

“The Chicax Movement and Philosophy: Recovering Patrick Carey-Herrera’s *Chicanismo: Hypothesis, Thesis, and Argument: Seven Essays Concerning the Essentials of Chicano Thought and Behavior*”  
by Manuel Chávez, Jr.

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**English Abstract**

The future development of a Mexican American philosophy calls for the recovery of and engagement with its past literature. In his 1983 book, *Hypothesis, Thesis, and Argument: Seven Essays Concerning the Essentials of Chicano Thought and Behavior* Carey-Herrera identifies some of the key philosophical themes that emerged through the Chicax Movement which, he claims, together, outline the perspective of “Chicanismo.” In the seven chapters of his work, he discusses the philosophy of U.S. history, the phenomenology of “Otherness,” oppression and resistance, racial identity, assimilation, self-representation, and the ethics of “Carnalismo.” In this article, I provide a critical review of Carey-Herrera’s work. I briefly summarize each chapter, followed by a critique of each one. I then consider the relevance of Carey-Herrera’s work to current discussions about the potential directions for a Mexican American philosophy.

**Resumen en español**

El desarrollo futuro de una filosofía mexicanoamericana exige la recuperación y el compromiso con su literatura pasada. En su libro de 1983, *Hipótesis, tesis y argumento: siete ensayos sobre lo esencial del pensamiento y el comportamiento chicano*, Carey-Herrera identifica algunos de los temas filosóficos claves que surgieron a través del Movimiento Chicano/a que, él según afirma, juntos, esbozan la perspectiva del “chicanismo.” En los siete capítulos de su trabajo, analiza la filosofía de la historia de los EE. UU., la fenomenología de la “otredad”, la opresión y la resistencia, la identidad racial, la asimilación, la autorrepresentación, y la ética del “carnalismo.” En este artículo, proporciono una revisión crítica del trabajo de Carey-Herrera. Resumo brevemente cada capítulo, seguido con una crítica de cada uno. Luego considero la relevancia el trabajo del Carey-Herrera para las discusiones actuales sobre las posibles direcciones de una filosofía mexicanoamericana.

**Resumo em português**

O desenvolvimento futuro de uma filosofia México-americana exige a recuperação e o compromisso com a sua literatura anterior. No seu livro de 1983, *Hipótese, tese, e argumento: Sete ensaios sobre os fatos essenciais do pensamento e comportamento chicano*, Carey-Herrera identifica alguns dos temas filosóficos chave que surgiram

através do movimento Chicano/a e que juntos, segundo ele, esboçam a perspectiva do chicanismo. Nos sete capítulos da sua obra, analisa a filosofia da história dos Estados Unidos, a fenomenologia da “Alteridade”, opressão e resistência, identidade racial, assimilação, autorrepresentação, e a ética de “carnalismo.” Neste artigo, apresento uma resenha crítica da obra de Carey-Herrera. Resumo brevemente cada capítulo, seguido de uma crítica de cada um. Depois considero a relevância da obra de Carey-Herrera para discussões atuais sobre os potenciais caminhos para uma filosofia méxico-americana.

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In the current era of nationalist politics in the United States, Mexican American philosophy has the potential to challenge the aggressive nativism and overt xenophobia that undergirds its cultural logic. The first national conference of the Society for Mexican American Philosophy held at Texas A&M University in May of 2017 is, thus, not only an academic event, but also a political moment for considering the possibilities and the future development of a Mexican American philosophy. As part of the project to build a Mexican American philosophy, it is important to recover and engage previous works that have already attempted to articulate a philosophy from the experiences of Mexican Americans. For this reason, I will examine Patrick Carey-Herrera’s text, *Chicanismo: Hypothesis, Thesis, and Argument: Seven Essays Concerning the Essentials of Chicano Thought and Behavior*.

Published in 1983, Carey-Herrera’s book aims to outline the philosophy that emerged from el *movimiento*, by identifying the main theoretical issues facing Chicana intellectuals. The Chicana Movement, as many have explained, was not a single monolithic movement, but it was the constellation of various events and organizations. [1] Although aware of this diversity, Carey-Herrera nevertheless understood the Chicana Movement as revealing a particular philosophical perspective: *Chicanismo*. In the preface, he claims, “Chicanismo’s fundamental, unwavering goal is sovereignty for today’s *Mexica* within today’s socio-political reality and order.” (x-xi) Chicanismo is a challenge to cultural imperialism rooted in the idea of Aztlán, which implies “that the Mexican American is *not* out of place in the great Southwest.” (xi)[2]

The book, Carey-Herrera states, is addressed to two target audiences. For Anglo Americans (“the general, majority community”), the book can guide them beyond their own destructive myths about people of color. For Mexican Americans (a “neutral” term for “the community in general”), the book can help develop their sense of self and community. Carey-Herrera suggests it can help Mexican Americans become Chicanas, “that politically, socially aware, and concerned segment of the Mexican American Community which sees itself as such, and prefers the term.” (xiii)

There are seven essays that compose the book. In each of the essays, Carey-Herrera discusses a theme that he considers central to the philosophy of Chicanismo: the politics of U.S. history, the phenomenology of “Otherness,” oppression and resistance, racial identity, assimilation, self-representation, and the ethics of “Carnalismo.” Although each essay focuses on a specific issue, they interrelate in ways that at times build off each other, but also at other times stand in tension with each other, and even seem to contradict each other. Carey-Herrera does not settle on firm answers to the questions he poses, but the effect of the collection of essays is to offer a suggestive view of what constitutes a philosophy of Chicanismo.

In this article, I will provide a critical review of Carey-Herrera’s work. I will offer a short summary of each essay, including my own critique of each one. I will then consider the relevance of Carey-Herrera’s work to current discussions about the possibility and directions of a Mexican American philosophy.

## **U.S. History and Mexican Americans**

In the first chapter, “The Historical Conspiracy: The Urgency For A New Historical Perspective,” Carey-Herrera attacks, what he calls, the “Great Gringo Conspiracy,” the narrow historical narrative of U.S. exceptionalism that omits elements which undermine the national story of triumph and progress. (3) In this view of history, Mexican Americans are considered to be “‘outside’ the proper concept of American history and society.” (5) The effect of this historical perspective not only feeds a “chauvinistic” nationalism among Anglo Americans, but without a perspective of their own history, Carey-Herrera contends “the Mexican American community has succumbed to the myths created about them by others--because they live in another’s world.” (7) As a result of living in a historical worldview not of their own, Mexican Americans “are as ignorant of their own origins as are the strangers who speak for them.” (7) Carey-Herrera credits *El Plan de Santa Barbara* for articulating the challenge to this historical conspiracy. Citing the work of Deluvina Hernandez and Octavio Romano-V., he understands this historical conspiracy as a “plot” but without a single intention or purpose. Rather, it is the effect of a combination of a lack of competence, indifference, intellectual laziness, institutional inertia as well as bigoted motivations. Yet, whatever its causes, he argues that it is morally and epistemologically irresponsible to continue to adhere to the Great Gringo Conspiracy.

Given that Carey-Herrera was a history professor, perhaps it is not a surprise that the first essay addresses the politics of U.S. history. His argument also reflects the period in academic history when the debates around multiculturalism were still hotly debated--in fact, Carey-Herrera mentions the conflicts at the University of California, Berkeley. While the debate may have been settled at institutions like UC Berkeley, the 2010 Arizona law to ban of Mexican American studies classes in public schools shows the historical conspiracy highlighted by Carey-Herrera has not faded away.[3] As he

makes clear, the value of historical knowledge extends beyond academic concerns because our understanding of history shapes how we view our selves and our reality. In this manner, Carey-Herrera argument echoes the point made by postcolonial intellectuals about the need to counter dominant historical narratives. However, given that his argument aims to justify the inclusion of Mexican American history into the narrative of U.S. history, Carey-Herrera does not consider how this inclusion may require more than the addition of content, but a reframing of national history. Also, Carey-Herrera does not touch upon the complexities and politics of Mexican American history which may have its own exclusions. Nevertheless, it is clear that Carey-Herrera concludes that Chicanoism calls for a historical perspective that makes visible the social existence of Mexican Americans.

### **The Master-Servant Relationship and Chicana Identity**

In the second chapter, “On The Aspect Of ‘Otherness’ And The Chicano: Reality and Language--Self Identity and Self Definition,” Carey-Herrera outlines a phenomenology of “Otherness” from a Mexican American perspective. Agreeing with Martin Heidegger, he claims that alienation characterizes the universal human condition, and thus cannot be reduced to socio-economic factors. However, Carey-Herrera understands that Mexican Americans face a particular manifestation of this alienation due to their own historical circumstances. This alienation affects the socio-psychological aspect of culture, and thus causes Mexican Americans to act out in particular ways. According to Carey-Herrera, a philosophy of Chicanoism should be “sufficiently powerful to halt any further deterioration of the injured psyche, and sufficiently potent to help establish the structure, values and perimeters of a new reality wherein the sense of alienation is less.” (22)

According to Carey-Herrera, the “cultural behavior” of Mexican Americans reflects the long history of a people oppressed by others, extending back centuries: “The resentful disdain which characterized the Indians’ attitude towards the Spaniards is still alive within us...the reluctance, the spiteful murmurs, the slo-fry [*sic*] resentment and the outbursts of self-destructive rage which always characterize the behavioral aspects of the relationship between servants and masters are still with us.” (22) Carey-Herrera explains the master-servant relationship, created through colonial domination, causes alienation and resentment within modern society. Where the “dominant force” comes to assume its own superiority over the “sub-dominant force,” developing a “master mentality,” the sub-dominant force develops a “servant mentality,” perceiving itself as inferior, resulting in “self-alienation.” (23)

In the contemporary situation, Carey-Herrera states that Mexicans as well as Mexican Americans developed a “servant mentality” in relation to Anglo Americans (25). However, Mexican Americans live between Mexican and Anglo American societies, and as a result “are the visible contact points between two very different worlds” (27). As a

result, he claims Mexican Americans inherited multiple sediments of a servant mentality: “It is our contention that the Mexican in the United States is the unfortunate inheritor of both the servant mentality and a master-servant relationship with respect to the latest *patrón*.” (29) Mexican Americans inherited a servant mentality that is an effect of Spanish colonization, U.S. imperialism, and living as laborers within Anglo American society. Yet, Carey-Herrera is careful to point out that the servant mentality of Mexican American laborers is not only the expression of self-alienation, but it can also be understood as a survival mentality.

Chicanismo, Carey-Herrera contends, presumes a “more valid alternative” to the master-servant relationship (psychological and socio-economic), one that is based in an equal co-existence between the Mexican American and Anglo American communities. How to achieve that alternative or what that alternative would look like is the key concern of Chicanismo. (30) Carey-Herrera argues becoming a Chicana means coming to reject and overcome the servant mentality. This is the hypothesis of Chicanismo: “The crux of the thing is that one exercises choice. One becomes Chicano via decision.” (32) According to Carey-Herrera, the significance of Chicanismo ultimately is the process of self-transformation away from alienation, not in achieving any particular socio-economic goal.

While he does refer to Ramos and Paz, Carey-Herrera’s second chapter suggests a connection to the work of Frantz Fanon. Although it would entail an investigation beyond the limits of this current essay, a comparison of Carey-Herrera’s and Fanon’s discussion of coloniality might be fruitful for Chicana and Africana collaborations. However, Carey-Herrera also shows the pitfalls of assuming a homogenous colonized subject. The masculinist viewpoint of Carey-Herrera is explicit in this chapter, where he claims that the history of being dominated has caused a loss of an “essentially masculine self concept,” which has resulted in a sense of weakness and resentment in “the Mexican subconscious.” (31) Even though Carey-Herrera does use the “He/She” pronoun in this chapter, the assumed masculine-gendered locus colors his elaboration of a philosophy of Chicanismo throughout his book.

## **Causes and Responses to Oppression**

In the next chapter, Carey-Herrera shifts from a phenomenological approach of the Mexican American experience to a socio-political one. The third chapter, “The Question of Prejudice and Discrimination: Its Nature, History and Function,” is constituted of two main parts. The first part compares different social theories for comprehending the causes of oppression of Mexican Americans, while the second part considers what is the best way for Chicana to respond to oppression.

Carey-Herrera begins by distinguishing between “prejudice” as being the expression of an individual’s attitude, and “discrimination” as the practice based on that

attitude. According to him, the important question to ask is not why prejudice exists--since all individuals have a right to think as they wish--but why discrimination occurs against Mexican Americans. Thus, in order to understand the latter, Carey-Herrera considers three social theories: deficiency theory, Marxist theory, and structural discrimination theory.

Deficiency theory, Carey-Herrera explains, claims that Mexican Americans are “victimized by their own shortcomings as much, if not more than, by the discriminatory behavior of the majority.” (39-40) Carey-Herrera recognizes the limitations of a social theory that blames Mexican Americans for their own subordination, nevertheless he claims that deficiency theory cannot be dismissed even if it is unpopular among many Chicano intellectuals. He states, there is “validity to the observation” that “a previous simple culture, or that a barrio-ghetto culture, can at times be disadvantageous to a reasonable adjustment in a complex, technical culture is not yet disproven.” (41) Marxist theory, on the other hand, Carey-Herrera argues, is not necessarily better. Marxist theory, he explains, predicts that people of color face less discrimination if they are part of the bourgeois. However, Carey-Herrera argues, that class segmentation occurs when people of color enter “the Professional Managerial Class,” where managers of color are still subordinate to white managers even if the manager of color has power over workers of color. (47)

Instead of the previous two theories, Carey-Herrera favors a structural discrimination theory, specifically internal colonial theory, for understanding oppression against Mexican Americans. Internal colonial theory locates discrimination in a society’s institutional practices as a whole (not just economic ones), and it explains how these institutions are informed historically by racial ideologies that differentiate between the colonized and the colonizers. Derived from “classical colonialism” insofar that it is characterized by ethnic-racial oppression of the colonized in the service of the colonizers’ interests, internal colonialism, however, it is different insofar that the colonized live within the colonizers’ society. The Mexican American community, he concludes, should be understood as an internal colony of Anglo American society.

In a move that seems to undermine the insights of internal colonial theory that holds discriminatory practices are embedded in the social structure, Carey-Herrera shifts to question how one should judge whether or not oppression actually exists in a particular situation, since he states that it is not obvious or transparent. Because a subjective interpretation can be mistaken and thus worsen the situation, he argues an accurate judgment is “a fundamental tactical and ethical problem for Chicanos.” (49) Carey-Herrera concludes it is necessary to discern the motives of the action that appear discriminatory: “I suggest that the motives behind the act are the best and most obvious criteria with which to begin” (50). It seems that although he favored structural discrimination theory as way to explain oppression, Carey-Herrera does not believe it can provide a sufficient understanding of oppression at the interpersonal level. It seems that Carey-Herrera does not accept the claim of structural discrimination theory that

oppression can be present even if the individual actors do not have prejudices and do not intend to discriminate.

This apparent contradiction I think is in part due to Carey-Herrera’s desire to maintain the agency of Chicanos within a situation structured by oppression. In the last part of this chapter, he details and compares possible responses Chicanos can enact once determining prejudice and discrimination exists in a situation.

The first one Carey-Herrera considers is predicted by the deficiency theory. He mentions the “problem of ego damage”: “When enough ego damage has taken place, the result is cultural poverty--a terminal attitudinal disease.” (55) He argues it is a self-defeating response to blame others as a way to protect one’s own ego. Two other possible extreme responses he mentions are forms of separatism: separation from the Anglo American community or separation from the Mexican American community. Carey-Herrera argues both options have their own negative effects on the individual, and neither necessarily addresses the problem of oppression.

Instead of blaming others or separatism, Carey-Herrera suggests becoming an “active participant” in socio-economic change against prejudice and discrimination. Becoming an activist entails determining what actions are effective and deciding which actions to engage in: from “boycotts, demonstrations, sit-ins, personal physical violence, riots, looting, selective vandalism.” (56) He makes the argument that under particular conditions, violence may be inevitable, but it should be “rationalized in light of social dignity and justice and the greater good.” (60)

For Carey-Herrera, active participation against prejudice and discrimination does not only entail social activism, but it can involve more individualistic actions. “Laissez-faire acculturation” is another option, which involves simply ignoring prejudice and discrimination as much as possible and participating freely within both the Anglo American and Mexican American communities. Through this option, one is able “to seek and experience freedom and growth within one’s capabilities... To grow and extend as a Chicano, even at the risk of distancing oneself from the body politic.” (61-2) Where the previous separatist and social activist options involved sacrificing some level of individual freedom, laissez-faire acculturation emphasizes complete individual freedom, which he states is “is a primary tenet of Chicanismo.” (61)

Of all the essays, chapter three is perhaps Carey-Herrera’s most convoluted and inconsistent. As I discussed previously, there seems to be a discrepancy between the first and second halves of the chapter that is never adequately addressed. It remains unclear, for Carey-Herrera, the importance or relevance of acknowledging the presence of prejudice in order to confront a situation of oppression. The emphasis on the role of prejudice appears to undermine his favored structural discrimination theory of oppression. Furthermore, he does not acknowledge the criticisms of internal colony theory which already existed within Chicano/a critical discourse at the time of his writing.

[4] Also, there are several claims that are problematic or seem to need further elaboration. For example, his willingness to accept some truth to the “culture of poverty” thesis, which conflicts with the insights of internal colonial theory, or his appreciation of “laissez-faire acculturation” which appears to evade moral responsibility as much as the “damaged ego” response. A central issue in Carey-Herrera’s chapter is that it is not always clear if he is simply *describing* different theories as belonging to Chicanismo or *prescribing* particular viewpoints for a philosophy of Chicanismo.

## Race and Mestizo Identity

In chapter four, Carey-Herrera addresses “the question of race and mestizaje.” Although Mexican Americans are not a race, he points out, nevertheless the dominant society perceives them as race, especially darker-skinned Mexicans who face the most discrimination. The racism against Mexicans in the United States is rooted in “the overall relationship between Europe and the New World.” (69) Carey-Herrera adds, “For that matter, its role can be traced as a component of the system so essential to the development of that relationship, modern capitalism.” (69)

Carey-Herrera traces the prejudice against Mexicans in the U.S. to the anti-Spanish views of Northern Europeans. “The Nordic Superiority Complex,” developed among Northern Europeans (in particular, the Germans), which emphasized the purity of race, deemed the Spanish as inferior due to being perceived as “contaminated” by Jews and Moors (71). The Spanish were guilty of the “the sin of mestizaje.” (69) The Nordic Superiority complex, Carey-Herrera explains, shifted from an ethnocentrism to racism when “biological thinking began to displace religious thinking in the eighteenth century that racial distinctions in the modern sense could be made, and it was not until the nineteenth century that full-blown racial ideologies were developed.” (73) What this history of racial ideology demonstrates is that biological races do not exist, and thus there is no natural racial hierarchy. Consequently, he argues, mestizaje only makes sense within the historical context of racial ideologies.

Carey-Herrera claims all Chicanos are mestizos--Indio-Hispanics, a product of the blending of peoples “during the excitement of the Conquest and the many years that followed.” (75) While the mestizo is accepted as the citizen-subject throughout Latin America, in the U.S., however, the mestizo is the exception to the national racial ideology. He states, “It is here that the Mexican American is most uniquely sensitized to this situation because it is they who exist on a daily basis between mestizo and non-mestizo worlds.” (75) So, even though race is not biologically real, nevertheless it has real socio-psychological effects. He argues that the “Nordic Superiority Complex” should be opposed, however this does not mean that Mexican Americans should advocate color-blindness and deny their “Mestizo inheritance.” Rather, “it is something of which one can be proud, not for self-serving reasons but because disrespect or disapproval of it exposes one as fundamentally ignorant of the historical processes which have



determined what we are.” (77-78) Carey-Herrera implies Chicanismo demands affirming one’s mestizx racial identity as a way to maintain one’s dignity.

In this chapter, Carey-Herrera offers a nuanced history of race and racism, especially as these issues affect Mexicans living in the U.S. While he does acknowledge the existence of colorism facing Mexican Americans, his defense of the mestizx identity fails to consider how the ideology of mestizaje has been used to erase the realities of indigenous, African, and Asian peoples in Mexico. What is interesting in this chapter is that Carey-Herrera alludes to the sense of in-betweenness which Gloria Anzaldúa richly elaborates in her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

### **Assimilation, Acculturation, and Resistance**

After discussing the causes of racism and discrimination discussed in the previous chapters, Carey-Herrera addresses its effects in chapter five, in particular the “question of why certain elements within the Hispanic communities in the United States do not appear to ‘progress and assimilate’ as quickly as might be expected...” (82). In the context of the U.S., he explains, “progress and assimilation” mean upward economic mobility as Hispanics move “away from our private ethnocentricity and towards a greater degree of sameness with majority.” (83) According to Carey-Herrera, the question of assimilation for Chicanos is not only a sociological question, but a moral question: “how much, and at what cost?” (83)

Carey-Herrera explains “the mainstream” is composed of different strata, with various degrees of blending of Southern European, Northern European, and African peoples into the cultural values of “those of a white, Protestant majority.” (88) Mainstream society has three main dimensions that affect social integration: “color, religion, and social status.” (90) As discussed in the previous chapter, “color-bias remains both obvious and absolute.” (90) While attaining “middle class” status relatively nullifies prejudice against Catholicism, even for Mexican Americans. (96) For Carey-Herrera, social status seems to be the most fundamental dimension of the mainstream, since it “can easily mitigate difficulties presumably caused by either color or religion.” (96-7). Although he does not explicitly define it, he suggests social status is linked to social and cultural capital, rather than only economic capital.

Using the concept of social class (social status), Carey-Herrera argues it is more accurate to understand the adaptation of some Mexican Americans into U.S. society in terms of structural assimilation. According to structural assimilation theory, upward economic mobility (“progress”) can occur without cultural assimilation. In other words, Mexican Americans can enter the professional classes, while maintaining a distinct bicultural identity that is informed by a sense of one’s ethnic heritage and/or one’s social participation in one’s ethnic group. (98-9)

Carey-Herrera argues the fact that more Mexican Americans have not been better integrated into the mainstream largely in part due to Anglo Americans who have not welcomed people of color into their social circles and institutions. Mainstream U.S. society is not a unified nation, but it is a “melting pot” that includes immigrant communities only in trivial ways. According to Carey-Herrera, “the Chicano” rejects this tokenizing melting pot: “This is a fundamental attitude in the social philosophy of Chicanismo.” (89) Consequently, the problem for Chicanos is what attitude they should take toward the process of adaptation into U.S. society.

The first approach described by Carey-Herrera is assimilationism. An assimilationist approach, he states, is outright rejected by Chicanismo because it not only misunderstands social reality by neglecting the history of colonialism, slavery, and imperialism, but also: “Were Chicanismo to support assimilation it would find itself in the absurd position of supporting its own demise in the denial of its own values and conclusions.” (86) The acculturationist approach also does not accurately describe the transition of the Mexican American community into U.S. society, he contends, but it is considered better than assimilation insofar that this approach understands adaptation processes as one of “growth rather than loss”: “The risk of losing valuable cultural and behavioral qualities, with particular concern for the more profound values which so influence social behavior, is mitigated by an attitude which responds to prudent growth and which denounces change and/or loss without compensation.” (85) Although the apparent similarity between the acculturationist approach and structural assimilation theory, it is never made clear by Carey-Herrera if they correspond, or if one implies the other.

Carey-Herrera argues the “Colonialist Theory” offers a better understanding of the Mexican American experience: “Nothing in this model leads us to expect any predictable, large scale assimilation. On the contrary, the Colonialist Model leads one to expect certain behavior which appears to reject assimilation.” (100-101) A resistant approach can be described as “the rejection of the rejectors.” (86) In this process of adaptation, the minority comes to recognize that the majority sees it as inferior, and therefore not accepted into the majority’s society. In response, the minority rejects the majority’s framing of the situation, and rejects the dominant culture as inherently superior. The minority, then, affirms their own ethnic identity and attempt to decolonize themselves by recovering pre-colonial values. However, the Colonialist Model makes the rejection of assimilation reasonable but not inevitable. Carey-Herrera notes that within the Mexican American community it is possible to find all of these approaches co-existing.

Like in chapter three, it is not always clear when Carey-Herrera is only offering a description of cultural transition or advocating for a particular approach. There is also a lack of clarity and consistency concerning terminology which makes it difficult to decipher his meaning. For example, “acculturation” at times connotes assimilation, and

other times it implies a form of resistance. Also, he seems to hold a contradictory stance on the possibility of social integration. On the one hand, he claims that “color-bias” is an “absolute” obstacle to social integration and, on the other hand, he asserts that social class trumps color-bias, allowing for social integration to be possible.

Interestingly, a central issue not touched upon by Carey-Herrera is the use of English-only laws to discriminate against non-English speakers, or bilingualism as form of resistance. Although it would be impossible for Carey-Herrera to anticipate every issue related to this theme, I think it is worth considering the “resistant approach” in current discussions about reviving indigenous spiritualities. Also relevant is the metaphilosophical issue of intellectual assimilation, acculturation, or resistance for Mexican American philosophers.

### **The Problem of Self-Naming and Self-Representation**

In the sixth chapter, “Towards a Socio-Philosophical Definition of the Chicano,” Carey-Herrera focuses on “the question of adequate yet acceptable terminology for purposes of self-description”: “Whether they be Chicanos, Latins, Hispanics, Mexican Americans, Americans of Mexican descent, Latin Americans, Spanish Americans, or Indo-Hispanics, those whose socio-biological backgrounds qualify them as ‘Hispanics’ rather than Anglos, participate in a common dilemma.” (104) Thus contrary to what the chapter title suggests, the main theme of the chapter is the problem of self-naming and self-representation.

Carey-Herrera recognizes there are multiple identifiers that are used by different peoples for different reasons. Some terms, like “Hispanic,” are commonly accepted even if they not necessarily precise. Others like “raza” are in-group terms, while the term “brown” tends to more provocative. He states that the failure of Anglo Americans to recognize the multiplicity of names or the emotional and political distinctions between terms “is the cause of a good deal of misunderstanding and resentment between majority and minority community.” (107) Carey-Herrera himself favors the term “Chicano,” but warns that it is “certainly the most controversial yet important of the expressions presented here [and] should be used with considerably greater thought and care.” (107) Although some writers claim the word is linked to a history reaching back to Nahua culture, he states the significance of the term is its symbolic value, even if its etymology cannot be accurately traced to pre-colonial languages.

In spite of his own preference, Carey-Herrera argues that members of the Mexican American community have a right to name themselves as they desire. However, he adds that usage of a term is dependent on its acceptance by society at large, including both the majority and minority communities. And, there is always the right for any community or individual to reject a term. Using the analogy of different types of tortillas (“the tortilla thesis”), Carey-Herrera argues that one name is not

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innately better than any other, and therefore, like one’s preference for flour or corn tortillas, one should not impose one’s choice on another.

The terminology of self-identification is important, Carey-Herrera suggests, because it shapes how we perceive ourselves and how we present ourselves to others. However, citing G.H. Mead, he explains our sense of self (personal and communal) is composed of a “private self image” (how we perceive ourselves) as well as a “public self image” (how others perceive us). (113) As he points out, the perception of racial minorities is shaped by the mainstream media, which is motivated to be provocative and to simplify reality. As a result, it distorts Mexican Americans: “In a world of images we find that we must deal with our own caricatures. We are not, then, simply what we say we are; we are also what people think we are.” (113) For Mexican Americans, there is significant power imbalance between our private self image and our public image. Carey-Herrera writes, “The images we hold of ourselves are distorted by the gross weight of the media version of what we are.” (114) Thus, the danger facing Mexican Americans is the internalization of racist stereotypes.

Given its theme, it is a little surprising (or perhaps not, given his lack of gender awareness) that Carey-Herrera did not address the term “Chicana” that was advocated by feminists within el *movimiento*. Nevertheless, his essay points out a recurring theme about the philosophy of language and self-naming. In this essay, Carey-Herrera anticipates some of the current debates about the use of “o/a/x” at the end of Chicana and Latina.

As such, Carey-Herrera does not come to any firm conclusions about terminology, other than to state that “[a]ny accurate descriptions, as well as any terminology involved in defining the Chicano community, must be inclusive rather than exclusive.” (116) Given the social, cultural, and political heterogeneity of the Mexican American community, he is aware that the question of self-naming must be an open-ended one, if one is to avoid a self-imposed distortion.

## **Chicanismo as a Philosophy**

It is in the final essay that Carey-Herrera brings together ideas discussed in the previous chapters. The last chapter, “Chicanismo: A Brief Historical Overview,” is where Carey-Herrera attempts to articulate the philosophy of Chicanismo as a whole as expressed in the early parts of the book.

Carey-Herrera explains that the philosophy of Chicanismo “evolved from and around the diverse activities of Chicano activists.” (120) It emerged as an organic socio-political philosophy directed at the problems of inequality and injustice encountered in U.S. society: “By simple description, it was in essence the righteous, eternal demand of those on the periphery of society to be permitted entry into the mainstream, but... on

their own terms.” (120) Carey-Herrera credits Alurista’s *Plan Espiritual de Aztlan* (1969) as the first public articulation of Chicanismo. He appreciates that Alurista provided a broad theoretical framework that allowed for different interpretations. Additionally, Carey-Herrera also recognizes the *Plan de la Raza Unida Preamble* (Texas, 1967), the *Del Rio Mexican American Manifesto* (Texas, 1969), and *El Plan de Delano* (California, 1966) for offering elements to conceive a philosophy of Chicanismo. In addition to these texts, Chicax community activists and political leaders “created a functional skeleton of operational Chicanismo, which helped to give form to the body.” (123) What the historical development of the Chicax Movement reveals, Carey-Herrera states, is that Chicanismo has been flexible enough to include different currents of thought.

Carey-Herrera agrees with Elihu Carranza that interest in Chicanismo is waning in the younger generation and this is due in part to how Chicax Studies is structured. He states the primary focus on social science and “the relative exclusions of a more humanistic or philosophical approach to Chicano Studies is certainly a contribution to the demise of interest in Chicano Studies as an academic preparation.” (125) Carey-Herrera argues philosophy is necessary for Chicax Studies. Social scientists and historians can clarify the issues, but “it is the philosopher who weighs, reforms, corrects and articulates the findings of his/her colleagues upon the scales of universal truth.” (125) Philosophers, because they use logical methods that apply “the tests of validity on a universal scale,” can verify “the proposed goals and destiny of Chicanismo.” (125) The methods of philosophy can anchor Chicanismo in truth, and consequently, provide a strong theoretical foundation for Chicax Studies. Carey-Herrera suggests that a philosophical approach would be able to strengthen or revive interests in Chicax Studies and thus Chicanismo among the next generation.

Carey-Herrera declares the “overall objective of a philosophy called Chicanismo is to resolve our intercultural problems on a theoretical plane.” (133) The purpose of finding these resolutions is to then determine the proper ethical relations and practices. Therefore, Chicanismo actually is composed of a dual inquiry. The first involves the “investigation and interpretation of the Chicano socio-historical experience referred to collectively as the Chicano Social Dynamic” and the second is the elaboration of “a functional, humanistic, dialectic set of ethical positions rooted in the dynamic, referred to collectively as the Chicano Ethic.” (134) The product of this sociological-historical study and moral philosophy, he argues, is Chicanismo.

A key problem for the first inquiry, according to Carey-Herrera, has been determining the best “historical or sociological models” to understand the experiences of Mexican Americans. (127) Carey-Herrera contends that “the dialectic model is Chicanismo’s preference.” (132) The dialectical model synthesizes the insights of materialism as well as of idealism and subjectivism. The dialectical model, as “a composite, pluralistic, evolved model,” can make sense of the contradictions created by the oppositional praxis of Mexican Americans. (132) This model allows for a complex

understanding of Chicana experience that sees it as dynamic and evolving, composed of various cultural mutations, and “driven by a dialectical resolution of problems.” (133)

While a sociological-historical study is necessary for understanding the “Chicano Social Dynamics,” Carey-Herrera states a more fundamental issue is the question of Being. Assuming Heidegger’s ontology, he states that every philosophy must position itself toward the question of Being. In fact, he states Chicanismo “comes alive” by revealing the “conditions of Chicano existence.” (137)

Carey-Herrera recognizes that even though it is difficult to define, “This does not deny the existence of things Chicano nor the sense of *being* Chicano” (138). Carey-Herrera follows Elihu Carranza’s argument for existence of a Chicana Perspective. Carranza refers to the perspectivism of Ortega y Gasset to argue that “the fact that a particular perspective of reality *is*, validates its own existence.” (139) This perspective posits a reality that exists independently of one’s individual will. Carey-Herrera states: “This definition of a Chicano reality, an independent, self-sustaining, sovereign aspect of the matrix reality, is our missing link. ...Because of this, it can be said that a Chicano Perspective does exist; a splendid independent in the existentialist sense, and a reality in an experiential sense.” (140) A Chicana Perspective exists because Chicanas exist, and while this Chicana Perspective is experienced by Chicanas, it is not reducible to any single individual’s experience. In this way, the Chicana Perspective is real both subjectively and objectively.

Given that a Chicana Perspective exists, Carey-Herrera sets to determine the essence of its reality, its “primary code.” (141) Referring to the work of Carranza and P.F. Strawson, Carey-Herrera claims this code is constituted by ahistorical concepts and categories in human thinking that do not change: “It entails the ‘search for that secret imaginative background behind the ideas’ which are now thought of as the essential, somehow, natural thrust or inclination of Chicano behavior.” (141) This “secret imaginative background” is composed of “pre-ideational factors as found in the individual group’s subconscious.” (141) He states, “They are the permanent, uncompromising pre-concepts which fasten a culture to the bedrock of its own being.” (146) The “pre-ideational factors” underlie the different conceptions of the ideals of life, even though they are hidden under layers of social practice.

Carey-Herrera agrees with Octavio Paz that the Mexican sense of solitude is caused by the alienation that exists in the primary code. Citing Samuel Ramos, he claims, the pre-ideational factors that distinguish the Mexican cultural worldview are located in the “unassimilable” difference between indigenous and European cultures. This “social duality” is the origin of Mexican ways of living. Carey-Herrera concludes this “sense of difference, regardless of its organic nature, causes behavior.” (145)

The pre-ideational factors that exist in the “Mexican soul,” Carey-Herrera claims, also exist in the “Chicano soul.” (144) He is careful to state that these pre-ideational

ingredients are not natural or biological (racial). Nevertheless, the alienation that is “an inescapable component of the primary code of Mexican culture” also informs the Chicana Perspective, and thus affects Chicana culture. Citing Carranza, Carey-Herrera notes the social alienation among Chicanas: “I submit that this same kind of alienation, involving suspicion, lack of cooperation, etc. exist through the entire spectrum of the Chicano social class structure and in a very particular way within the Chicano management class.” (147) He contends that although alienation characterizes the Chicana condition, it can be addressed by Chicanas: “...it is within this condition of relative freedom that the Chicano must deal with a more tangible kind of alienation.” (146) This alienation determines the conditions of Mexican and Mexican American life, but he argues that Chicanas can discover their “relative freedom” to face this as it manifests in concrete social relations.

According to Carey-Herrera, a “Chicano Ethic” can be developed from a critical understanding of the alienation facing Chicanas. This ethic of “Carnalismo” is based in “a metaphysical bond [which] exists amongst Chicanos in the sense of an inherent condition of brotherhood or family.” (150) This social metaphysics serves as a foundation for ethical principles and a moral responsibility among Chicanas. Carey-Herrera contends that Carnalismo should be pursued by Chicanas because it can serve as a way of “self-definition and of self-defense.” (153) It would not only strengthen the sense of a Chicana community, but it could “act as guidepost to an ethically superior way of living.” (153) He suggests that self-understanding results in a moral obligation, a sense of moral responsibility.

Through Carnalismo, Carey-Herrera argues, Chicanas come to recognize the difference between legal conventions and ethical values, and in this way the question of ethics draws Chicanas “into the world of universal principles.” (154) The question of ethics leads one to become aware of the history of abuse and victimization which reveal a demand for respect and dignity, linking this to “the humanistic universal imperative, the equality of man.” (155) Because our human nature resists the ethical worldview, and wants revenge for abuse and indignity, Carey-Herrera conceives of Carnalismo as a form of de-ontological ethics, in which Chicanas voluntarily submit to universal principles.

### ***Chicanoism’s Relevance Today and Final Thoughts***

Carey-Herrera’s book is an ambitious project insofar as he attempts to identify and elaborate an overall philosophy from the issues and problems emerging from the struggles encountered by Chicana intellectuals. Although it was published over thirty years, his work anticipates some of the current discussions among contemporary Mexican American philosophers. For example, in his essay, “White Supremacy, Guera/ o-ness, and Colonization: An Argument for a Mexican-American Philosophy,” Andrew Soto argues, “The creation of a Mexican-American philosophy, rooted in the voices of

Mexicans and Mexican Americans and their historical resistance, perseverance, heroicness, and struggle with colonialism, institutional racism, white supremacy, identity, and culture, is the strongest tool to bring about this awareness” (23). Carey-Herrera would have agreed with Soto’s argument about the need for a Mexican American philosophy as a way to counter the internalization of anti-Mexican racism and the dangers of assimilation into mainstream U.S. society. According to Carey-Herrera, Chicanismo can be, as Soto states, “a tool Mexican-Americans use to unmask and reveal the genius and superiority of their people” (23).

In his essay, “The Philosophical Gift of Brown Folks: Mexican American Philosophy in the United States,” Jose Antonio Orosco argues that a Mexican American philosophy is not only possible as a distinct field of study, but it “can enrich the conception of philosophy, and of public life, in the United States.” (23) I believe Carey-Herrera would agree with Orosco’s claim that “Mexican American philosophy is...the philosophical work produced by members of this ethnos.” (24) But, it would be interesting to consider if Carey-Herrera would also claim that Chicanismo, as distinct from Mexican American philosophy, should not only be approached as an ethnic philosophy, but it should be understood also in “culturalist” and “criticalist” terms.[5] In his articulation of Chicanismo, Carey-Herrera emphasized that its significance is due to its suggesting a Chicana worldview via a critical understanding of mainstream U.S. society.

In fact, given his articulation of Chicanismo, Carey-Herrera would have agreed with Orosco that a major reason for the importance of a Mexican American philosophy is its capacity “to examine and articulate the experience of the Mexican American ethnos for the purpose of developing theories and strategies of resistance against discrimination and oppression from dominant U.S. society.” (26) Orosco also argued that another reason that a Mexican American philosophy is valuable is its potential to contribute to the discipline of philosophy and to debates in public policy. It can enhance philosophy in the U.S., Orosco contends, by possibly correcting “any systematic epistemic distortion in U.S. American social and political philosophy” and contributing to public policy debates concerning Latinxs. (23) Although he claims to address non-Mexican Americans, Carey-Herrera’s work has a more “interward” orientation, and does not seem directly concerned with engaging with public-policy or with the discipline of philosophy. Instead of being concerned with integrating Chicanismo into the discipline of philosophy, he imagines Chicanismo as providing a philosophical foundation for Chicana Studies. Carey-Herrera never considers that there might also be a “great gringo conspiracy” in philosophy.

As Carey-Herrera’s work demonstrates, Mexican American philosophy has existed and does exist, though perhaps not formalized or recognized within the discipline of philosophy. While his writing reflects the period of his time, and therefore exhibits many of its limitations, Carey-Herrera’s book offers a unique historical precedent for further elaboration of a Mexican American philosophy.



“The Chicano Movement and Philosophy: Recovering Patrick Carey-Herrera’s *Chicanismo: Hypothesis, Thesis, and Argument: Seven Essays Concerning the Essentials of Chicano Thought and Behavior*”  
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## Notes

[1] For more information about the Chicano Movement, see the “Introduction” by Alma M. García in her edited anthology, *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writing*, “Chapter 3: The Chicano Movement” in Juan Gómez-Quiñones’s *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise 1940-1990, and Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* by Carlos Muñoz, Jr.

[2] As I will discuss later in this essay, Carey-Herrera assumes a masculinist terminology in his description and articulation of Chicanismo (of course, the term itself is masculinist). When quoting his work, I maintain Carey-Herrera’s original masculinist terminology, otherwise I employ more gender-inclusive language.

[3] See Roque Planas, “Arizona’s Mexican-American Studies Ban Goes to Trial.”

[4] See Fred A. Cervantes, “Chicanos as a Postcolonial Minority: Some Questions Concerning the Adequacy of the Paradigm of Internal Colonialism.”

[5] In essay, Orosco consider four different positions to consider the possibility of a Mexican American philosophy. The first approach, universalism, denies philosophy is embedded in any particular culture. The second approach, culturalism, claims philosophy is necessarily embedded in a culture, and therefore any philosophy reflects the worldview of its culture of origin. The third position, criticalism, claims a genuine philosophy exists only when the conditions of independence and freedom are met, otherwise under the conditions of dependency and domination, philosophy will only reflect the worldview of the colonizer.

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