

BOOK REVIEW
MARÍA, DAUGHTER OF IMMIGRANTS
by María Berriozábal

Sonia R. García

María, Daughter of Immigrants. By María Berriozábal. San Antonio: Wings Press, 2012. Pp. 350. \$27.95 (hardback).

María Berriozábal's autobiography takes her readers on the incredible journey of a Mexican American woman who became the first Latina elected to the San Antonio city council. Berriozábal intertwines her personal life with public events to create a fascinating story spanning across seven decades, beginning in the 1940s and continuing into the present. The book makes a significant contribution to the growing literature on Chicana/Latina politics—a literature which consistently reveals the propensity of Chicanas to bridge two spheres of political activity, deploying both traditional electoral and community-oriented strategies, to bring about social change. Like most Chicanas, her political participation manifests in relation to herself, her family, and the Chicana/o community.

Through a series of vignettes, Berriozábal tells her story by integrating Spanish and English, personal reflections, family stories and photos, cultural history, and archival sources into her narrative. In her opening chapters, she focuses on her family history and early life. She begins with family histories in Mexico and the joining of the Rodríguez and Arredondo families after they arrive in Texas. With vivid detail, she shares stories of her own origins in Laredo, Texas, on the borderlands, and of her early childhood when, in 1942, her family moved to San Antonio. She also marks a turning point in her life,

when at the age of 14, she set out on a personal mission—to help her family out of poverty and to ensure that her siblings completed their education. To do so, she finished high school and worked as a secretary for some of the most influential personalities in San Antonio. It is through her various positions and interactions with politicians and businessmen that Berriozábal began her initial education into the world of politics and backroom deals.

Chapters six through eight detail Berriozábal's motivations to run for city council and her years of experience as a councilwoman. She also explains her unsuccessful bids for mayor and a congressional seat. In the chapter "Back in the Arena," Berriozábal chronicles her next trajectory as a leader for women's issues at a global level, when in 1995 she was selected as a member of the official U.S. Delegation to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Other chapters address how she met her husband, Dr. Manuel Berriozábal (a mathematics professor), and their life together, as well as her college experience. She also shares a touching story of being a caregiver to both her parents until their deaths in 2008. The book closes with a chapter titled, "Retoños" (New Sprouts), where she reflects on lessons learned in life, the new generation of community activists and leaders, and challenges facing Chicanas/os, such as the passage of the Dream Act.

Throughout the text, Berriozábal addresses several issues and themes underscoring the complexity of Chicanas' experiences in politics and in society. She highlights her own political development and consciousness as a Mexican American woman and then as a self-identified Chicana, greatly influenced by reading the works of Gloria E. Anzaldúa, whom she calls her "Tejana muse." She also addresses the obstacles she faced when running for political office and the challenges confronting her while serving on the city council. Her experiences reflect the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and

class discrimination faced by Chicanas. Throughout the book, Berriozábal illustrates her deep commitment to social justice, the environment, and spirituality. In her discussion of politics, she addresses specific issues such as water, nuclear power, economic development and services to minority communities, as well as the importance of inclusion in decision-making and political participation.

Although the book is about Berriozábal's personal journey, it is set in the context of a significant period of history: the Civil Rights and Chicano Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s and 1970s, providing a fresh perspective into the Chicana/o Movement and its legacy in San Antonio, Texas. Berriozábal pays tribute to many Latino civil rights leaders and organizations such as the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project (SVREP) and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF). Strongly committed to Chicana issues, she also pays homage to many Chicana leaders and organizations, which she refers to as "A Litany of Hope."

Because she was involved in their founding, she is able to give the reader an intimate view of the early years of two organizations: the Mexican American Business and Professional Women's Association as well as *Hispanas Unidas*. Equally important, she explores her involvement with *Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS)*, rooted in the local Catholic churches on the Westside of San Antonio, which influenced her views of connecting faith and social justice.

In general, the book contributes to a growing list of existing books on San Antonio politics. Although the book centers on one particular city, readers will find parallels with other communities with sizeable Latina/o populations. Yet, while the book highlights various important grassroots organizations

founded in San Antonio, readers may have to look elsewhere for a more in-depth history and analysis of most of these organizations. Given that much of the story/history took place during the height of Civil Rights and Chicana/o Movements, it also would have been useful if the book had placed San Antonio politics in a larger national context.

María makes an invaluable contribution to a variety of academic fields, such as Chicana/o Studies, Leadership Studies, Community Studies, Women's Studies, Feminist Studies, Public Administration, Urban Affairs, and Political Science. Although the book portrays the politics of San Antonio, most readers will appreciate the “behind the scenes” politics that Berriozábal chronicles, as well as the history of so many grassroots organizations. Practitioners, political observers, civil rights and Chicana/o activists, and aspiring public servants alike will greatly benefit from this book. The book also contains two reflection pieces by acclaimed scholars in the field of Chicana Studies—Drs. Josephine Méndez-Negrete and Antonia Castañeda.