Women In Latin America

How might women's role in Latin America have changed over the years? In this essay we'll discuss the impact women have had in Latin America. I found it very interesting to see how women's roles have changed over the course of time and I hope you will too.

Although their contributions have been greatly overlooked and overshadowed by men, throughout history women in Latin America and the Caribbean have played an important role in its conception. Women have always borne a large share of economic responsibility for their households as well as being wives and mothers to their families. For poorer women this can be particularly true because their households depend on their income to provide clothing, food, school supplies for the child, and other basic needs for their families. Despite all the contributions women have made it's only in this recent part of the century that women in Latin America have had much political influence and the right to vote. Over the past 30 years political, social, and economic troubles throughout many parts of Latin America has drawn women out from their homes to the streets to protest and form feminist movements. Women's support of various political issues throughout history was usually motivated by a desire to protect their families. (Orr & Cruz 1993 76)

In her book Women and Politics in Latin America, author Nikki Craske argues that a common identity among Latin American women is motherhood and their focus on caring has been a catalyst for many powerful political movements in Latin America. Thus for many women in Latin America it is a strategically useful mobilizing point. She goes on further to say that although political exclusion is generalized, women are absent from political involvement in a much greater degree than men. There are a few factors that explain this, first authoritarianism has ruled over much of Latin America and their political systems thus greatly discouraging any popular participation. Second gender construction in those regions have made it law that politics are a man's world and not for women. Lastly this has in turn resulted in women's desire to be involved with politics to be ignored, since it has been interpreted as a social thing rather than political. Although Latin America's political systems have tended towards exclusion, there have been many important developments in women's political participation. The most important moments are the democratization movements that populated the region in the 1970s and 1980s these social movements provided new opportunities for women. With the embrace of feminism, feminist debates reevaluated many previously hidden women's issues and brought them center stage. (Craske 1999 14-15)

Machismo and Marianismo are two important terms that influence the social and political systems of Latin America. Machismo is the virility of men and the aggressive and sexist male attitudes and behavior towards women. It gives men certain rights over women under the disguise of fearlessness and honor. There are even some cultural norms that allow men to drink excessively and commit domestic violence and abuse against women, these cultural norms reflect machismo. It is accepted that within this model men can have sex and relationships outside of marriage while women do not and are expected to stay home and "be a good woman". The female inverse is known as Marianismo, where the ideal of womanhood is self-sacrificing motherhood, this aspect is reinforced by the Virgin Mary that is central to Catholicism. The ideals that make up Mariansimo are spirituality and moral superiority combined with

submissiveness towards men. Even though these views are changing the idea of moral superiority of women, more so if they're mothers still permeates ideas regarding their role in politics and many feminists believe that this ideal hinders women greatly. (Craske 1999 27-28)

It's not surprising that given its cultural importance motherhood would be the dominant political identity of women. This can sometimes lead to "militant motherhood" or "politicized motherhood" in which women of all classes will gather together to protest an issue that threatens human rights or the lives of their families. This again goes back to motherhood and women's nurturing roles in everyday life and politics is no exception. The idea of militant motherhood is common in Latin America and a very useful tool for the development of social movements especially during authoritarian military rule. Militant motherhood is truly a force to be reckoned with in these regions with motherhood being seen as a symbol of great power. The Argentinian Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, who engage with marianist ideals of women's moral superiority see motherhood as above politics. The Madres marched and protested every week in the capital's main plaza and gained both local and international support for their cause. Somos más, which literally translates to "We are more" or "There are more of us" was a chant used by Chilean women during a demonstration demanding democracy and justice from the authoritarian Pinochet regime. These groups were instrumental in bringing down repressive military governments in Latin America.

Latin America has had many important female political figures throughout the past 5 centuries that played a vital role in shaping its history. Eva Peron, who was the wife of Argentine president Juan Peron became a heroine to the working class. She was the first female president of a country in Latin America when she was elevated from vice president to president after the death of her husband. Brazilian politician Bendita de Silva was elected to Brazilian congress in 1986 during the "lost decade" and was the first minority woman to be elected. Having been a slum dweller herself she centered her campaign around the plight of the popular class or working class in Rio de Janiero's slums. Rigoberta Menchú was perhaps one of the best known Latin American women in Guatemala. She was a Guatemalan Indian rights activist and part of the Quiché Maya group who became involved in the women's rights movement and even joined the Catholic Church to advocate for social reform. In 1983 her widely translated book I, Rigoberta Menchú, she gained a lot of international fame and in 1992 she was awarded the Nobel peace prize for her efforts in achieving social justice and reconciliation in Guatemala.

In conclusion, women play a vital role in Latin America and their contributions continue to shape the region even to this day. The hardships they endured to get where they are today just show the resolve they have and is an inspiration to future generations. I chose this topic because the ever changing role of women is important for our society so we can evolve past petty differences that hindered progress in the past. I learned a lot more about Latin American women then I previously did and see them as an inspiration. Some commonalties Latin American women have with the United States is how they were first only thought as wives and mothers and also could not vote for a long time until society changed in part due to protests for equal rights and feminism.

Bibliography:

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