

Throughout "I am Joaquín," Gonzales discusses the importance of his mestizo identity, and by prioritizing it, decidedly omits AfroChicanx from the conversation. AfroChicanx do not appear in Gonzales's poem, despite the longstanding history of Black, Indigenous, and European interactions in Mexico. African slaves were common during Mexico's colonization and creation,

resulting in a presence of AfroMexicans throughout the nation. Yet, Gonzales's poem does not indicate to readers that they even existed, instead creating an Indigenous-European binary. This mestizo identity is a reflection of Gonzales's own racial mixture, but he projects this self-image onto the whole Chicano Movement, setting the precedent of favoring a mestizo identity and denying entry to AfroChicanx. Gonzales's erasure of AfroChicanx thereby reinforces the notion that this demographic cannot participate in the movement, creating lasting effects of exclusion.

Gonzales's erasure of AfroChicanx is powerful because, though he does not explicitly speak for all of those within the Chicano Movement, his representation of Joaquín attempts to establish a "universal" Chicanx experience. By claiming major figures of Aztec and European history as Joaquín's ancestors, Gonzales implies that every Chicanx can do so as well if they are mestizo. He argues that every Chicanx can claim connection to their powerful ancestors as a source of pride to combat any negative sentiments against a mestizo identity. Just as Joaquín can claim lineage to these great figures, so too can Chicanx identify with the protagonist of the epic, as Joaquín could be any Chicanx. Yet, this attempted universality not only erases AfroChicanx, but also excludes women from what Gonzales projects to be "Chicano."

Throughout "I am Joaquín," Gonzales repeatedly references famous men in history, placing them in higher regard than he does the women of the epic, implying that women are secondary in the Chicano Movement. Gonzales writes about all of the men he embodies, men that are of Indigenous, European, and Mexican ancestry: Cortés, Cuahtemoc, Christ, Hidalgo, Madero, Villa, and Zapata. He includes Miguel Hidalgo, known as the "father of Mexican independence," for sparking the rebellion against Spain ("Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla."). He also includes various leaders in the Mexican Revolution of the twentieth century, as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata were leaders in the Revolution, while Francisco Madero was a revolutionary

leader and President of Mexico between 1911 and 1913 (“Francisco Madero.”). Gonzales picks these notable historical figures when talking about the men that are part of his lineage, men who hold notions of conquest and compassion, greatness and glory. They all fill out history books and as such, indicate that men are influential for Chicanx and their history, as these men all had a major impact in the development of Mexican culture.

The women in “I am Joaquín,” meanwhile, are not of the same status as the men that Joaquín embodies, as he is “The Virgin of Guadalupe, / Tonantzín, Aztec goddess, too” (Gonzales, “I Am Joaquín” 22). On the surface, it appears as if Gonzales reveres the women more, choosing a goddess and saint -- two women who are worshipped in Mexican and Aztec cultures. The women’s status as deities is not their most vital trait, however, as Gonzales actually includes them because they serve as mother figures to men. The Virgin of Guadalupe is famous in Mexican Christian culture for being a maternal figure, while Tonantzín means “Our Mother” (Wolf 35). Their role is as figures of support to the men mentioned prior, protectors of them while they engage in conquests and revolutions. The men are historical figures with concrete actions while the women are mythological, and thus figures that do not take action but instead remain in the background of major events in Mexican history. Gonzales, through the figures represented throughout the poem, indicates that the men are the ones with the agency to change history and create important moments while the women serve as support systems, thereby prioritizing the Chicano over the Chicana.

Gonzales’s use of the Virgen of Guadalupe is particularly noticeable because of the controversy that surrounds her and what she symbolizes. Gonzales’s praise of her as someone to embody indicates that he believes Chicanas ought to look to her for inspiration; however, she stands as a divisive symbol because “the Catholic Church uses the Virgin of Guadalupe as a

symbol to suppress women's sexuality" and as "the idea of female submission" (Ascencio 87). Because the Catholic Church utilizes her as symbol of obedience, Mexican men adopted this ideology to demand that Mexican women emulate her and prioritize reproduction and domestic labor. As a result, "The work of Chicana writers has become exceptionally important in part because it re-appropriates the negative associations attached to Chicana identity and reinvents this identity as empowering" (Ascencio 89). Chicanas fought back against the constraints imposed on them by Chicanos by criticizing their "male-dominated community for pushing women to be subservient and for offering them limited choices: 'to become a nun, a prostitute, or a wife and mother'" (Ascencio 94). Gonzales thus attempts to empower Chicanas but actually forces negative stereotypes onto them. Despite attempting to speak for all Chicanx in his poem and discuss why they should be prideful, he demonstrates why it is not possible to speak for all.

Gonzales, however, continues to paint Joaquín as a universal symbol for Chicanos by emphasizing the lack of acceptance Chicanx face in American society. The poem's opening lines reflect the feelings that would make many people join the Chicano Movement: "I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion, / caught up in the whirl of a Gringo society, confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes, / suppressed by manipulation, and destroyed by modern society" (Gonzales, "I Am Joaquín" 16). Gonzales, through the character of Joaquín, must adapt to an entirely different culture, leaving him powerless. Joaquín is in direct conflict with the Gringo society, further reinforcing the idea that Joaquín's experience encapsulates the Chicano experience and that Chicanos cannot coexist with white Americans. Later Gonzales writes, "I, / of the same name, / Joaquín, / in a country that has wiped out / All my history, / stifled all my pride, in a country that has placed a / different weight of indignity upon my age old burdened back" ("I Am Joaquín" 23). "All my history" refers to his royal ancestry, as the Aztec pride displayed

throughout the poem is not seen as a positive in white society. To be mestizo is to be inherently inferior in Anglo society, leaving Joaquín frustrated at the lack of agency he feels. This lack of agency is also a blow to the feelings of masculinity by Chicanos, which effectively "stifle[s] all [their] pride." To be Chicano means to be in control of your family, serving as the provider and protector. Yet, in the "Gringo society," it is Anglo American men that have the power, further diminishing the pride of Chicanos.

While "I am Joaquín" does not mention the concept of *Aztlán* explicitly, it lays the foundation for many of the themes that the Chicano movement and *Aztlán* would adopt. As a result, the novel *Heart of Aztlán* by Rodolfo Anaya, written 9 years after Gonzales's epic poem, parallels "I am Joaquín" in theme, showcasing the epic poem's influence. *Heart of Aztlán* also offers a unique look at how *Aztlán* plays an influential role in empowering Chicanos and diminishing Chicanas in the 1970s.

Into the 1970s: The Problematic Power of *Aztlán* in *Heart of Aztlán*

After moving his family from their farm in rural New Mexico to a barrio in Albuquerque, New Mexico, protagonist of *Heart of Aztlán* Clemente Chavez struggles to acclimate to a more Anglo dominated society. Moving with his four children, Juanita, Ana, Benjie, and Jason, and wife Adelita, Clemente worries that "without the land the relationship a man created with the earth would be lost, old customs and traditions would fall by the wayside, and they would be like wandering gypsies without a homeland where they might anchor their spirit" (Anaya 15). Heritage and history are important to Clemente for rooting himself and his family in a familiar and safe environment. Without "old customs and traditions," Clemente fears that he will lose

himself. On his rural farm, Clemente could establish a culture engrossed in Mexican tradition, thereby making the Mexican identity the norm. Yet, Clemente cannot hold onto the same culture when he arrives in Albuquerque, where Chicanos must operate in the same "Gringo society" that Gonzales laments. The Chicanx barrio that he moves to offers a new environment where Clemente must deal with a myriad of problems: Clemente must learn what it is like to work for white bosses who disregard his safety; he must adapt to more opportunities for his family to venture to the outside world; he must deal with the politics that dictate his financial security; and, ultimately, he must learn how to navigate the customs in the barrio and in white society.

Clemente's struggle to acclimate to his new home leaves him at a low point and he turns to alcoholism to cope, demonstrating the strain of assimilation. Clemente loses his job working for a railroad due to union disputes, leaving him and many of the men in the barrio without economic security. To stay afloat financially, Clemente's wife Adelita becomes the main source of income, compounding the shame he feels for losing his job. Later, Clemente notices his children going out at night, smoking marijuana and going to parties without telling him where they are going. The combination of these newfound problems causes Clemente to feel as if he cannot find his place in the barrio, making him isolated from the rest of his family: "A world he had once ruled had suddenly slipped away from him, and a wedge had been driven between himself and his family. First he blamed the city and the alienation he felt in it, and he cursed the politics of the shops which were splitting the men into different camps" (Anaya 87). While the rest of his family begins to adopt the customs of their new society, Clemente's fears of losing their culture come true. As a result, Clemente "had spent hours during the past few weeks in the bar, seeking in alcohol a reason for his loneliness and impotence" (Anaya 87). Clemente's confusion in urban American society reflects Joaquín's struggle and reveals how many Chicanx

turn to alcoholism as a coping mechanism. One study found that "Quantitative measures of acculturation stress, but not cultural identity per se, were found to be significantly associated with substance dependence and anxiety disorders in this select population of Mexican American young adults" (Ehlers). It is apparent, then, that struggles in white American society have an impact in the development of alcohol abuse in Chicanx, especially Chicano men (Ehlers). Of course, the use of alcohol is not a healthy coping mechanism, and can instead heighten feelings of frustration and anxiety. Clemente experiences such side effects, and the struggles he faces only worsen.

The breaking point for Clemente is when he loses control of his family, especially the women, demonstrating how impactful machismo is for the Chicano. The term "machismo" refers to the "negatively regarded syndrome of hyper – or traditional masculinity" in which "the traits embodied in the macho are, on the whole, the socially expected behavior for males" (Basham 126). Though American society recently adopted the term in creating the image of the "macho," it was "once the almost exclusive domain of Mexican or Latino culture," and subsequently transgressed to Chicano culture ("Machismo" 165). Machismo is thus a more appropriate term to analyze Clemente's actions than simply referring to masculinity in general, as machismo has cultural and historical roots in Mexican society which dictates the particular type of masculinity Clemente displays. One theory about the origin of Machismo refers to the inadequacy and feelings of shame that Mexican men had during colonial times, as they could not stop colonizers from raping women and establishing dominance over the men ("Machismo" 166). To compensate for their shame, "Mexican men developed an overly masculine and aggressive response to suppression," resulting in the "colonized man turn[ing] his frustration and aggression inward toward his wife and family" ("Machismo" 166, 167). These feelings of frustration

manifested into Mexican men asserting control over women and passing it off as part of their culture. They would relegate their wives to the domestic sphere and strictly control the actions of their daughters; if the women rebelled, they utilized physical aggression. Just as colonized men felt inadequacy, Clemente too feels inferior in his new society. He is unable to establish himself in this new Anglo-American society which leaves him with little control over his life. He thus chooses to exude Machismo and take his anger out on his wife and daughters.

After drinking alcohol and ruminating in his anger, Clemente exhibits Machismo in an attempt to regain control of his life. He begins to blame his wife Adelita for his inability to adjust to white society: "He saw her plotting with the other forces that were set on destroying his position as head of the family. She had grown stronger since their arrival in the city, while he had grown weaker. She was now in control of the finances of the family, and he had to beg or steal from her just to buy a drink" (Anaya 87). Clemente expects to be the head of the house, the one who provides and protects his family; yet, when he loses his job, he also loses his status. Further compounding Clemente's feelings of betrayal by his family is the fact that his daughters stop asking him for permission when they leave the house, instead going to their mother to tell her where they are going at night. Not only does Clemente lose control of the finances, but he cannot control his daughters as he once did on their old farm. As a result, Clemente, in a drunken stupor, lashes out at his family. He screams to his wife, "You allow my own daughters to run loose like whores," utilizing a derogatory and sexist insult against his own kin (Anaya 87). His verbal insults of the women in his life begin to rejuvenate him, at least temporarily, and "for a moment he felt a surge of power fill his body and clean away the cobwebs of the alcohol. He would control again; he would rule again!" (Anaya 87). It is control that Clemente wants and needs, and he feels as if controlling the women will redefine his power, indicating that Clemente's self-

confidence stems from Machismo, as he wishes to rid himself of feelings of inadequacy. This surge of self-confidence does not last long, however, as "he grabbed the meat knife from the table and held it over [his daughter's] heads. They shrieked and fell back trembling, huddling together for protection against the madman" (Anaya 89). In his lowest moment, Clemente becomes self-aware, putting the knife down and retreating. Drunk, violent, and alone in this new world, Clemente "needs to feel that he is needed, that he is still the head of the family, and he doesn't know how" (Anaya 90). Without control, Clemente spirals and falls victim to alcoholism which worsens the feelings of isolation that white society reinforces.

It is only through the power of the mythical homeland of *Aztlán* that Clemente is capable of regaining control of not only himself, but his family and community. After the altercation with his family, Clemente returns to the bar to continue drinking and stumbles into a gathering of his fellow Chicanx. Clemente overhears an elder of the barrio, Crispín, telling a group of men about the origins of *Aztlán*, and Clemente

> was bound up with the people of the story, and with the legend of the eagle and the serpent, and all that related somehow to him and to the strikers who sought justice, but he didn't know how. And the place called Aztlán was like a mysterious word, latent with power, stretching from the dark past to the present to ring in his soul and make him tremble (Anaya 98-99).

Without fully understanding why, the idea of *Aztlán* catches Clemente's attention, even in his drunken stupor. He continues to think about this mythical homeland in relation to the workers of the barrio and their ongoing strike for fair wages and treatment, wondering whether he should become the leader of the movement as some of the men want him to be. Confused and unable to stop thinking about the mythical concept, Clemente asks Crispín for guidance, leading Clemente to realize, "[Aztlán] is what I need to live! I will search for those signs, I will find that magic heart of our land about which you whisper, and I will wrestle from it the holy power to help my people!" (Anaya 137). Just the idea of *Aztlán* alone gives Clemente the strength to find purpose

in life again. Clemente shakes off his drunkenness and embarks on a spiritual journey, not sure what he is looking for but nonetheless convinced that he must go. Without a family, job, or community, Clemente has nowhere to turn to but *Aztlán*, and he hopes to find power once again after losing it in this new land.

The notion that Clemente can have purpose again if he can connect with *Aztlán* reveals the strength of the mythology-ideology in the Chicano Movement. For Anaya, Clemente's loneliness and frustration, resulting in alcoholism and domestic abuse, are a result of a lack of purpose and connection with American society. Through *Aztlán*, not only does Clemente wish to make himself a greater man, but he wants to help his community and people. The journey of redemption climaxes when Clemente has a vision:

> Time stood still, and in that enduring moment he felt the rhythm of the heart of Aztlán beat to the measure of his own heart. Dreams and visions became reality, and reality was but the thin substance of myth and legends. A joyful power coursed from the dark womb-heart of the earth into his soul and he cried out I AM AZTLÁN! (Anaya 145-146).

Anaya insinuates that *Aztlán* is not just a mythical place, but a concept to be embodied; *Aztlán* is within every Chicanx. *Aztlán* brings strength, unity, and power for the Chicanx, and no matter what American society does to alienate Chicanx and sever cultural and familial ties, the idea that Chicanx grow strength from this American homeland anchors them in power.

After finding *Aztlán* Clemente regains power over both his family and his community. He returns home and reclaims his place at the head of the household, gaining forgiveness from his wife and daughters. Then, after much debate, Clemente finds himself leading the Chicanx workers in their fight for fair wages and health standards. In the process of recuperating himself, Clemente reinforces his masculine dominance over his family, indicating that to be in control of one's life, Chicanos must also control their women. Clemente's wife Adelita, along with their two daughters Ana and Juanita, go from prominent characters in the novel to side characters that

lose their agency. They are no longer focal points in the family's development in their new environment, instead serving to reinforce Clemente's status as head of the household. In one instance, Clemente holds a meeting with the union workers; Adelita, meanwhile, does not participate and solely serves as a housekeeper: "The sala is full of men and I have no meat to feed them," she worries (Anaya 201). While Clemente meets with the men and discusses matters of importance, Adelita's task involves cooking all day and making sure the men are well fed. Rather than treat her as an equal, Clemente relegates her as an obedient caretaker, indicating that a Chicana's role is to help prop up Chicanos in their quest for liberation. While the men fight for justice, the women are there to support their husbands. Anaya, therefore, advocates for and instills traditional gender roles in the Chicano Movement, reflecting the broader gender hierarchy that Chicanos sought to instill during the movement. Though there were many women involved in the Movement, "once [they] joined the movement, they were usually steered into subservient roles performing only lower-level decision-making duties and doing the grunt work in the organizations. In good faith, women activists volunteered their time, knowledge, and skills to pursue social justice; in return, patriarchs treated them as unpaid servants. They expected women to be seen but not heard" (*Chicana Movidas* 34). Adelita thus assumes the role that these patriarchs relegated Chicanas to, making her cook to support the men and offer no substantial help in the fight for equality. *Aztlán* is thus a tool that inspires the men, and not the women, to take political action. To Anaya, *Aztlán* gives the men the ability to stand up for themselves while simultaneously demeaning the women as subservient domestic laborers, reflecting the broader problems within the Chicano Movement.

In summary, the conceptualization of the Chicano Movement by "I am Joaquín" established the foundation for the depiction of *Aztlán* in the 1970s, exemplified in Anaya's novel,

Heart *of Aztlán*. “I am Joaquín” creates the image of what it means to be “Chicano” in American society in the 1960s and 1970s, taking pride in a mestizo identity that American society denigrates. Gonzales utilizes various historical and mythological allusions to encapsulate why Chicanos should find strength in their Indigenous and European ancestry. In doing so, however, he effectively excludes AfroChicanx from the conversation and creates a culture that prioritizes Indigeneity. Women, too, face this exclusion from the dominant rhetoric of the poem, as Gonzales relegates them to the role of subservient mother figures that guide the men. Though Gonzales does not explicitly mention the idea of *Aztlán* in his epic poem, he alludes to many of the founding themes that *Aztlán* would embody in the 1970s: masculinity, mestizo pride, and Chicanx liberation. As such, *Heart of Aztlán* parallels many of the themes of “I am Joaquín,” legitimizing and reinforcing the ideals set by Gonzales. These hetero-partriachal ideals would not go unchallenged, however, as the notion that only Chicanos work toward liberation while Chicanas play a supporting role from the domestic sphere faced backlash, evidenced by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa in the 1980s.

Chapter Two: Anzaldúa's Path to a More Inclusive *Aztlán*

As the Chicano Movement raced into the 1970s, making progress in civil and labor rights, Chicana activist dissent emerged as well. Growing frustration over widespread sexism and preference for male leaders led Chicanas to feel as if they were participating in a movement that did not prioritize their needs. As a result, "by the end of the sixties, Chicanas began to assess the rewards and limits of their participation" (Garcia 218). Chicanas found themselves facing oppression from multiple avenues, dealing with racism from white Anglos and Mexicans and sexism from both men outside of their culture and from within. This double oppression resulted in a unique form of activism, as "Chicanas believed that feminism involved more than an analysis of gender because, as women of color, they were affected by both race and class in their everyday lives" (Garcia 220). Not wanting to entirely abandon the Chicano Movement, Chicanas reimagined their role moving forward: as "the Chicano movement developed in the 1970s...Chicana feminists began to draw their own political agenda and raised a series of questions to assess their role within the Chicano movement" (Garcia 219). Chicanas began to tackle feminist issues in their activism, alongside the established issues of the Chicano Movement, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, steadily amplifying their message of intersectionality and equality. Yet, there remained a large oversight of the work of Chicana feminist activists, and their fight against sexism remained in the peripheral of society's view.

In 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa released her ground-breaking book *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, effectively amplifying a Chicana feminist message to a public audience and producing one of the most important texts in Chicanx literary studies. Growing up in a Texas border town, "less than twenty-five miles from the U.S.-Mexican border," Anzaldúa found herself juggling various identities that often conflicted with one another: Chicana, brown

skinned, lesbian, and American (Anzaldúa 3). After working as a teacher for a few years, Anzaldúa went on to earn her Master's Degree before entering into a doctoral program; however, she "grew increasingly frustrated because the program wouldn't allow her to pursue Chican@ literature as a legitimate subject of study" (Anzaldúa 4). After leaving the program, Anzaldúa would go on to support herself financially with her writings and editing, leading her to publish *Borderlands / La Frontera*.

Borderlands / La Frontera is a genre-breaking text in which Anzaldúa reconciles her various identities and her life on the Texas-Mexico border. She views herself as a representation of the U.S.-Mexican border, divided by the various cultures that are often in opposition with one another. In theorizing about these identities and their relation to one another, she creates a theory of a "new *mestiza* consciousness" for greater understanding of intersectionality and acceptance. Her book "generated a tsunami of admiration, appreciation, and for some, a real sense of spiritual connection...It also provoked its share of controversy in some arenas" (Anzaldúa 9). In fact, the book was banned in Arizona in 2012 (Anzaldúa 3). Despite criticism, *Borderlands / La Frontera* ultimately stands as a transformative, notable, and influential piece of Chicanx scholarship, making an impact on the greater literary and academic field. It is difficult to classify the text into one category, as it serves as a memoir that infuses song, poetry, theory, and mythology throughout, standing out as much for its form as it does for its arguments. Karrmen Crey, Assistant Editor for *Aztlán: a Journal of Chicano Studies* even claims that of all the Chicanx scholars, "none is more frequently cited than the groundbreaking feminist, queer, Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa. In fact, since 2007, every issue of *Aztlán*— fourteen issues total—has contained at least one essay or dossier that takes up Anzaldúa's ideas" (Crey). Given her

influence, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera* stands as a transformative moment in Chicanx history and studies, as well as in the development of *Aztlán*.

Because Anzaldúa is one of the most notable Chicana scholars, much has been written about *Borderlands / La Frontera* already. Yet, there remains a gap in literature about how Anzaldúa transforms the myth of *Aztlán* from a male dominated concept into a concept that serves as an inclusive homeland for multiple identities. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* is a journey that encapsulates the transformation of *Aztlán* into a homeland that houses not only Chicano men, but also women, immigrants, queers, and all people of color. When Anzaldúa wrote her hybrid text, *Aztlán* already existed in the Chicano Movement, and thus she starts her book with a chapter titled "The Homeland, Aztlán / *El otro México*." The last chapter, however, is titled "*la conciencia de la mestiza* / Towards a New Consciousness," indicating that the book is a journey from the constraints of *Aztlán* towards a new way of thinking, one that includes a self-awareness and feminist modes of understanding of the different identities of the peoples who come to occupy the new *Aztlán.*

In order to properly contextualize the different identities that occupy the new *Aztlán,* it is first vital to understand *Aztlán's* geographical location and its history of settler colonialism. Because *Aztlán's* physical location is the U.S. Southwest, it is a territory originally inhabited by Indigenous peoples that faced settler colonialism by multiple empires; Spain's colonization of the Americas included *Aztlán*, followed by the Mexican state and then the U.S. government. Multiple settler colonial nations thus colonized the space of *Aztlán*, marring it with the violence that stems from colonialism, such as exploitation of the land and its original inhabitants. This settler colonialism also results in a conjoining of different identities, as original inhabitants come into contact with colonizers, resulting in a mixture of races and cultures over time. *Aztlán* thus

mirrors the history of colonization that Chicanx endured, representing the greater racial and cultural development of the Chicanx people. Just as different identities came to occupy *Aztlán* (i.e. the U.S. Southwest) throughout time, such as Indigenous peoples, Spaniard, mestizos, Black people, Asians, and Anglos, these identities also make up the diverse identities that can also be Chicanx. Anzaldúa thus reflects the impact of *Aztlán's* settler colonial history as she advocates for different identities to reclaim the land throughout *Borderlands / La Frontera*.

Anzaldúa's first chapter begins with a reinforcement of the concept of *Aztlán* as Rudolfo Anaya and Rodolfo Gonzales depict it, specifically in the idea that Chicanx are a group of mestizos that belong to *Aztlán*. She opens with a quote explaining how "The *Aztecas del norte*...compose the largest single tribe of nation of Anishinabeg (Indians) found in the United States today...some call themselves Chicanos and see themselves as people whose true homeland is Aztlan [the U.S Southwest]" (Anzaldúa 23). *Borderlands / La Frontera* tackles various ideas related to the Chicano Movement, such as anti-racism, immigration, feminism, and classism, yet Anzaldúa chooses to begin with an explanation of who Chicanx are and their association to *Aztlán*. In doing so, she attributes great significance to *Aztlán*, linking the concept to all Chicanx. Later in the chapter, she continues with the origins of Chicanx: "The oldest evidence of humankind in the U.S. — the Chicanos' ancient Indian ancestors — was found in Texas and has been dated to 35000 B.C. In the Southwest United States archeologists have found 20,000-year-old campsites of the Indians who migrated through, or permanently occupied, the Southwest, Aztlan, land of the herons, land of whiteness, the Edenic place of origin of the Azteca." (Anzaldúa 26). Anzaldúa connects Chicanx to Indigenous inhabitants of North America, echoing the established notion that Chicanx are more Indigenous than they are Spanish, and to be mestizo means being in proximity to Indigeneity. Yet, she does not mention the actual Indigenous tribes

that lived and continue to live in Texas and the U.S. Southwest, such as the Apache, the Comanche, Kickapoo, and the Shawnees to name a few ("Indian Nations of Texas"). As a result, she ignores the actual Indigenous inhabitants in favor of connecting the Chicano Movement to a mythical homeland and the Aztecs. Though she links Chicanx to Indigenous peoples occupying the U.S. Southwest, she does not go as far as to call Chicanx an Indigenous tribe. Instead, she calls them their own race, writing "*En 1521 nació una nueva raza, el mestizo, el mexicano* (People of mixed Indian and Spanish blood), a race that had never existed before. Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, are the offspring of those first matings" (In 1521 a new race was born, the mestizo, the Mexican) (Anzaldúa 27). Chicanx, then, are mestizos, those of Indigenous and Spanish descent, leaving no room for AfroChicanx. Likewise, as she utilizes the male forms of "el *mestizo*" and "*el mexicano*" which, due to the gendered language of Spanish, indicate masculinity, thereby prioritizing men over women. The *Aztlán* that Anzaldúa finds herself in at the beginning of *Borderlands / La Frontera* is thus the one that she inherits from the 1960s and 1970s.

Though Anzaldúa begins the book with the *Aztlán* mythologized in the sixties and seventies, she demonstrates a greater understanding of the reality Chicanx find themselves in, contrasting the description of mythical *Aztlán* with a poem describing the contemporary U.S. Southwest. In between the description of the origin of Chicanx and the narrative of Mexican history lies an untitled poem that discusses the "1,950 mile-long open wound" that is the United States-Mexican border (Anzaldúa 24). This man-made border is not simply a boundary between two countries for Anzaldúa, it is her "home/ this thin edge of / barbwire" (Anzaldúa 25). Growing up in a border town, she finds herself a victim to the material realities of the border, finding herself split from her ancestral land of Mexico. Yet, she knows that the border is

ultimately a man-made construct placed over the land that "was Mexican once, / was Indian always / and is. / and will be again" (Anzaldúa 25). Anzaldúa's *Aztlán* is thus one that faced great changes compared to the *Aztlán* the Aztecs resided in once upon a time, as it is now scarred with a border that alters the reality of those living near it. As a result, she feels division within herself, leading her to grapple with what it means to embody a border, culminating in a greater consciousness and understanding of her conflicting identities. The border illuminates that there is not just separation between the U.S. and Mexico, but also between Mexicans from Mexico and Mexicans from America, women and men, queers and heterosexuals, the upper and lower classes. Yet, these differing identities all reside in *Aztlán*, making her realize that, "Los atravesados live [in *Aztlán*]: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead" (Anzaldúa 25). She does not explicitly refer to the different ethnic-racial identities that live in *Aztlán*, but instead describes their statuses and stereotypes in Anglo society: some are "troublesome" to white society because their cultural and racial differences cause tension; some are mestizos which are "half-breeds" and "mongrels" that do not belong to any one race; some are "queer" in the hetero-patriarchal society. Because these identities face oppression from systemic and overt racism, they are all always close to death and thus "half dead," whether it be socially or physically. The abundance of identities criticized by Anglo society that reside in this homeland thus calls for a more nuanced approach to *Aztlán*, pushing Anzaldúa "towards a New Consciousness."

In order to progress towards a more inclusive society, Anzaldúa argues that male dominated culture, which creates a hierarchy of status, must be torn down. Culture, she writes, "is made by those in power - Men," resulting in the creation of subservient roles for women to keep them in "rigidly defined roles" (Anzaldúa 38, 39). She focuses on culture because of its

power in shaping reality: “Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates" (Anzaldúa 38). Culture, then, has the power to give certain identities more value in a society. Men rule over women, whites rule over people of color (whether it be Anglo whites or Mexican whites), heterosexuals rule over queers. Yet, there is a hierarchy of power that becomes complicated when different races interact. White men hold power over women, but they also hold power over minority men, leaving minority men uncertain of their self-worth. As a result of frustration with their status, Chicanos utilize Machismo against Chicanas as “an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem. It is the result of hierarchical male dominance...The loss of a sense of dignity and respect in the macho breeds a false machismo which leads him to put down women and even to brutalize them” (Anzaldúa 105). Machismo, according to Anzaldúa, is thus a result of Chicanos being colonized. Anzaldúa believes that in order to create a more inclusive culture, this sexism and male hierarchy can no longer exist: “Though we “understand” the root causes of male hatred and fear, and the subsequent wounding of women, we do not excuse, we do not condone, and we will no longer put up with it” (Anzaldúa 105). Male dominated culture is a product of Spanish and Anglo white male supremacy, making up the culture that pervades white and Chicano culture. It is also important to recognize that there are two forms of male whiteness that Anzaldúa argues against, as whiteness stems from both the Spanish empire and the U.S. empire. These two empires combined to colonize Mexico and their racial and patriarchal hierarchies continue to affect the oppression of people of color and women today. To be free of the sexist and racist ideology established by male culture ultimately means recognizing the oppression of others.

In breaking from male culture, and subsequently from the *Aztlán* created by Gonzales and Anaya, Anzaldúa calls for a “new *mestiza* consciousness.” Anzaldúa opens her last chapter of

Borderlands / La Frontera by describing the theory of José Vasconcelos, a Mexican philosopher who believed that the mixing of the races in offspring would result in a "cosmic race" that "provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool" (Anzaldúa 99). Anzaldúa believes that "From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollinization, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making -- a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer.* It is a consciousness of the borderlands" (Anzaldúa 99). Anzaldúa advocates for this "new *mestiza* consciousness," indicating that it is one of tolerance, of cultural and racial fluidity, and of sexual liberty. The name "*mestiza* consciousness" is very deliberate. By naming the consciousness as *mestiza*, Anzaldúa indicates that this new way of being is a rebellion against the strangleholds of Anglo and Spanish white male-dominated societies. Just as Gonzales argues in "I am Joaquín," racial mixture is not shameful, contrary to white supremacist beliefs, but rather something to be prideful of. Anzaldúa differs from Gonzales though by choosing the word "*mestiza*," rather than the male form of "mestizo," thereby rebelling against the patriarchy by making women the norm and placing them in the center of power: "The struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one" (Anzaldúa 106). She believes that feminism is the path forward for a new culture and society that accepts all of the identities that hide in the shadows of male dominated society. This new *mestiza* consciousness thus creates space for multiple identities in the Chicano Movement and in *Aztlán*.

Anzaldúa further reinforces the idea that the "new *mestiza*" is a transgressor and uniter of cultures with a poem that follows the description of this new consciousness. She writes, "Because I, a *mestiza*, / continually walk out of one culture / and into another, / because I am in all cultures at the same time...*Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan / simultáneamente*" (Anzaldúa 99). "*Mestiza*" in this instance is not just a racial descriptor, but a

mode of thinking, an embodiment of the ideology of the "new *mestiza* consciousness." Born out of a struggle with her identities, Anzaldúa learned what it means to shift between different positionalities. These different names for her identities are cause for confusion: "when not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; *Raza* when referring to Chicanos" (Anzaldúa 85). Further frustrating the difficulty of inhabiting all of her different cultures is the fact that they are all in opposition with one another: "Within us and within *la cultura chicana*, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture" (Anzaldúa 100). All of these differing cultures "hablan simultáneamente" (speak simultaneously) to Anzaldúa, making her be a part of them all at once.

Because of all of the different identities, Anzaldúa, in an untitled poem, writes about the fear that she has of occupying many different identities and cultures, demonstrating how difficult it can be to reconcile them all. Anzaldúa places this untitled poem in between a description of her struggle to find peace within her identity, writing "I felt alien. I knew I was alien" (Anzaldúa 65). Immediately after the poem she writes "She could not trust her…dark Indian self," indicating that she struggled to come to terms with her mestiza identity, resulting in feelings of isolation in American society (Anzaldúa 65). To reflect these feelings of confusion over her identity, in her poem she writes, "She has this fear that she has no names that she / has many names that she doesn't know her names" (Anzaldúa 65). Norma Alarcón writes, "The quest for true self and identity, which was the initial desire of many writers involved in the Chicano movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, has given way to the realization that there is no fixed identity" (373). The

realization that Anzaldúa, like many Chicanx, does not have a fixed identity leaves her fearful of either having no names (i.e. identities) or having too many names, or perhaps that these different names do not allow her to understand herself well enough. The speaker of the poem is in fear of her different identities, as they will lead to alienation from others who have names accepted by American society. The fear that the speaker has compounds throughout the poem, and even when she wonders whether she can embrace her different identities, the speaker fears that "when she does / reach herself turns around to embrace herself a lion's or witch's or serpent's head will turn around / and swallow her and grin" (Anzaldúa 65). The speaker, much like Anzaldúa, feels afraid that even if she embraces herself and accepts her differing identities, she will face backlash. The different potential dangers, represented by the lion, witch, and serpent, indicate that there are many different avenues for conflict for someone with differing statuses from Anzaldúa. The lion, known for its dominance and patriarchal power, symbolizes the threat that white men and their social power pose; the witch represents the white women that may tear Anzaldúa down for her race and sexuality, as their power and status corrupts them; the serpent, meanwhile, represents those within the Chicanx culture that internalize and perpetuate the notions that oppress Anzaldúa and other Chicanas. American men, Mexican men, homophobes, and racists all pose a threat to Anzaldúa, leaving her in fear of what will happen if she embraces all of her names.

Anzaldúa does not back away from the challenge of connecting her various cultures, however, instead embracing them all and calling for cultural ambiguity. Anzaldúa writes, "The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures" (Anzaldúa 101). Anzaldúa's solution is to embrace all of these cultures, though it can lead to "intense pain," because "by creating a new mythos -- that is, a change in the

way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave -- *la mestiza* creates a new consciousness" (Anzaldúa 102). While it may hurt to be rejected by the cultures the new *mestiza* embodies, it is only by embracing them that she can change the perception of the cultures and thus self-perception. Anzaldúa reflects this juggling of cultures by utilizing both English and Spanish throughout *Borderlands / La Frontera*, embracing her native tongue and bringing it to an English academic setting. She fuses English, Spanish, pachuco slang, Nahuatl language, Christianity, Aztec and Toltec mythology, and Mexican legend throughout *Borderlands / La Frontera* as a representation of the cultural transgression she makes on a daily basis, and as a way to model how the new *mestiza* consciousness should enact cultural differences.

This new approach of embracing her differing cultures is one facet of the new *mestiza* consciousness; however, by embracing them, Anzaldúa ultimately ends up without an established culture. She writes, "As a *mestiza*… I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of IndoHispanics and Anglo; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture" (Anzaldúa 103). So while the new *mestiza* juggles all of the cultures, they do not claim their established cultures and accept them as is. As a result, they create a new culture that takes the best parts of the culture and leaves the sexist and racist parts behind. By acknowledging existing cultures without claiming them, Anzaldúa takes ownership of them, allowing her to begin to reshape them to become more inclusive for various identities.

One such way in which Anzaldúa utilizes her new mestiza consciousness to reshape culture is by amplifying the problems of minority women. Because Chicanas suffer oppression by both white men and Chicanos, Anzaldúa follows in the footsteps of other Chicana activists by

utilizing an intersectional lens. She recognizes that the intersection of identities makes an impact on the experience of Chicanas: "the dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century…For 300 years she was invisible, she was not heard" (Anzaldúa 44-45). As Alarcón states, "By invoking the 'dark beast' within and without, which many have forced [Chicanas] to deny, the cultural and physic dismemberment that is linked to imperial racist and sexist practices are brought into focus" (N. Alarcón 375). Anzaldúa thus emphasizes how dark-skinned women, like herself, face oppression from multiple avenues in sexism and racism, leaving them at the lowest position in white and Chicano society. For 300 years their oppression went overlooked, but in writing *Borderlands / La Frontera*, she breaks the silence, bringing women of color's issues to the forefront of Chicano and American society and amplifying the message of various other Chicana and Women of Color feminists. In the words of Norma Alarcón, "As tribal 'ethnicities' are broken down by conquest and colonizations, [female] bodies are often multiply racialized and dislocated as if they had no other contents. The effort to recontextualize the processes recovers, speaks for, or gives voice to, women on the bottom of a historically hierarchical economic and political structure" (374). Anzaldúa does not accept the society given to her, nor the ideas reinforced to her throughout her life; instead, she charges forward and, like Alarcón argues, gives voice to women, working through her pain into a greater understanding of what is needed to make Mexican and Anglo white societies, the Chicano Movement, and *Aztlán* more inclusive.

Anzaldúa also discusses the importance of opening space to queers in the Chicano Movement, arguing that the contributions of queer individuals remain in the shadows despite their important impact and contributions to all societies. In Chicano culture, "the majority of

Chicanas, both lesbian and heterosexual, are taught that [their] sexuality must conform to certain modes of behavior. [Chicano] culture voices shame upon [Chicanas] if [they] go beyond the criteria of passivity and repression" (Trujillo 282). Anzaldúa, as a lesbian of color, believes that her "choice to be queer" is "the ultimate rebellion that she can make against her native culture" (Anzaldúa 41). She chooses to rebel against Chicano culture in order to take a stand against the homophobic culture that leads to oppression and shame for queer Chicanx. In writing about her choice and being open about her sexuality, she decries the idea that it is shameful to be queer, refusing to be relegated to the shadows of society like others before her. She writes, "Chicanos need to acknowledge the political and artistic contributions of their queer" (Anzaldúa 107). It is not just Chicanx queers that Anzaldúa advocates for either, but those of all different cultures: "Being the supreme crossers of cultures, queers have strong bonds with the queer white, Black, Asian, Native American, Latino, and with the queer in Italy, Australia, and the rest of the planet. We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods" (Anzaldúa 106). Queer people are a part of every race, culture, and society, and Anzaldúa argues that all cultures must embrace them if they wish to transcend to a greater level of consciousness -- the new *mestiza* consciousness. Anzaldúa writes, "The *mestiza* and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls" (Anzaldúa 107). Anzaldúa does not equate the mestiza and the queer as being one in the same, but that does not mean one cannot be both mestiza and queer. She likens the two as beings that transcend borders, cultures, and races, placing them as evolutionary in progressiveness. While one may claim that Anzaldúa puts down heterosexuals for their sexuality, that is not the case. She does not favor one sexuality over the other, but instead utilizes queers as the standard for breaking down existing barriers of

oppression. In doing so, she also creates space for pansexuals, as she advocates for a transgression from the straight-gay binary to an embracing of a spectrum.

Another existing barrier that Anzaldúa combats is between Chicanx of a mestizo background and Chicanx of Black ancestry. The Chicano Movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s established and reinforced the idea that to be Chicanx means having Indigenous and European blood, alienating those of other ancestries as not "truly" Chicanx. Though Anzaldúa herself is of a mestiza heritage, and talks extensively throughout *Borderlands* about this racial identity, she also discusses and includes Chicanx of Black ancestry at various moments. For example, Anzaldúa acknowledges the lack of attention given to AfroChicanx in the dominant rhetoric and culture, writing "we hardly ever own our Black ancestry" (Anzaldúa 85). She believes that this lack of acknowledgement by Chicanx of their history is dangerous. If mestizo/a Chicanx ignore Black Chicanx because of their race, then they will be helping "the dominant white culture [that] is killing [Chicanx] slowly" through efforts to "white wash and distort history" (Anzaldúa 108). Anzaldúa thus claims that it is imperative to understand the identities and history that comprise the Chicanx identity: "our mothers, our sisters and brothers, the guys who hang out on street corners, the children in the playgrounds, each of us must know our Indian lineage, our afro-*mestizaje*, our history of resistance" (Anzaldúa 108). Again, she acknowledges the Black blood that runs through many Chicanx, creating space for AfroChicanx in the consciousness of the Chicano Movement. In calling for reflection about the connections between Chicanx's afro-*mestizaje* history, Anzaldúa does not simply wish for Chicanx to only passively acknowledge the importance of Blackness, but to be actively anti-racist. Whether it be children or adults, all in the community must be aware of this connection to their afro-*mestizaje*; in order to do so, Chicanx must work to eliminate the racism that led to its erasure from the Chicanx

consciousness in the first place. To enact this anti-racist activism, Anzaldúa argues that Chicanx must actively educate others.

One racial group that Anzaldúa does overlook, however, when discussing Chicanx of different races is those Chicanx of Asian ancestry. This lack of attention to Asian Chicanx is interesting given the fact that there is a deep history of Asian immigration to Mexico. During Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship in the late 19th century there was an open-door policy of immigration which led to an influx of around 10,000 Japanese immigrants (Peddie). Chinese immigrants also migrated to Mexico during this time period as a result of the U.S. closing its borders to Asian immigrants, and Asians thus became the fastest growing group of immigrants to Mexico during the Porfiriato (Buchenau). Anzaldúa, however, does not mention Asian Chicanx throughout *Borderlands*. This is not to say that she does not mention Asians at all; While discussing the importance of combating white supremacy and the white washing of culture, Anzaldúa writes, "The struggle is inner: Chicano, *indio*, American Indian, *mojado*, *mexicano*, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian -- our psyches resemble the bordertowns that are populated by the same people...Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes" (109). Anzaldúa acknowledges different races, classes, and immigration statuses that reside within border towns, including Asians. Yet, she begins with mestizo Chicanx, indicating that they are the people she primarily thinks about in this discussion of breaking free from white societal oppression; she ends with Asians, placing them last on the list of prevalence and importance.

In defense of Anzaldúa, Asian Mexicans and Chicanx are relatively low in terms of demographic percentage, and she still mentions the importance of embracing those of Asian heritage; however, her oversight is a product of the limited scope of analysis that she engages in

with regard to the U.S.-Mexican border. Though Anzaldúa discusses the complexities of border culture, the borderlands she refers to throughout *Borderlands / La Frontera* primarily references the Texas-Mexico border, neglecting other borders in Arizona and California. As a result, Anzaldúa does not take into account the history and importance of the Chinese in Mexico. Scholar Chao Romero highlights how "the Chinese invented the unauthorized immigration from Mexico to the United States," such as through illegal smugglings into San Francisco (López-Calvo 181). Similarly, many of the Chinese immigrants resided in the states of Sonora (which borders Arizona), Baja California (which borders California), and Chihuahua (which borders part of Texas); though Anzaldúa focuses on the Chihuahua-Texas border, she favors Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas over Baja California and Sonora (López-Calvo 182). As a result, she neglects the expansive history of Chinese people and Asians in general in Mexico that contribute to border culture in other states apart from Texas. Many of the Chinese that settled in Mexico also went on to have children with Mexicans, leading to interracial marriages and a fusion of cultures that affected the identities of bordertowns, resulting in "kinship, friendship, and association membership" in the Sonora-Arizona borderlands (López-Calvo 182, 184). Anzaldúa's oversight about the presence of Asians in the Mexico borderlands thus highlights how she does not represent the entirety of the U.S.-Mexican border culture, but rather her own experiences on the Mexican-Texas border. Nonetheless, though she does not explicitly discuss Asian Mexicans and Chicanx, her ideology of the new *mestiza* consciousness ultimately calls for cultural and racial tolerance and inclusion for all, and this extends to people of Asian descent.

Throughout *Borderlands / La Frontera*, Anzaldúa establishes a new ideology in the creation of her "new *mestiza* consciousness," promoting cultural ambiguity that allows people on the margins of society to embrace their different identities. When she began *Borderlands / La*

Frontera, she started with "The Homeland, *Aztlán*," a place that still holds significance in the origins of the Chicanx people; however, *Aztlán* also stands as the origin place for Chicano culture, a culture that alienates many different identities. Rather than simply abandon *Aztlán*, however, Anzaldúa demonstrates how the mythological homeland can be a symbol of inclusivity and progress in the Chicano Movement. Yet, while Anzaldúa attempts to reappropriate *Aztlán*, she actually perpetuates its history of settler colonialism. While striving to reclaim *Aztlán* from both Anglo society and Chicano men, she places Aztecs in the center of the conversation due to their ties to the mythological concept. Because she engrosses her narrative in the story of *Aztlán*, Anzaldúa ultimately loses sight of the history of the land in relation to other Indigenous peoples, subsequently replacing Texas native peoples with Aztecs. Throughout *Borderlands / La Frontera,* Anzaldúa attempts to be inclusive to Indigenous people by addressing all Indigenous people as the same; however, he over generalization of Indigeneity is itself an act of exclusion. By referring to Indigenous people as one homogenous group, while also primarily referring to Aztecs throughout the book, she overlooks the distinct histories and rich cultures of individual tribes that exist in the U.S. Southwest borderlands. In creating a new mode of thinking that will allow Chicanx and other identities to recuperate their lost homeland, she overlooks the Indigenous peoples removed by the settler colonialism of three different empires – Spain, Mexico, and the United States. Anzaldúa's paradoxical inclusivity of all identities and exclusivity of Texas Indigenous peoples appears in the final poem excerpt with which she ends *Borderlands / La Frontera*.

Anzaldúa ends *Borderlands / La Frontera* by returning to *Aztlán*, indicating that the "new *mestiza* consciousness" is not in conflict with the concept of *Aztlán*, but rather a way to improve the Chicanx homeland. Anzaldúa closes with an excerpt from the first poem of the book, writing

This land was Mexican once
was Indian always
and is.
and will be again. (Anzaldúa 113)

By ending *Borderlands* with these four lines, Anzaldúa establishes what the new *Aztlán* is and how it will look in the future once reclaimed from the United States. Though she does not explicitly mention *Aztlán*, "this land" being Mexican in the past refers to the land that was lost in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo after the war between the U.S. and Mexico between 1846 and 1848. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo gave the U.S. 55% of the land that Mexico owned, including the U.S. Southwest which was once *Aztlán*. The form of the lines, too, indicates that these lines refer to *Aztlán* and the lost Mexican land, as they mimic the shape of Mexico, the settler colonial nation that once occupied *Aztlán*. Mexico's land is widest near the U.S. border and it narrows in width as it curves down towards Central America before widening again. These four lines likewise follow this layout and the same curvature. Though *Aztlán* is not part of contemporary Mexico, it is the mythological homeland of the Aztecs who migrated into what is now Mexico and shaped its history. Thus, the connection between *Aztlán* and Mexico is strong, and the shape of the lines indicate that *Aztlán* serves as a connecting place between the mythological and ancestral homelands of the Aztecs.

Through Anzaldúa's final four lines, it is clear that, despite her attempt to make *Aztlán* an inclusive homeland, she engages in the settler colonialism that she disavows throughout *Borderlands / La Frontera*. The four lines find Anzaldúa grappling with *Aztlán* by utilizing the past ("was"), present ("is"), and future tenses ("will be") (Anzaldúa 113). By beginning the lines with a reminder that the land was once Mexican, she documents the history of the Mexican territory before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, indicating that she believes *Aztlán* to belong to Mexicans and Chicanx despite the fact that Mexico is a settler colonial state. In describing the

land as Mexican before Indigenous, she insinuates that Mexicans and Chicanx are the priority for her and the new *Aztlán.* Anzaldúa then gives ownership to the Indigenous inhabitants in the following line; however, she does not name existing Texas and U.S. Southwest tribes, such as the Apache, the Comanche, the Shawnees, and the Kickapoo. By not naming them, Anzaldúa implies that the Indigenous peoples that once owned (and continue to own) the land are the Aztecs, the tribe which she engages most clearly and consistently with throughout *Borderlands / La Frontera*. Because she engages with her Aztec ancestry throughout the book, Anzaldúa thus prescribes ownership of the land to herself and other Chicanx through their Mexican and Indigenous ancestry. It is thus not clear whether she believes that the land belongs to existing Indigenous peoples occupying territory in the U.S. Southwest or to the Aztecs and their descendants (i.e. Chicanx). Interestingly enough, she does not mention *Aztlán's* Anglo-American owners, bypassing the present situation of *Aztlán* belonging to the United States (according to American legality). Instead she acknowledges the land as still belonging to its Indigenous peoples. She ends with "and will be again," indicating that the land will belong to both Mexican and Indigenous people in the future. Though seemingly contradictory upon a first reading, Anzaldúa by the end of *Borderlands / La Frontera* lays out the future of society as belonging to the "new *mestiza*," meaning that the Mexican and Indigenous people will reconcile into a greater form of being, one that allows for people of all cultures and races to coexist and transcend to greater levels of acceptance. These will be the owners of *Aztlán* in the future, she claims, and the Mexican, Indigenous people (whether that be Aztecs or existing Indigenous tribes), and other identities will restore *Aztlán* as a more inclusive homeland.

Yet, even though she advocates for different identities to reclaim the land throughout *Borderlands / La Frontera*, Anzaldúa ultimately engages in the same settler colonialism she

denounces. If viewed through the lens that *Aztlán* is a geographical location that belongs to Chicanx people, an idea rooted in ethnocentrism and touted by some within the Chicano Movement, *Aztlán* repeats the same colonial violence of removing Indigenous peoples for another group. Leanne Simpson, in "As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance," writes "my Ancestors expected the settler state to recognize my nation, our lands, and the political and cultural norms in our territory" (Simpson 9), Of course, what the settler colonialists did was the opposite, resulting in the genocide of millions of Indigenous peoples and the erasure of their cultural systems. *Aztlán*, if utilized to promote a reclamation of the land for only Chicanx through the erasure of other Indigenous peoples, would engage in this same colonial violence that is antithetical to what Simpson's ancestors hoped for. This is not to say that Chicanx people cannot occupy the U.S. Southwest and feel a connection to the land; rather, there does not need to be "one" owner and inhabitant of the land. The idea that there is only one true owner of the U.S. Southwest is rooted in capitalism, as idea that only one entity can own land perpetuates the same ideology that leads to exclusionary behavior. It is both possible and necessary for multiple identities to join together in inhabiting the same shared space, and the first step to allow for this multi-layered inhabitation is through acknowledging different identities and their shared histories in relation to settler colonialism. This acceptance of different identities appears throughout *Borderlands / La Frontera*, but Anzaldúa falls short of explicitly discussing the necessity of layering out the different inhabitants of the land to the necessary degree.

Chapter Three: The Appropriation of Indigenous Peoples Rooted in *Aztlán*

After over 30 years of activism and reform, the 1990s marked the end of a centralized Chicano Movement. Though many activists continued fighting for the goals established throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, "It proved very difficult to get organizations and individuals to lay aside their specific agendas for the common welfare. The growing rift between Chicanos and Chicanas was only the most glaring example. Even within organizations, personal squabbles worked against unity" ("The Chicano Movement: 1965–1975" 273). The substantial work of Chicanas throughout the 1970s and 1980s received criticism by those who wished to remain in the patriarchal society and culture they grew up in, and irreconcilable differences led the downfall to the Chicano Movement. Further compounding the division was a lack of a galvanizing leader or leaders in the movement, as "no one leader emerged from the pack to give direction to the movement" ("The Chicano Movement: 1965–1975" 274). In addition to these internal issues, scholar Manuel G. Gonzalez argues that the conditions of the post-Vietnam War era also played a part in the end of the movement:

> [T]he failure of the movimiento needs to be seen in a broader context. Despite its deficiencies and weaknesses, the fact of the matter is that all the civil rights movements faded, not just the Brown Power groups. The political and intellectual climate of the country changed drastically with the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Problems, perceived and real, with the economy altered priorities, as well. As Americans approached the eighties, Armando Navarro argues convincingly, the concern for human rights was eclipsed by the desire for financial security. ("The Chicano Movement: 1965–1975" 274).

By the 1990s, the Movement's lack of centralized goals and activism led one person to state that "Nothing remains of [the Chicano Movement] now but a handshake practiced by middle-aged men" because "outside of the recent immigrant rights marches, there does not appear to be much militancy among Mexicanos since the movimiento, either in the barrios or in the schools" ("The

Chicano Movement: 1965–1975" 275). The lack of a centralized movement and issues with leadership not only affected the social activism of Chicanx, but it also changed the art that Chicanx produced, especially as it relates to their representations of *Aztlán.*

Many pieces of literature concerning *Aztlán*, either explicitly or implicitly, were published in the earlier decades of the Chicano Movement; yet, by the 1990s, *Aztlán's* prominence in literature declined along with the Movement. For example, Ray Gonzales edited a 1992 poetry collection titled *After Aztlan: Latino Poetry of the Nineties*. Released early in the decade, the book's title indicates that *Aztlán* was a concept that Chicanx and Latinx moved on from, effectively making *Aztlán* a concept of the past. The shift in utilizing Latino instead of Chicano is also telling of the evolution of identity as well, as it indicates that as Mexican Americans gained distance from the Chicano Movement, some also lost connection to the Chicanx moniker, instead finding appeal in a broader Latinx community.

Though literature may not have engaged with *Aztlán* in the 1990s as much as it did decades prior, another cultural and artistic medium did continue to grapple with aspects of the concept: visual art. In order to continue analyzing *Aztlán* as a representational category, visual art offers the most potent medium for doing so; visual art was as intertwined with the Chicano Movement as literature was, and the development of visual and performance art in the 1990s relays how *Aztlán* transformed as a concept. Visual art's importance to Chicanx expression cannot be understated, as it served as a medium allowing Chicanx to express themselves publicly. Murals, graffiti, paintings, flyers and more were all methods for distributing messages related to Chicanx liberation.

A central art group called the Royal Chicano Airforce (RCAF) demonstrates the vast impact that visual and performance art had (and continues to have) because of the Chicano

Movement. The RCAF was an art collective that "produced major works of art, poetry, prose, music, and performance in the United States during the second half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first" (E. Diaz 1). Most famous for its work in the 1960s and 1970s, this art collective created art that represented the broad goals of the Chicano Movement, focusing on "a visual campaign to symbolically reconfigure barrio space using words, images, and symbols of a collective consciousness" (E. Diaz 14). The RCAF also utilized their art for activism, continuing a long-standing tradition of Mexican art serving as a political tool. They promoted meal drives, created "politically inspiring portraits of Chicano movement leaders," and sought to bring attention to police brutality against Chicanx: "Portraits of *Los Angeles Times* journalist Ruben Salazar, for example, who was killed by law enforcement during the 1970 Chicano Moratorium march, were exhibited in the *Ruben Salazar Memorial Group Show*" (E. Diaz 28). The RCAF ultimately was an influential force in the Chicano Movement that prompted Chicanx to create visual and performative art to express themselves. Visual and performance art thus serve as an effective and relevant tool for analyzing the development of *Aztlán*.

As the Chicano Movement came to a close and the work of the RCAF slowed, there was a divide between the focus of the scholarship relating to the Chicano Movement and artwork centered around it. After the 1980s, "scholarship in the 1990s returned to the periodization of Chicano/a history and its major figures, critiquing the patriarchal structure that excluded women and queer people of color who participated in the creative and political activism of the era" (E. Diaz 34). Though much of the literature focused on topics such as the ones Anzaldúa tackled in *Borderlands / La Frontera*, RCAF art and other Chicanx artists took a different route in their analysis: "RCAF artwork reveals a more complex theoretical framework for understandings of the Chicano/a family, military service, and political claims to indigeneity that informed academic

paradigms in the 1990s" (E. Diaz 34). The claims to indigeneity that Diaz mentions refer to the burgeoning critique of *Aztlán* as an appropriating concept heading into the 1990s, evidenced by the performance art piece *Couple in the Cage: Two Amerindians Visit the West (1992)*.

Performance art, in particular, serves as the most potent tool for analyzing the development of *Aztlán* post-1990s because of the manner in which it allows for the embodiment of the concept through the performers' bodies. Because literature appears on a page, a static object that cannot change once printed and published, the thoughts of the authors are forever held in place. If an author wishes to react to audiences and readers, they must publish a separate work to account for the reaction. Performance art, meanwhile, allows for the interaction between performers and audience members. Audience members can interact with the performance, shaping both the performer's reactions and the significance of the performance. Performance art also allows for the physical embodiment of the performance and the themes and topics related to it. As Alicia Arrizón states, "the cross-referentiality of performance art mirrors the cross-referentiality of identity" ("Introduction" xxi). In performances in which identity is at the forefront of the topic, performance art allows for the embodiment of these identities that scholarship does not permit. In relation to *Aztlán*, identity is inherently intertwined with the concept, and thus performance art related to *Aztlán* would allow for the intersection of identities, the use of Indigenous iconography, and the importance of gender differences to find embodiment through performers. As Arrizón argues, "the identity of performance is inseparable from the materialization of discursive conventions into which it is ostensibly integrated" ("Introduction" xxii). Performance art is thus the most potent tool for relaying not only how *Aztlán* appears in a physical space, but also for understanding how audiences approach the concept and react to it, providing interactive insight that has not appeared up until this point.

One crucial art piece that reflects many of the themes of *Aztlán* is the performance art piece *Couple in the Cage*, performed by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña. Though not inspired by RCAF, the piece continues the tradition of Chicanx performance art serving as a political tool. Fusco and Gómez-Peña's backgrounds influenced the art and performances they created together and laid the framework for *Couple in the Cage*. Fusco's background as an Afro Cuban-American influenced the development of a post-colonial theoretical framework to which she applies to her art (Fusco 4,6). In 1988, she met "Mexican artist and writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña," and the two began an "ongoing dialogue about relationships among Latinos east and west, north and south" (Fusco 147). Together, the two artists began to think about the work of previous Latinx artists, such as those in the RCAF, in order to build upon it. Gómez-Peña describes how "in 1969, at the peak of Chicano nationalism, there was an interdisciplinary group called Toltecas in Aztlán that, without ever explicitly stating it, used the border as a laboratory...They were the precursors of our current dialogue" (Fusco 147). Gómez-Peña also cites his Mexican cultural ties as a major influence on his work: "Another influence is the Chicano movement: Chicano art, muralism, Chicano theater, Chicano poetry" (Fusco 148). With art from pieces such as the RCAF and poetry from major Chicanx figures in mind, Gómez-Peña and Fusco created their own visual art that reflects their perceptions of Latinidad, seen through the piece *Couple in the Cage*.

Performed in the years 1992 and 1993, the 500-year anniversary of Columbus' arrival to the "new world," *Couple in the Cage* highlights the continued evolution of the concept of *Aztlán*, as it critiques the appropriation and exoticization of Indigenous and Black people. Performed in various cities and countries, the piece was highly controversial:

> Our plan was to live in a golden cage for three days, presenting ourselves as undiscovered Amerindians from an island in the Gulf of Mexico that had somehow been overlooked by

> Europeans for five centuries. We called our homeland Guatinau, and ourselves Guatinauis. We performed our "traditional tasks," which ranged from sewing voodoo dolls and lifting weights to watching television and working on a laptop computer. A donation box in front of the cage indicated that, for a small fee [one dollar], [Fusco] would dance (rap music), Guillermo would tell authentic Amerindian stories (in a nonsensical language), and we would pose for Polaroids with visitors. Two "zoo guards" would be on hand to speak to visitors (since we could not understand them), take us to the bathroom on leashes, and feed us sandwiches and fruit. At the Whitney Museum in New York we added sex to our spectacle, offering a peek at authentic Guatinaui male genitals for $5. A chronology with highlights from the history of exhibiting non-Western peoples was on one didactic panel and a simulated Encyclopedia Britannica entry with a fake map of the Gulf of Mexico showing our island was on another (Taylor 163).

After the performance stopped traveling to various museums, Gómez-Peña and Fusco utilized footage of the performance to create a short film showcasing the events. The production of the short film reveals how *Couple in the Cage* serves as a critique of *Aztlán*, demonstrating how the exploitation of Indigenous cultures and peoples captivates audiences.

Though never explicitly mentioning *Aztlán*, the performance establishes a tie to Mexican culture through Aztec signifiers, indicating that the piece critiques the Chicano Movement. Gómez-Peña's costume includes a headdress, a facemask with jaguar print, and jewelry worn across his chest and forearms, all harkening to imagery of an Aztec. The headdress is reminiscent of Aztecs in paintings and portrayals, as they both include long, colored feathers. The jaguar print on Gómez-Peña's facemask also carries associations with the Aztecs, because they utilized the jaguar as a symbol of power, associating it with warriors and with the elite class (Saunders 106). Further linking the performance art to the Aztecs and *Aztlán* is the rendition of the famous Mexican ranchera song "Mexico Lindo y Querido" / "Mexico Beautiful and Beloved" at the beginning of the short film ("The couple in the cage" 2:01-3:15). The song is famous for its commemoration of Mexico, serving as a nationalistic song to idealize the nation in light of migrant absence. By playing this song as the opening piece of the short film, Gómez-Peña and

Fusco insinuate that the piece is directly related to Mexico and Mexican / Chicanx culture. Rather than play a song from an Indigenous culture, or a song related to Fusco's Cuban heritage, they play a famous Mexican song, indicating that the piece is a critique of the exoticization and dehumanization of Indigenous peoples by Chicanx, seen most clearly in the creation of *Aztlán*. Though Gómez-Peña and Fusco's *Couple in the Cage* never explicitly mentions *Aztlán*, the themes and commentary it provides serve as criticism for how Chicanx find *Aztlán* appealing while not acknowledging the history of current Indigenous peoples living in the U.S. Southwest, such as the Apache and Comanche. Gómez-Peña and Fusco reveal how *Aztlán* is an exotic, romanticized, and appropriated concept that continues the longstanding colonial violence of putting Indigenous peoples and cultures on display for personal gain.

In addition to critiquing the appropriation of Indigenous bodies and culture in the creation of *Aztlán*, *Couple in the Cage* also critiques the exploitation of Black and Indigenous female bodies throughout history. Fusco, as an Afro-Cuban, channels the "tradition of positioning the dark-skinned body as a spectacle for the consumption of the white" audience, a tradition that "did not end in the nineteenth century" (Kelly 117). Fusco symbolizes the exoticization, violation, and fetishization of the Black and Indigenous female body. In particular, she gains inspiration from the case of Saartijie Baartman:

> between 1810 and 1815, Saartijie Baartman (or Sarah Bartmann), who became known as 'The Hottentot Venus,' was exhibited to the public throughout Europe…while the exhibition of Saartijie Baartman in London was considered a public scandal, the state's objection to the exhibit was based more on her 'indecency' or nakedness than on her status as an exploited, indentured black individual. The fascination with Baartman's body and the disregard for her exploitation continued after her death; her genitals were dissected by French scientists (Kelly 116).

Fusco's performance evokes historic resonance with Baartman's horrific display and exploitation, and she offers her body to a contemporary audience to display how even 500 years

after Columbus's arrival, white audiences continue to demean Black and Indigenous female bodies. As Martínez-Saéz argues, Fusco's performance plays on the popular Latina idea that Anglo societies perceive the "flesh" of minority women as an exotic object (21). The simultaneous objection and public outrage of Baartman's body being naked while on display and the continued exhibition of her genitals past her death indicates that white society finds Black and Indigenous female bodies as disturbing, exotic, and sexual, ultimately relegating them to the status of object. By placing herself in a cage and acting as both Black and Indigenous, Fusco exposes the sexualization of her body to the white audience, highlighting this same idea that the flesh of Black, Indigenous, and Latina women face sexualization; she refers to the history of colonists purchasing their bodies during colonial times. Though capitulating to this trope of the Black female body being an object pleasurable to the white societal gaze, Fusco ultimately satirizes the objectification of the body for sexual pleasure and gives "agency to [the performer's] bodies and their reinscription of the wounded flesh" (Martínez-Saéz 21). Fusco, though reproducing the same objectification that Black bodies faced during colonization, ultimately regains bodily autonomy by staying in control of the performance and the display of herself.

In addition to their physical performance, *Couple in the Cage* reinforces its intentions to critique the exploitation and fetishization of Indigenous and Black bodies for public consumption by including footage and pictures that demonstrate the historical practice of putting humans on display. To highlight the inhumane treatment of foreign racialized bodies that occurred in Anglo countries for centuries, the short film splices together film of the performance with historical film: "It recalled the construction and performance of the "exotic" staged in the ethnographic fairs of the late 19th century, in which "natives" were placed in model "habitats" much as lifeless

specimens were placed in dioramas. And it parodied the assignation of value that the West has placed on the exotic" (Taylor 164-165). One example occurs when the film displays footage of an exhibit proclaiming that it had "Cannibals" from Africa ("The couple in the cage" 12:04-12:08). Fusco, as an Afro-Cuban woman, parallels this display of the Black "cannibals." She alludes to the colonialist thought that "savage" women devour white men, whether it be through physical ingestion (their fear) or through sexual intercourse (their fantasy). Colonial depictions of African and Indigenous women included both the image of "the cannibal, a vile savage who relished human flesh," and the image of "the naked women, portraying them…as sensuous, accessible, and acquiescent" (Myscofski 146). The portrayal of a "cannibal" thus serves as a method of othering Black and Indigenous women, making them an object to sexually conquer and also to treat inhumanely: "The retelling of tales of cannibalism was the last of several steps in the creation of 'otherness' in the people of the Americas (Myscofski 143). Fusco, much like the "cannibal," faces the white gaze that relegates her to the status of sexual and dangerous object.

In another instance, the film describes how "In 1853, two Salvadorans named Maximo and Bartola began a five-decade long tour of Europe and America billed as the last Aztec survivors of a jungle city in Mexico" ("The couple in the cage" 23:05-23:12). While Fusco represents the "cannibal," Gómez-Peña symbolizes the "Aztec survivors." Gómez-Peña mimics the idea that white audiences are susceptible to believing anything about dark skinned bodies, just as these two Salvadorans convinced audiences that they survived the colonization of the Aztecs. He also reveals the need for white society to portray Indigenous people in particular ways: as uncivilized people living in the jungle. Just as Maximo and Bartola claimed to live in the jungle of Mexico, Gómez-Peña acts as if he is from an undiscovered island and thus not

familiar with any technological inventions. Lastly, Gómez-Peña criticizes the notion that Aztecs and other Indigenous peoples are all from the past; if they are not, then its only possible because they were "undiscovered." The piece, then, demonstrates how in the recent past, Anglo society viewed Black and Indigenous peoples not only as exotic, but as spectacles and freaks to go see, akin to viewing animals in a zoo. While successfully critiquing this inhumane aspect of Western society's history, Gómez-Peña and Fusco's performance also took on unintended meanings due to the reactions of audience members.

Couple in the Cage ultimately critiques not just the past perceptions of Indigenous and African peoples, but contemporary society as well because audience members engaged with the two actors as if they were actually Indigenous people put on display for public amusement. As Kelly highlights, there are two meanings and critiques of the film: "the colonialist tradition of placing humans on display and the equally persistent tradition of spectators eagerly consuming such displays" (Kelly 115). At the end of the short film, the title cards state that "The performance was conceived as a satirical comment on the past. To the performers' surprise, however, many of their visitors thought they were real" ("The couple in the cage" 30:42-30:55). Gómez-Peña and Fusco did not believe that so many audience members would actually think Guatinauis was a factual Indian tribe. Clues, too, of the true nature of the show were abundant throughout the performance. For example, in one instance Gómez-Peña watches a television inside the cage that shows three people portrayed as being Indigenous dancing in an exaggerated and comical manner. In watching the offensive portrayal of Indigenous people, Gómez-Peña hints to the audience that they are doing the same thing by watching him, yet the majority of the audience, enthralled in the performance, does not understand the critique. One man tells the camera "I'm sure he doesn't know what [the television show] is," dismissing Gómez-Peña as a

creature unable to comprehend "modern" technology ("The couple in the cage" 4:28-4:30). Other audience members did have a better understanding of what they were watching, such as a man in Madrid, Spain who says "It's a critique of the colonization of America...as long as it's a joke, it's fine. You have to see the humor in all this" ("The couple in the cage" 12:40-13:03). Despite his acknowledgement of the situation, his dismissal of the event as humorous indicates acceptance of the situation as inherently acceptable. As Martínez-Saéz points out, the man's "attempt to dismiss and disregard the event by relegating it to the category of 'sense of humor' not only neglects the reinscription of history, but also infantilizes the performers" (18). He insinuates that to put Indigenous bodies on display is something that can be laughed off and does not need to be taken seriously, a theme that the performance continually emphasizes.

Throughout the performance, audience members also repeatedly showed little regard for Gómez-Peña and Fusco's bodies, emphasizing how Indigenous and Black bodies, and by extension Indigenous culture, face exploitation in Western society. During the performance, the audience members could pay for various interactive tasks, as it was one dollar for a photo, 50 cents for a naked dance by Fusco, 50 cents for Gómez-Peña to tell the story of his homeland (in a made-up language), and five dollars for him to show his penis ("The couple in the cage" 8:32-8:47). Not only did audience members actually pay for these tasks, but "several times on their tour, women actually touched [Gómez-Peña]. One woman in Irvine, California, Fusco recounts, 'asked for plastic gloves to be able to touch the male specimen, began to stroke his legs and soon moved towards his crotch.' He stepped back, and the woman stopped" (Taylor 165). These women that touched Gómez-Peña did not ask for consent, indicating that they felt a sense of entitlement to his body. To another American it would be against societal norms to touch another person without consent, but because they believed Gómez-Peña to be Guatinauis, the women

assumed they could take ownership of him. The low prices for the interactive tasks also reveal the lack of regard for the two performers' bodies. It was more expensive to have a photo than for Fusco to dance or for Gómez-Peña to relay the (made up) history of their culture, indicating that memorabilia for the audience was more valuable than their bodies and culture. When Fusco did dance for 50 cents, people commented on her beauty and figure, relegating her to the status of exotic object. Again, Fusco parallels the case of Baartman, who was also essentially "reduced to her sexual parts" (Kelly 117). Anglo society thus views Indigenous and Black bodies as inherently sexual. As scholar Chris Finley writes, "Native men as well as Native women [have] been sexualized, gendered, and racialized as penetrable within colonial and imperial discourses" (Finley 35). Gómez-Peña and Fusco effectively demonstrate that contemporary Anglo society views the bodies and culture of Aztec Indigenous peoples as undeserving of the same respect given to white bodies and culture, a notion lasting since the days of colonization.

Gómez-Peña and Fusco's critique is not exclusive to Anglo society, as it demonstrates how Mexican society, too, perpetuates the colonial violence of appropriating Indigenous cultures and bodies. Scholar Lourdes Alberto argues that the Mexico government utilizes what he terms *indigenismo* in the appropriation of Indigenous cultures: "the multiple aims of *indigenismo*, as governmental policy as well as cultural production, facilitated the formation of a modern Mexican nation by creating a myth of origin through the selective formation of indigenous history" (Alberto 108). In creating a national identity, the Mexican government continually deploys Indigenous cultures, myths, and iconography to create a sense of community and pride in their Indigenous background, "while at the same time excluding actual indigenous people through assimilation programs and land dispossession" (Alberto 108). She further specifies that Chicanx throughout the Chicano Movement exhibited the same behavior as the Mexican

government: “by adopting indigenist poetics, Chicanos’ and Chicanas’ uses of indigeneity is viewed as an extension of a colonial practice” (Alberto 108). *Couple in the Cage* highlights the appropriation utilized via *indigenismo* by Chicanx and Mexicans in the creation of *Aztlán*. Ultimately, Gómez-Peña and Fusco adhere to many of the tropes and ideas that *Aztlán* creates and reinforces, as they impersonate Indigenous peoples and place themselves as a spectacle for audiences. Yet, in doing so, the two artists actually depart from these tropes of *Aztlán*, creating a satire that exposes the colonial act of appropriating Indigenous peoples that *Aztlán* perpetuates.

Aztlán in the Twenty-First Century: Rejection from All Sides

As *Couple in the Cage* laid bare the problematic aspects of *indigenismo* as it relates to *Aztlán*, controversy continued to surround *Aztlán* into the twenty-first century. In the early 2000s, right-wing political figures utilized *Aztlán* in debates about immigration, citing the concept as proof of the danger that immigrants, particularly Mexicans, bring to the U.S. For example, “On 23 May 2006, the CNN program *Lou Dobbs Tonight* displayed a map of Aztlán to frame immigration with Mexican governmental aggression and “radical Latino” politics” (Bebout 291). Right wing commentators associated *Aztlán* with notions of radicalism and terrorism to persuade people to stand against Mexican immigration and the Ethnic Studies requirement in the TUSD high school curriculum which “is a clear and direct appropriation of Chicano movement discourse” (Bebout 293). Once seen as a liberating and inspiring concept for grass roots activists, through conspiracy theories, consistent television coverage degrading it, and fear mongering rhetoric infused into public discourse, “nativists have successfully reframed the Aztlán narrative...In other words, this phenomenon has reached a stage wherein Chicano or Mexican

articulations of Aztlán immediately trigger the nativist reconquista hysteria" (Bebout 309). Without a centralized Chicano Movement to combat the reframing of the concept, *Aztlán* became a controversial and negative topic by the mid 2000s.

With a controversial association attached to it, the recognition that it appropriates Indigenous cultures, and the knowledge that some use it as an excuse to exclude certain identities, *Aztlán's* fall from grace and reverence became evident in 2019 when the famous Chicanx student group MEChA voted to remove *Aztlán* from its name. MEChA, which stands for Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de *Aztlán* (Chicanx Student Movement of *Aztlán*), was the name chosen for Chicanx students in 1969 when "more than one hundred ethnically Mexican students, staff, and faculty from twenty-nine of California's public colleges and universities met in Santa Barbara in order to craft a plan for higher education. But they also brought together several distinct student organizations and combined them into one new group: MEChA" (Hidalgo, "Beyond Aztlán"). Yet, despite their rich history of activism throughout the Chicano Movement, members voted to change their name to MEPA: Movimiento Estudiantil Progressive Action, partly because they wanted to distance themselves from *Aztlán* and ethnic nationalism. Students cited controversy, such as nationalistic implications from conservatives and the exclusivity highlighted by queer and feminist scholars, with the concept and its history of exclusion as reasons to remove it from the organization's name (Hidalgo, "Beyond Aztlán"). Though MEPA does not speak for all Chicanx, the removal of *Aztlán* from their name is indicative of the contemporary state of the mythical homeland and ethnocentric nationalism. As a revered and well-known organization that continues its activism from the Chicano Movement, MEPA's dismissal of *Aztlán* indicates that the concept is one that is seemingly outdated, weighed down by a complicated and controversial history.

So where does all of this controversy leave our understanding of *Aztlán* today? Once seen as a unifying symbol for oppressed Chicanos, it faced decades-long criticism for not being gender inclusive enough, for appropriating Indigenous symbols, and for being a radical nationalistic concept. With MEPA disavowing the concept, *Aztlán* struggles to remain a relevant academic concept; however, it is not completely gone from the consciousness of Chicanx. The rise of social media beginning in the late 2000s and expanding into the 2010s naturally led to Chicanx posting online; accompanying this foray into social media is a persistent, albeit sparingly, engagement with *Aztlán*.

The Consistent use of *Indigenismo* on Instagram in the 2010s

Social media is a unique platform for analyzing the development of *Aztlán* because of the accessibility that it offers to a wide range of users. As Bazarova and Choi write, "social media technologies have opened new possibilities for sharing personal information with online networks…From expressing deep personal feelings and opinions to documenting mundane details of daily life, this type of public disclosure shared with multiple, diverse, and often ill-defined audiences blurs boundaries between publicness and privacy" (1). One does not need to be a revolutionary leader like Corky Gonzales or a ground-breaking scholar like Gloria Anzaldúa to have their voice heard; all one needs to do is make an account. Social media also offers the ability for users to post online under the guise of anonymity, as one does not need to attach their real-life identity to their virtual identity. With the ability for anyone to post on social media, it is apparent that the functions of social media differ by individual, as users "utilize different social media functions for disclosures with different levels of intimacy, depending on their motives and

goals" (Bazarova and Choi 2). One such motivation may be to promote a social message in order to voice their opinion to a public platform. As such, many users engage with social media to discuss certain social justice issues, offering insight into what the average person may think about an issue. Social media thus offers insight into how Chicanx currently view and engage with *Aztlán* outside of an academic setting.

To analyze this final shift in the evolution of *Aztlán*, I utilize the social media platform Instagram to document engagement with the concept. Instagram is one of the biggest social media platforms and it primarily deals with photography and images. Users post pictures to their individual feeds with accompanying captions to go with each photo, comprising a post. One vital feature of Instagram is the use of hashtags, denoted by a pound sign. Users will post a hashtag and then write a word or phrase alongside it, such as #*Aztlán*. A hashtag then allows users to click on it which brings up all other posts that utilize the same hashtag, connecting them all by their shared content. The use of the hashtag is a well-studied and documented one, resulting in different theories about its impact on users. Cass R. Sunstein argues that the "effect of social media hashtags has been to abet the increasing group polarization of the US, as evidenced by his discussion of #BlackLivesMatter and #AllLivesMatter." Anthropologists Yarmir Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, meanwhile, claim that "hashtags organize information but also leave information out or include misleading, irrelevant, or false information" (Noel). Hashtags, then have the power to unite people under one topic, but also divide people engaging in one hashtag from people utilizing other hashtags. Yet, hashtags also have the power to transform identity, as Noel details how Latinx authors challenge and create notions of identity and Latinidad through utilizing hashtags on Instagram: "In centering their queer and migrant struggles through hashtags, memes, and poems, [Latinx poets] urge us to keep questioning Latinidad, and they

imagine new polemic and poetic possibilities for being in a brutal world" (Noel). Instagram is thus a medium that can help transform identity and bring users together under one topic via hashtags, but can also leave out crucial context and nuance that can create division.

As a result, Instagram has the potential to reveal greater insight into how Chicanx engage with an already controversial concept in *Aztlán*, and whether the hashtag brings people together in a unifying manner or if it perpetuates the same division highlighted by earlier critics. In finding out whether *Aztlán* is relevant today, I searched through hashtags about *Aztlán* and found that many Chicanx continue to include it in their posts, keeping the concept alive; however, various posts indicate that through visual art, users continue to reinforce the problematic aspects of *Aztlán*.

Chicanx today evidently engage in the same use of *indigenismo* critiqued by Gómez-Peña and Fusco, as the appropriation of Indigenous peoples satirized in *Couple in the Cage* appears most visibly in a post against "Kids in Cages." The Instagram post depicts a young boy holding a sign saying, "No Kids In Cages" (Bob_bernal_jr).[1] Behind the young boy march others also wearing Aztec headdresses and clothing. While it is not possible to discern the identities of those photographed, the user includes hashtags with the words "#*Aztlán,*" "#mexicanlivesmatter," "#culture," and "#nokidsincages," indicating that the user identifies *Aztlán* as being a part of Mexican culture. The caption of the post describes the scene as a "peaceful Vanessa Guillen protest march" in Los Angeles, California, a reference to Mexican American U.S. soldier Venessa Guillen (Bob_bernal_jr). After going missing at the military base Fort Hood in Texas, she was found "dismembered and burned," leading to national outrage "at the lack of answers and action from the military when Specialist Guillen first disappeared" (J. Diaz et al.). Because

[1] See Figure 1

of the lack of immediate action around her disappearance and subsequent death, many Latinx and Chicanx activist groups protested against the systemic problems that continue to push them to the side and result in unlawful death and discrimination (J. Diaz et al.). The inclusion of #*Aztlán* with this protest indicates a lasting connection between the mythical Chicanx homeland with contemporary social justice movements and Chicanx pride. The "No Kids In Cages" Instagram post thus reveals how Chicanx rallied around Guillen by reinforcing the ideas created during the Chicano Movement. They find pride and power in their Aztec ancestry and proudly display it to protest Guillen's wrongful death, calling for changes to the systemic problems that sparked the Chicano Movement.

The "No Kids In Cages" post also displays the connection between *Aztlán* and the fight against the U.S. agency of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). With a rise in immigration by Mexicans, Central Americans, and other nationalities, the detention of children in migrant detention centers and their subsequent separation from their families by ICE is a contentious point in the Chicanx community. By writing #*Aztlán* alongside the "No Kids In Cages" sign, the poster emphasizes the idea that the immigrant children separated from their families and placed in ICE detention centers, specifically those of Mexican origin, belong in the United States because *Aztlán* is their home; in dressing up as Aztecs, they imply that all Chicanx do not deserve to be caged because their Aztec ancestors were in America long before colonization. The use of Aztec clothing and the hashtag "culture" also perpetuates the idea that Chicanx and Mexican culture includes Aztec and Indigenous culture, furthering the appropriation of Indigenous peoples criticized in the 1990s. Both *Couple in the Cage* and the "No Kids In Cages" Instagram photo display the same form of Indigeneity, but Gómez-Peña and Fusco critique the legitimate appropriation utilized by those protesting.

Many other Instagram posts use Indigenous visual art, indicating that the appropriation of Indigenous culture as a symbol of Chicanx pride is inherently tied to *Aztlán*. One post displays a drawing depicting two ICE officers detaining an Indigenous person, again accompanied by the hashtag "#*Aztlán*" (Oscarguillen777).[2] Other hashtags include "#chicano," "#brownpride," and "#freethemall," indicating that this post also equates Indigenous peoples as equal to Chicanx, as if their true form is as an Indigenous person (Oscarguillen777). The artwork also displays one ICE officer wearing a hat reminiscent of the hats worn by pilgrims, a critique that argues that the detaining of Mexican immigrants is an act of colonial violence similar to the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Another Instagram photo depicts artwork including an Indigenous person holding a police officer in a threatening manner, with the words "Stop Police Brutality" and "Stop Injustice" framing the outside of the photo (Mexica_custom_viclas).[3] Hashtags include "#*Aztlán*," "#aztecas," and "#mexicaculture," again indicating that *Aztlán* is a part of Mexican culture. The photo is a reference to the disproportionate amount of police violence that occurs against Black and Brown people, another contemporary social justice issue in the consciousness of many Chicanx. In drawing an Aztec intimidating a police officer, the photo indicates that Chicanx must revert back to their "true" form in order to stand up to their oppressors; they must find strength in their Aztec ancestry and its history of war against an empire. Again, the concept of *Aztlán* continues to include the appropriation of Indigenous peoples, equating Aztecs as being equal to Chicanx. This simplistic approach to creating Chicanx nationalism "produces romanticized images of a single Indian tribe that later became Chicanos, a system of representation that erases historically accurate indigenous subjectivities. Such nationalist

[2] See Figure 2
[3] See Figure 3

narratives, grounded in biologically based terms of mestizaje and a national romance of a unified indigenous past, do not recognize Indians other than Aztecs as inhabitants of this continent, so that in such narratives, *mestizo* and therefore *Chicano* means *Indian"* (Guidotti-Hernández, *Unspeakable Violence* 16). While Chicanx reproduce imagery of *Aztlán* believe that they are promoting unity, their efforts actually contribute the problematic appropriation of Indigenous cultures that Gómez-Peña and Fusco criticize in *Couple in the Cage*.

With many Chicanx turning to Instagram, engagement with Chicanx visual art and concepts from the Chicano Movement continue today. For example, though there is no official Royal Chicano Air Force account, over 400 posts display their art, keeping the history of Chicanx artwork and activism alive. In addition to RCAF posts, there are over 54 thousand Instagram posts that have a connection to #*Aztlán*. These posts largely equate Chicanx culture with Indigenous cultures, specifically the Aztecs, indicating that many Chicanx either overlook the criticisms made about the concept or are unaware of them. In making these posts, the intent to focus on social inequality appears often, as a wide variety of the posts relate to issues such as immigration, including posts about ICE and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), police brutality, land reclamation, farm worker rights, racism and more. Chicanx posting on social media evidently continue to seek empowerment through *Aztlán* despite its problematic aspects, just as was once the case during the Chicano Movement.

Appendix

Figure 1: No Kids in Cages

Figure 2: Two Ice Officers Detain an Indigenous Person

Figure 3: An Indigenous Person Intimidates a Police Officer

Conclusion

Since its inception in the 1960s, *Aztlán* has continued to serve as an empowering concept that gives Chicanx strength and comfort in their struggles for social justice. Whether in regard to issues persisting since the Chicano Movement, such as workers' rights and police brutality, or newfound issues such as mass ICE deportations and DACA, *Aztlán* remains in the consciousness of many Chicanx. However, there is also a large faction of Chicanx and Chicanx scholars that disavow *Aztlán* or find the concept to be problematic. Because of the male-dominated culture of the 1960s and 1970s, authors such as Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales and Rudolfo Anaya created a vision of *Aztlán* that centered around men and mestizaje, much to the exclusion of other identities. As feminist and queer scholars, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, from the 1980s challenged the manner in which *Aztlán* reinforced hetero-patriarchal norms, they reappropriated the concept to make it more inclusive and intersectional. Making space for queer people, women, and Chicanx who did not fit the mestizo racial identity such as Asian and AfroChicanx, these scholars identified how male writers overlooked many people's inclusion when conceptualizing *Aztlán*. Despite efforts to diversify and reappropriate it, Gómez-Peña and Fusco's critique of the appropriation of *indigenismo* ultimately reveals that *Aztlán* is inherently problematic. Its exotification of Aztec culture and Indigenous people is rooted in its creation, meaning that *Aztlán* cannot overcome this appropriation to embody the intersectionality that scholars like Anzaldúa attempt to instill it with. Even Anzaldúa's attempt to reappropriate the concept and provide inclusivity and intersectionality engages with the settler colonialism that historically displaced Indigenous peoples. In centering the conversation around Aztec mythology, culture, and people, *Aztlán* encourages Chicanx to replace the histories of other Indigenous tribes of the U.S. Southwest in favor of claiming ownership of the land for themselves. In attempting to reclaim

Aztlán, Chicanx ultimately engage in the same colonial violence that Gómez-Peña and Fusco highlight, as settler colonialism is rooted in the concept. Once seen as a positive force to promote Chicanx pride and nationalism, critical analysis of *Aztlán* transformed the concept into a controversial topic in academic circles.

While scholars recognize the issues surrounding *Aztlán*, the continued use of its imagery in social media art demonstrates a generational divide. As Chapter one details, the creation of *Aztlán* in the 1960s and 1970s, over 50 years ago, stems in part from Gonzales's "I am Joaquín." On the surface, Gonzales promotes Chicanx pride by affirming strength in one's mestizo identity and rebelling against Anglo society. He finds comfort in figures such as the Aztec ruler Cuauhtémoc, the Mexican revolutionaries Zapata and Villa, and Mexican independence leader Miguel Hidalgo, while also acknowledging his European ancestors like Cortés. Yet, in primarily referencing and revering Indigenous and European men, Gonzales preferences a mestizo identity over other racial identities, and preferences men over women. Rudolfo Anaya, in his book *Heart of Aztlán* furthers these themes through the character of Clemente whose newfound strength given by *Aztlán* results in the reinforcement of a patriarchal culture. Rejuvenated by *Aztlán*, Clemente relegates his wife Adelita to the status of housewife and forces his daughters under his control. *Aztlán* thus begins as a patriarchal concept that gives older Chicanos the belief that they are the ones who should be in control.

Chapter two, meanwhile, demonstrates how Chicana activists in the 1980s, such as Anzaldúa, attempted to reappropriate the concept to be more inclusive for the generation inheriting the end of the Chicano Movement. In order to promote inclusivity and intersectionality, Anzaldúa argues for the adoption of a "new *mestiza* consciousness," an ideology that calls for all, regardless of their identity, to transcend the existing hetero-patriarchal

society that condemns many minorities in order to dismantle existing systems. She calls for the end of existing cultures because they were created by men; she both embraces her different identities while also claiming that she does not need to adhere to or identify with them; she claims that all Chicanx need to embrace different races (even though she overlooks Asian Chicanx). By the end of *Borderlands / La Frontera*, Anzaldúa argues that a reclaiming of *Aztlán* will return the homeland to its proper inhabitants and be more inclusive for all.

Though Anzaldúa attempts to make *Aztlán* a more diverse concept, chapter three demonstrates how the concept's appropriation of Indigenous peoples, specifically the Aztecs, reveals that *Aztlán* cannot function as a positive concept. Created during the 1990s after the end of the Chicano Movement, *Couple in the Cage* demonstrates how Black and Indigenous bodies face exploitation by white and Mexican society. Through their portrayal of "undiscovered Amerindians," Gómez-Peña and Fusco satirize the historic colonial act of placing Black and Indigenous bodies in display for white audiences, an act that *Aztlán* reproduces. With the performance being set post-Chicano Movement, Gómez-Peña and Fusco set the stage for a new wave of Chicanx to think about *Aztlán* critically. Chicanx growing up in the 1990s and twenty-first century do not get the same idealized version of *Aztlán* that Chicanx growing up in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s received, setting the stage for a generational divide.

With the influential and historic high school and college Chicanx student group Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de *Aztlán* (MEChA) changing its name to Movimiento Estudiantil Progressive Action (MEPA), it is clear that many younger Chicanx students want to distance themselves from *Aztlán*. This shift away from *Aztlán* represents a pivotal moment in Chicanx history, as younger Chicanx indicate that they are willing and capable of progressing past the ideologies of the heteropatriarchal Chicano Movement to forge their own path forward.

Yet, older generations of Chicanx seemingly have a different relation to how they view and utilize *Aztlán*, evidenced by their posts on Instagram. Many of the visual art Instagram posts stem from Chicanx older than the typical high school and college demographic. The older generation's continued use of *Aztlán* indicates that when they were younger, *Aztlán* existed as an inspiring concept; they are either not aware that the concept is problematic, or do not believe in the arguments against it. Regardless, these older Chicanx evidently do not wish to let go of *Aztlán*. By circulating imagery of the concept, they engage in the problematic aspects that Gómez-Peña and Fusco highlighted, such as the exotification and appropriation of Indigenous bodies.

Though these older Chicanx reproduce the negative aspects of *Aztlán*, they also narrate its positive aspects. They relate the concept to the social justice movements that they advocate for, protesting inequality while promoting Chicanx pride. Finding themselves in a time of immense social upheaval and activism, these Chicanx attempt to perpetuate the defiance against racial oppression instilled during the Chicano Movement; however, their methods indicate a lack of awareness of how *Aztlán* and Chicanx have changed over time. As the case of MEPA highlights, younger Chicanx evidently wish to abandon the concept of *Aztlán* entirely, attempting to promote Mexican American power and pride without adhering to the problematic ideology of the past. Yet, the case of *Aztlán* necessitates a more nuanced approach.

Aztlán, despite its problematic aspects, is still a useful tool for empowering Chicanx and Mexican American individuals because, at its core, it calls for the Chicanx community to take pride in their ancestry and proudly proclaim that they belong in the United States as much as any other race or ethnicity. Because it is laced with positive intentions, in order to continue as an empowering force, *Aztlán* cannot be a symbol utilized to promote ethnic nationalism through the

erasure of other ethnicities and races. Indigeneity cannot become over simplified; rather, acknowledgment is the first step to pushing forward the positive aspects of the concept while learning from the scholarship surrounding its problematic components. By acknowledging different Indigenous tribes in the U.S. Southwest, as well as the longstanding history of Mexican-Indigenous violence, Chicanx can move toward a more inclusive *Aztlán*.

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