

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

ELIZABETH “BETITA” MARTÍNEZ

organizer, activist, author, educator

“It is all too clear today that the struggle for social justice and to defend our planet is far from over. But all over this country – and other countries too – young people are on the move with a new passion.”

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Background Information

Born December 12, 1925; Died June 29, 2021

Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez, also known as Liz Sutherland, was born in Washington, D.C., and raised in the surrounding Maryland suburbs. Her father was Mexican, and her mother was American. She was the first Latina to graduate with a bachelor’s Degree from Swarthmore College. She is known as an activist due to her work in addressing the oppression that communities face within race, class, and gender, focusing specifically on Mexican-American/Chicano issues. Her work centered around building alliances across racial and ethnic lines in

social justice work. She was motivated to inform others about the various overlapping systems of oppression.

Martínez’s Resistance

Martínez’s aspirations led her to work as a researcher for the United Nations and eventually to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as the coordinator for the New York office. As one of two Latinas at her job, she learned to embrace her Mexican American identity. She even returned to using her father’s last name, Martínez, as opposed to her mother’s maiden name that she used for the first part of her life. Eventually, Martínez moved to New Mexico, where she dove into the fight for Chicanos. Martínez co-founded learning spaces for the Latinx community and created organizing workshops. She also authored and edited publications around the struggles of social movements, gave workshops on anti-racism, and taught Ethnic and Women’s Studies courses.

Achievements

Martínez authored many publications, including “500 Años del Pueblo Chicano”, or “500 Years of Chicano History”, a bilingual photo book that became a staple of Chicano Studies classes. In 1973, she co-founded a bilingual movement newspaper, “El Grito del Norte.” She also co-founded the Institute of Multiracial Justice in 1997. In 2000, she was recognized as the “Scholar of the Year” by the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies. Later that year, Swarthmore awarded her an honorary doctorate.

Essential Questions

1. Martínez did not see herself represented in the work she was doing and took action to change that narrative.
 - a. What experiences from her youth led her to do this?

2. Martínez learned to embrace her Mexican American identity, inspiring her to change her name and dedicate her life to addressing Mexican-American/Chicano social justice issues.
 - a. What aspect(s) of your identity are most important to you? How does this affect the way you live your life?

3. ***“It is all too clear today that the struggle for social justice and to defend our planet is far from over. But all over this country – and other countries too – young people are on the move with a new passion.”***
 - a. What social justice issues are you passionate about? How have you informed others about them?