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Reading Betita Martínez: a Commemoration of Her Life and Work with a Selected Bibliography of Scholarship and Associated Research Resources

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Publication Date

2022-05-05

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**Reading Betita Martínez:
a Commemoration of Her Life and Work**

with

**a Selected Bibliography of Scholarship and Associated Research
Resources**

by Clarissa Rojas and Roberto Delgadillo



"Betita Taught Me," art by Melanie Cervantes. With permission from the artist.

May 5th 2022, UC Davis Library

Reading Betita Martínez: a Bibliographic Commemoration of Her Life and Work

by Clarissa Rojas

We stand on the shoulders of giants. Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez was a giant if ever there was one. In the Mexican tradition we say the name of the deceased and then proclaim Que Viva!

This tradition heralds that the imprint of our ancestor lives on in our memories and in our deeds. In this way, the spirit of our ancestor lives—Que viva Betita!

Through my writing I write Betita into life because the spirit of Betita invokes me. I am called to bring her legacy to light. Our ancestors live in us and through us, and Betita compels me to tell her story to inspire us to act toward making more just worlds. Betita might say a more just world is made possible only through our actions. Betita, after all taught us, that we are the revolution. As long as injustice roams, the people will prevail in the struggle for freedom: “the heart just insists on it!” Betita said.¹ And Betita brought so much heart/corazón, the *raison d’être* of the people of the ancestral lands of México—which she would define as including the Southwest—as she often reminded “it was taken from México to expand slavery in the 1840’s.” Betita was a lover of history who denounced the U.S.’ constant case of historical amnesia.

Betita’s consciousness was born in the trial by fire that is witnessing your elders experience racial hostility. Most Chicanas, Black Brown and Indigenous folks can recall witnessing at an early age the ways our parents were subjected to racism. And her consciousness grew, culled by her involvement in the women’s and Marxist movements, through travels to study colonialism around the world for her work at the United Nations, her time with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, her work as editor at both Simon and Schuster and the Nation, then her time in New Mexico in the early days of the Chicano movement where she founded *El Grito del Norte*, a bilingual newspaper that shaped the Chicano movement.

¹ Platt, Tony, “The Heart Justi Insists: In Struggle with Elizabeth “Betita” Sutherland Martínez,” *Social Justice* 39, no.2/3 (128-129) (2013): 25-50/

Betita went on to write what Kathryn Blackmer Reyes frames as an “immense opus of writings.” (Blackmer-Reyes, 2013)² The pages of this Bibliography traverse the scope of her work and involvement with a vast array of social movements and scholarly fields over the long course of her life. Betita’s words and work shaped the field of inquiry that is Chicana Studies, the way Chicana understand themselves as such, not to mention Chicana feminism.

Ahead of the rise of the Chicana movement, Betita astutely framed language for how Chicanas could understand the conditions of their existence at the crossroads of white supremacy, capitalism, misogyny and sexual violence. In a recent conversation, Margo Okazawa Rey said that Betita was a transnational feminist before that term was even invoked. “We should learn about our sisters around the world because someday we shall together form a force that nothing can stop,” wrote Betita Martínez in 1971 in “Viva la Chicana and All Brave Women of La Causa.” (Martínez, 1971)³

Betita called for—and practiced a different kind of leadership style and set of social relations than the patriarchal ones she lambasted in “Chingón Politics Die Hard...” (Martínez, 1998)⁴ As her multiple generations of mentored scholar activists and artists attest, hers was a leadership that empowers others, not a hierarchical one. Betita also taught us to live a life of struggle joyously, to celebrate the hard-fought victories and to nurture the embers that keep the fire of the struggle alive.

A look at my favorite books of Betita’s reminds me of the anti-imperialist fervor that ran deep in Betita. I really developed my relationship with her in the streets, protesting and attending vigils for the lives lost to the War on Terror. One of my favorite books is the colorful, *We Have Not Been Moved: Resisting Racism and Militarism in 21st Century America*,⁵ a moving collection of the voices that have fought against the violence of war. It shows that the power of the people to demand and fight for justice is as ceaseless as it is ubiquitous. In the sea of Betita’s litany of essays and articles referenced in the pages that follow, I must mention *500 Años del Pueblo Chicano = 450 Years of Chicano History in Pictures*, a tour de force history that maps the genealogy of a people in glorious photographs that deliver

² Reyes, Kathryn Blackmer. “Elizabeth Sutherland / Elizabeth ‘Betita’ Sutherland Martínez Bibliography, 1960-2013.” *Social Justice* 39, no. 2/3 (128-129) (2013): 12-25.

³ Martínez, Elizabeth Sutherland. “Viva La Chicana and All Brave Women of La Causa.” *El Grito del Norte* 4(4-5): A-B.

⁴ Martínez, Elizabeth ‘Betita,’ “Chingón Politics Die Hard,” *Living Chicana Theory*. Berkeley, California: Third Women Press, 1998.

⁵ Martínez, Elizabeth, Mandy Carter, and Matt Meyer, eds. *We Have Not Been Moved: Resisting Racism and Militarism in 21st Century America*. 3rd ed. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012.

the indefatigable spirit of our peoples.⁶ And the accompanying volume laboriously completed over several years in her eighth decade of life, the bilingual *500 Years of Chicana Women's History = 500 Años de Historia de Las Chicanas*, also an incredible pictorial collection and tribute to the defiant spirit of our Chicana ancestors who appear beside the 20th and 21st century culture makers and warriors of the future.⁷

Betita's life and legacy insist on cross-racial solidarities to carve the potential landscape for socially just worlds. To that end, *Letters from Mississippi*, serves as a testament to the voices of the civil rights era. In moving poetry and essays, Betita collects first person narratives from organizers and volunteers on the front lines of the Freedom Summer in 1964.⁸ A few years earlier, in 1961, Betita visited Cuba. It was two years after the Cuban revolutionary victory and the inspiration she felt in the ambience of revolutionary fervor heralded by Cuban artists and writers would accompany her throughout her life. "When Cuba declared itself socialist," she testified, "so did I." She wrote *The Youngest Revolution*, offering her take on the revolution that conspires to contaminate the reader with unparalleled excitement, hope for the future and the deepest belief that social change is not only possible, it is coming!

My dearest Betita, may your words live the longest lives reach the youngest ones, and always stay near to our hearts. I light this candle for you Betita, that your journey continues to be a breathtaking tour de force dreaming up the best for our people. Hasta luego Betita, until we meet you again and again in your words. Thank you Betita, for all you taught us.

⁶ Martinez, Betita, *500 Años del Pueblo Chicano = 450 Years of Chicano History in Pictures*. Albuquerque, NM: Chicano Communications Center, 1976.

⁷ *500 Years of Chicana Women's History = 500 Años de Historia de Las Chicanas*. Bilingual ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008.

⁸ Sutherland, Elizabeth, ed. *Letters from Mississippi*. [1st ed.]. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1965.

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[N.B. Book is available via University Library's Interlibrary Loan service (ILL). This service is provided free of charge to UCD faculty, staff, and students.]

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[N.B. Book is available via University Library's Interlibrary Loan service (ILL). This service is provided free of charge to UCD faculty, staff, and students.]

Bibliographical/Book Review Databases/Indices:

Academic Search Complete [via EBSCO]

**Academic Search Complete (ASC)* is available through at the UC Davis Library website's Databases tab. An all-purpose academic database that is a good starting point for many topics. *ASC* provides full-text access to more than 5,500 periodicals, including over 4,600 peer-reviewed journals, and indexing and abstracts for an additional 9,500 journals and 10,000 publications, including monographs, reports, conference proceedings, etc. The database features PDF content going back as far as 1887.

Alternative Press Index [via EBSCO]

**Alternative Press Index (API)* is available through at the UC Davis Library website's Databases tab. Subject index to over 300 alternative, radical and left periodicals, newspapers and magazines. Includes index by nation, discipline and inter-disciplines, includes social sciences and humanities, with central focus on the practice and theory of socialism, national liberation, labor, indigenous peoples, gays/lesbians, feminism, ecology, democracy, and anarchism.

America: History and Life [via EBSCO]

**America: History and Life* is available through at the UC Davis Library website's Databases tab. Bibliographic database containing citations to articles on American and Canadian history, including ethnic history and relations, from prehistory to the present. Covers more than 2000 journals published worldwide.

Ethnic Newswatch [via ProQuest]

**Ethnic Newswatch* is available through at the UC Davis Library website's Databases tab. A full-text collection of the newspapers, magazines and journals of the ethnic, minority and native press in the United States.

JSTOR: The Scholarly Journal Archive

**JSTOR* is available through at the UC Davis Library website's Databases tab. *JSTOR* provides Full-Text access to back files of hundreds important scholarly journals in nearly 50 disciplines spanning the arts, humanities, social sciences and the sciences. Current issues are now included for selected titles. Holdings vary by journal.

Archival Material:

Martínez, Elizabeth Sutherland. *Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez Papers. 1964-1998*. Washington, D.C. Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2013.

[N.B. The papers of Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez were given to the Library of Congress by her daughter, Tessa Koning-Martínez, in 2013. The papers span the years 1964-1998 with the bulk of the material dating from 1964 to 1970. The majority of the collection documents Martínez's activities as a civil rights activist while a member of the Student Nonviolent Committee (SNCC), during the 1960s and her endeavors in helping James Forman, also a civil rights activist and SNCC member, with some of his writing projects. The papers are in English and are arranged by type of material. The collection consists chiefly of correspondence between Martínez and Forman. The correspondence provides insight into the internal workings of SNCC, particularly the New York office where Martínez mainly worked, and conveys details about the difficulties in doing public relations and fund-raising for the organization, the future direction of SNCC, and discussions about anti-white feelings of some of the African-American members of SNCC toward white members of the organization. The correspondence also includes copies of diary entries that Forman would send as letters to friends and members of SNCC. Some of the letters from 1968-1970 relate to exchanges between the two about the writing of Forman's autobiography, *Making of Black Revolutionaries: A Personal Account*, and other writing projects. The papers also contain a few outgoing letters from Martínez to Marion Barry, Betty Garman Robinson, and Julian Bond. Also in the papers is a 1998 letter from Martínez to Manning Marable about black radicalism. The papers include notes by Martínez about writing projects and a small amount of material relating to Forman's book, *Sammy Younge, Jr.: The First Black College Student to Die in the Black Liberation Movement*. The miscellany file consists of a speech by Forman and a reprint of an article about him from the Times of Zambia. The papers of Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.]

---. *Elizabeth "Betita" Sutherland Martínez Papers. 1958-2009*. Stanford, CA: The Special Collections and University Archives Department of Stanford University Libraries, 2009.

[N.B. This collection consists of correspondence, articles, journals, memos, minutes, fliers, notes, pamphlets and other material. Topics include Chicano history, culture, education, Chicano Indian relations, journalism, and movements for social justice. Please note that this collection is unprocessed but open for research; material must be requested at least 36 hours in advance of intended use.]

---. *Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee Collection, 1964-1968*. Atlanta, GA: Emory University, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, 1968.

[N.B. The collection consists of records of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee from 1964-1968, collected by Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez, the coordinator of the New York, New York office. The materials include correspondence, research and position papers, progress reports of activities, printed material, minutes and memoranda, and a poem. Correspondence consists of a letter to Martinez from "May" regarding activist, Jerry Oberwager's work with the group. Research and position papers cover topics such as women's rights and southern areas where civil rights abuses occurred including Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi. There is also a progress report on challenges the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party faced in congress. Printed material contains newspaper clippings contain articles about Stokely Carmichael, chairman of SNCC from 1966-1967, and about

SNCC as well as newsletters, pamphlets, and congressional reports. There are minutes and memoranda from the organization from 1964-1968 and a poem entitled “Band of Brothers” about the Freedom Riders.]

Online Resources:

Essays/Letters/ *Testimonios*:

Coalition Building Among People of Color: A discussion with Angela Y. Davis and Elizabeth Martínez
<https://culturalstudies.ucsc.edu/inscriptions/volume-7/angela-y-davis-elizabeth-martinez/>

Elizabeth (Betita) Martínez, Graduation Speech, 29 May 2000
<https://www.swarthmore.edu/news/commencement/2000/martinez.html>

Archival Material:

Colours of Resistance Archive
<http://www.coloursofresistance.org/>

[N.B. This is a collection of articles and resources documenting the history and efforts of a grassroots network of people in the U.S. and Canada who consciously worked to develop anti-racist, multiracial politics in the movement against global capitalism. This network existed from 2000 until about 2006.]

The Freedom Archives
<https://freedomarchives.org/>

[N.B. The Freedom Archives contains over 12,000 hours of audio and video recordings as well as print materials dating primarily from the late-1960s to the mid-90s. These collections chronicle the progressive history of the Bay Area, the United States, and international movements for liberation and social justice.]

El Grito del Norte [via JSTOR Independent Voices Digital Collection]
<https://www.jstor.org/site/reveal-digital/independent-voices/elgritodelnorte-28455641/>

[N.B. Independent Voices is an open access digital collection of alternative press newspapers, magazines and journals, drawn from the special collections of participating libraries. These periodicals were produced by feminists, dissident GIs, campus radicals, Native Americans, anti-war activists, Black Power advocates, Chicana/os, LGBT activists, the extreme right-wing press and alternative literary magazines during the latter half of the 20th century. Founded in 1968 by Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez and Beverly Axelrod, the bilingual Chicana/o newspaper *El Grito del Norte* sought “to advance the cause of justice for poor people and preserve the rich cultural heritage of la Raza in [northern New Mexico]” by using familiar language to connect the struggles of its readership to the colonizing institutions culpable for their mistreatment (*El Grito del Norte*). In addition to calling attention to community needs and promoting Chicano interests in local politics, the newspaper acted as a safe space for women staff members to gain experience with the day-to-day operations of a full-scale news production. As a result, Chicana feminist contributors began to introduce ideas of the

Chicana struggle for autonomy to the same audiences that were witnessing and broadly supporting the ongoing Chicano movement.]

Obituaries/Tributes:

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Catalyst Project. *Farewell Betita, great builder of bridges.*

<https://collectiveliberation.org/farewell-betita/>

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<https://wusfnews.wusf.usf.edu/2021-07-02/remembering-elizabeth-martinez-chicano-social-justice-activist>

Habib, Yamily. *Remembering Elizabeth Martínez, the Voice of the Chicana Movement.*

<https://belatina.com/remembering-elizabeth-martinez-chicana-movement/>

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<https://missionlocal.org/2021/07/the-heart-insists-on-it-odes-to-betita-martinez-the-chicana-pioneer-dedicated-to-political-activism/>

Platt, Tony. *“The Work Said Who I Was.”*

https://goodtogo.typepad.com/tony_platt_goodtogo/2021/06/the-work-said-who-i-was-.html

Okazawa-Rey, Margo, Women of Color Resource Center (WCRC), and Adelita Michelle Medina.

#BetitaTaughtUs: Chicanisma and El Movimiento

<https://convergencemag.com/articles/betitataughtus-chicanisma-and-el-movimiento/>

[N.B. This tribute includes an interview originally published in the Summer/Fall 1999 issue of “Sister 2 Sister,” the newsletter of the WCRC. Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez served on the Center’s board in the 1990s and 2000s.]

Priscella Vega. *Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez, Prolific Author and Pioneering Chicana, Dies.* Los Angeles Times (Online). Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Times Communications LLC, 2021.

[N.B. Online full text availability via ProQuest Los Angeles Times (1985-current). Access restricted to UCD IP addresses.]

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[N.B. This tribute includes an interview. aired on March 8, 2006, in which Betita Martínez talks about her then-yet-to-be-published book “500 Years of Chicana Women’s History.”. She also shares memories growing up in segregated Washington DC in the years of the Great Depression, her research on colonialism while working for an incipient United Nations Organization.]

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Wallenberg, Erik. *Standing Against Racism and Empire: Remembering Elizabeth 'Betita' Sutherland Martínez*.

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Whiting, Sam. *Elizabeth 'Betita' Martínez, Chicana Historian, Activist and Trailblazer, Dies in S.F. at 95*.

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Betita-Martinez-Chicano-historian-activist-16333568.php>