

A Brief History of
The Chicano Rights Movement in Colorado:
“El Movimiento” 2015/2016 – Web Copy

In the 1960s people started gathering to create movements in fighting for social changes. This began, after people of color and women had been experiencing segregation in their hometown. The Chicano Rights Movement started with many Mexican-Americans in the United States being drafted into the Vietnam War. In this war, the Mexican-Americans were put on the front lines, resulting in many of their deaths. In the communities of color there was a collective consciousness that sparked a national response to racism and all of its institutionalized forms: education, healthcare, housing, military service, labor, the electoral process, for Chicanos and American Indians land rights.

In Colorado, there were two movements that had prominence: The Chicano Movement and the American Indian Movement because of the large population of Indigenous people in Colorado. Chicanos are Indigenous to the Southwest U.S. Chicano communities exist only in the Southwest and nowhere else in the world. The Chicano Movement across the Southwest, referred to as Aztlán by Chicano people, was concerned with the war draft, the electoral process, farm workers’ rights, education, civil rights, housing, and land rights.

Despite the fact that many women held key positions and were responsible for much of the work that was involved in the Chicano Movement, it is the men that get credit for the focus areas within the Chicano Movement. For example, José Angel Gutierrez is remembered for founding El Partido de La Raza Unida out of Corpus Cristi, Texas. Reyes Lopez Tijerina is remembered for his work with La Alianza and the struggle for land in New Mexico particularly around Tierra Amarilla, NM. Cesar Chavez is credited for the work with the United Farm Workers out of La Paz, California. Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales is credited with leading Chicanos in Colorado through the Crusade for Justice. The men got the credit, but a lot of the times, the women were doing the bulk of the work at every level and in every community.

Atecpatzin, *El Movimiento* (Boulder, CO: Calmecaztlan, 2015)

Related Films to Watch:

- 1.) **Mexican American Civil Right Movement (8 min)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGNnV53q-rM>
- 2.) **California Farmworkers Who Sparked A Rebellion For Farmworkers' Rights (3 min)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEPOBZTUM1A>
- 3.) **Colorado Experience: Justicia y Libertad (26 min)**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xz3MEi57H14>

A) The Crusade for Justice

An urban civil rights and cultural movement called the Crusade for Justice was formed in Denver, Colorado, in the mid 1960’s. While located solely in Denver, the Crusade’s influence was felt across the southwest as its principal spokesman, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez, a former official of the Democratic Party, emerged as one of the central leaders in the Chicano movement. Ricardo Romero, the younger brother of Corky’s wife, Ernesto Vigil, and Juan Haro were also key figures and co-founders of the Crusade for Justice. Unfortunately, in the end Ricardo Romero and Juan Haro ended up serving time as political prisoners for their involvement with the Crusade and willingness to fight for their people.

The Crusade for Justice was known for helping organize and support high school strikes, demonstrations against police brutality, and legal cases on behalf of Chicanos framed by the police. It also supported mass actions against the Vietnam War.

Out of all the things the crusade was known for one of the most important roles played by the Crusade was the organizing of the Chicano Youth Liberation conferences which brought together large numbers of Chicano youth from the Southwest, the Northwest, and the Midwest, as well as Puerto Rican youth from the Midwest and East Coast. The first conference (1969) came out with El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán (The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán), a program for the mass mobilization of Chicanos for community control. The Plan of Aztlán raised the concept that the liberation of the “Mestizo Nation” would ultimately require “a nation autonomously free, culturally, socially, economically, and politically.”

The second Chicano youth conference (1970) represented a step further for those that supported a mass-action perspective and the formation of an independent Chicano political party. Following the conference, the Crusade for Justice and other Chicanos launched the Colorado Raza Unida Party.

From the Article: Crusade for Justice <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/swp-us/chicanlib2.htm> Further information: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OrifLnbs_A

B) United Farm Workers Movement

Throughout the course of United States history, there have been many reasons for unsuccessful organization of farmworkers. The National Farm Labor Union, which was led by Ernesto Galarza, in the 1940's and 1950's, enjoyed moderate success but many obstacles were presented to the organization through the growers' manipulation of the bracero program. One individual, César Chávez, with the help of many other influential people overcame this obstacle, and led the first successful organization of farmworkers in U.S. history.

The conditions the farmworkers faced were deplorable. Often times they had no electricity, running water, or bathrooms. Their homes consisted of tents, and some of them even had live out of their cars and trucks. Many workers had to pay two or more dollars per day for unheated metal shacks that were usually infested with mosquitoes. These shacks did not contain indoor plumbing, or cooking facilities and the housing arrangements were often segregated by race. The working conditions were meager at best, and none of the ranches contained portable toilets. Some of the growers made the workers drink from the same cup, and others were charged up to twenty-five cents for a cup of water. Whole families including children had to work in the fields just to be able to afford the most basic necessities. Although there were some laws preventing the mistreatment of workers, the law was often ignored by the growers. It is important to note that the plight of the farmworkers was not exclusive to just Chicanos. Mexicans, Filipinos, Japanese, and Black farmworkers all faced these forms of oppression. All of these demographics subsequently became involved in the United Farmworkers Movement.

There were many attempts to form an organization to represent farm workers. In 1959, the AWOC, Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee was formed. It was a branch of the AFL-CIO, American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization. The predecessor of the AWOC was the AWA, Agricultural Workers Association, which was founded by Dolores Huerta. AWOC was composed of Black, Chicano, Filipino, and Anglo workers. Two of the early leaders, Dolores Huerta and Larry Itliong, a Filipino, had helped the Filipino workers, in particular, gain experience organizing unions and strikes in the fields.

In 1962, a young Chicano named César Chávez formed the NFWA, National Farmworkers Association. Chávez had been the national director of the CSO, Community Service Organization, but

had left when the CSO refused to concentrate its efforts on organizing farm workers. This organization worked with communities to solve their problems through organizing and direct action. He based his new organization that eventually became the UFW, United Farmworkers Movement in Delano. He traveled from town to town, trying to convince groups of farm workers to organize because he hoped one day they would band together and form an effective union.

In 1964, Chávez was able to band together with other unions, churches, and community groups that were sensitive to the civil rights movement, in an effort to help put pressure on politicians to end the bracero (strike breaking) program.

<http://www.laits.utexas.edu/jaime/cwp2/ccg/historyofufw.html>

From the Article: History of the UFW More

information: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Hm7miqHLXg>

C) West High School Blow Out



On March 20, 1969, more than a hundred Chicano and Chicana students at Denver's West High School walked out of class to protest racism in their school. The West High walkout (or "blowout," as it is also known) was one of the largest and most violent student protests in Colorado history. Many students of Mexican descent attended West High, but the school was often unwelcoming to minority students. With the help of Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales and other members of Denver's Crusade for Justice, students organized a walkout, calling for the firing of a teacher who frequently made discriminatory remarks in class. Students also demanded more bilingual education, classes in Chicano history and literatures, and for teachers to stop advising students to join the military, at a time when the United States was fighting in Vietnam.

On the morning of March 20, student left classes in small groups. They were joined by members of the Crusade who were there to support the students and monitor authorities. Nearly 300 people marched to nearby Baker Junior High to get students there to join the protest. The group returned to West High, where they were met by police in riot gear. The police ordered the students to Sunken Gardens Park, across from the school. As students were walking to the park, an altercation broke out between several protesters and police. Protesters claimed that fifteen Denver police officers began hitting students. Observer Jim Hall wrote in the neighborhood newspaper *West Side Recorder*, "Everything broke loose — night sticks started swinging and cops were pulling girls' hair by the handful. Nearly every cop I saw had a mindless look and was beating kids savagely." At the end of the day, 25 people were arrested, and six people including one officer were injured.

Students from other Denver junior-high and high schools joined the protest in solidarity and on March 21, more than 1,200 students of all races gathered at West High and marched to nearby Lincoln Park for a rally, where students and police clashed again.

<http://www.9news.com/story/news/local/2015/03/15/this-week-in-colorado-history---west-high-walkout/24810237/>

From the Article: This Week in Colorado History - West High walkout



Activists and Leaders:

Cesar Chavez

Cesar Chavez was born on March 31, 1927 in Arizona. He was a farm worker, labor leader, civil rights activist and co-founder of the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). The NFWA by coordinating with other organizations, eventually evolved into the United Farm Workers (UFW). The UFW was cofounded by Chavez and Delores Huerta. Having grown up working in the fields, Chavez learned firsthand what life was like for the migrant worker and the meager living conditions they were forced to live in. He strived to bring attention to the issues facing farmworkers and used nonviolent tactics such as boycotts, hunger strikes, and political marches to draw in the attention of the national media. This publicity helped the union become very successful. Today, Cesar Chavez is considered one of the most influential civil rights activists of the movement.

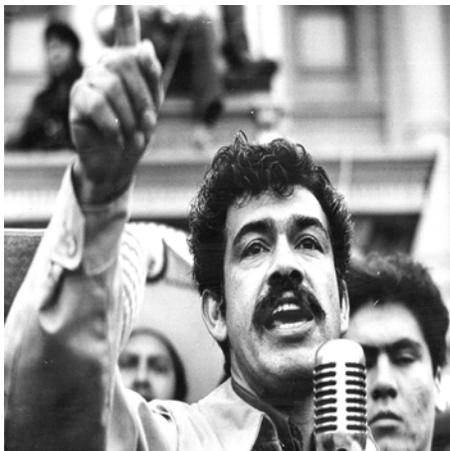
Dolores Huerta

Dolores Huerta was born April 10, 1930. She grew up in an agricultural community where she learned to appreciate cultural diversity since she was surrounded by Mexican, African, Filipino, Japanese and Chinese- American working families. In 1960, Dolores founded the **Agricultural Workers Association** and also helped co-found the **United Farm Workers Association**. Huerta was also a major advocate for



Women's Rights. These achievements led to Dolores Huerta receiving numerous awards including the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales – (Crusade for Justice)



Rodolfo Gonzales was born on June 18, 1928 in Denver, Colorado. From an early age Rodolfo was taught of the struggles of the Mexican people against Spanish domination and the rule of Porfirio Diaz. These lessons had a profound effect on Rodolfo and set him on the path of being an activist. After graduating from Manuel High school in 1945, Rodolfo Gonzales went on to start a successful career in boxing and retired in 1955 with a record of 63 wins, 11 losses and 1 draw. Today, he is best remembered for his contributions to the Chicano Movement by co-founding the Crusade for Justice, founding Escuela Tlateloco, and his political statement/poem '*I am Joaquin*'.

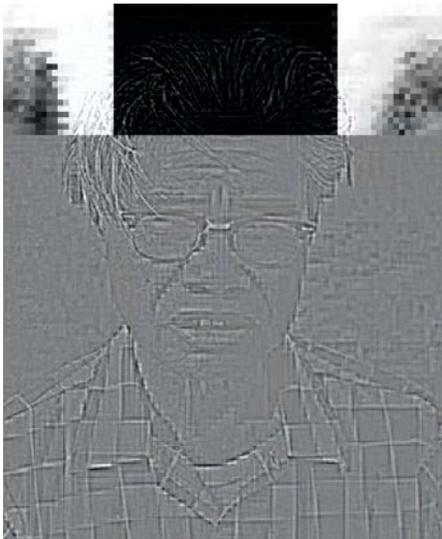
Larry Itliong a.k.a. "Seven Fingers"



Larry Itliong was born on October 25, 1913 in the Pangasinan Province in the Philippines and immigrated to the United States in 1929. In his youth, he worked as a farmworker in Alaska where he went on to organize cannery and agricultural unions throughout the state. Later, he went on to establish unions in Washington State, and throughout California. These actions led to him to be a cofounder of the **Alaska Cannery Workers Union**. It was while living and working in Alaska, that Larry Itliong lost three fingers in an accident at a local cannery, which earned him the nickname "Seven Fingers". Then, after WWII, Larry returned to the U.S. and settled in the city of Stockton CA., and later took part in the asparagus strike of 1948. In Seattle, he served as the first shop steward of International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 37; and was later elected as the Union vice-president in 1953. During his time serving with the **United Farm Workers** he negotiated a contract for

grape growers, which although was unsuccessful, it did result in acquiring higher wages for farm workers. History books often mention Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers, but many unfortunately fail to recognize the Filipino activists' involved in this movement and their numerous contributions to the cause. Johnny Itliong, son of Larry Itliong, once said about both Chavez and his father: "Larry was militant. Cesar was non-violent". Nowadays, Larry Itliong is remembered as a leader in the movement, backed by the voices of the countless unsung heroes that fought beside him in the pursuit of a better tomorrow.

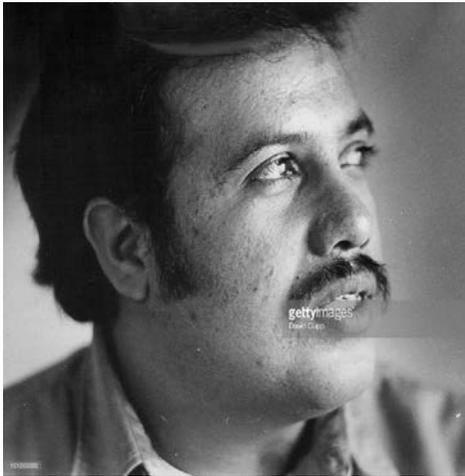
Philip Vera Cruz



Philip Vera Cruz was born on December 25th, 1904, in the Philippines, in the province of Ilocos Sur on the island of Luzon, and immigrated to the United States in 1926. In 1940, Phillip Vera Cruz was a farmworker in the grape, lettuce, and asparagus fields in Delano, California. He, alongside many others, had to work 10 hour days and was often paid only 70 cents an hour. Along with living in poor conditions, the workers also had no rights on the job or access to healthcare of any kind. Having experienced these issues firsthand, Philip went on to become a very influential Philippine-American labor leader and political activist for the Asian American Civil Rights movement. He was one of the founders of the **Agriculture Worker Organization Committee (AWOC)**, which later on merged with Cesar Chavez's National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) and gave birth to the **United Farm Workers Union (UFWU)**. Philip and other activists lead the 1965 Delano Grape Strike in which they were

demanding a 10 cent per hour pay increase. This lasted five years before they were successful. Philip Vera Cruz in his later years served as an officer with the UFWU, and helped organize retirement homes for farm workers who worked all their lives and had no savings for retirement due to the poor pay they were receiving.

Magdaleno Len Avila



The son of immigrant parents, Magdaleno Rose-Avila began his work life in the onion fields of southeast Colorado at the age of 11. By the time he was 13, he was traveling the migrant stream picking fruits and vegetables. After spending several years helping organize workers in Colorado, Avila took on the position of lead organizer and spokesperson for the efforts of the **United Farm Workers Union** in Colorado. In 1972, Magdaleno “Len” Avila helped organize the grape and lettuce boycott in the San Luis Valley in Colorado with support of the UFWU. He was seen as an influential figure during the Chicano Movement of the 1960’s and 70’s in Denver Colorado, and ran for public office for the La Raza Unida Party. Throughout his career, Avila has been a United States Peace Corps Country Director in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Paraguay and Micronesia.

He has ran congressional campaigns and worked for the Democratic National Committee Colorado Legal Services, and the Colorado Migrant Council. He also taught theatre and sociology at the University of Colorado and sociology at Colorado College. Avila also worked for the Nobel Peace Prize-winning human rights organization Amnesty International USA. Today, he serves as Executive Director of the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project in Seattle, Washington.

Jose Angel Gutierrez



Jose Angel Gutierrez was a Political Science professor and Director of the Mexican-American Studies Center at the University of Texas. He was Co-founder of the Mexican American Youth Organization and founding the militant Chicano activist group La Raza Unida.

Dora Esquibel

Dora Esquibel was a University of Colorado alumna, activist, and was active in the Chicano and Migrant Rights Movements. She was a member of the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) at CU from where she graduated in 1982. While a student at CU Boulder, she was involved in a student take-over of one of the campus administrative offices.

Dr. Priscilla Falcon



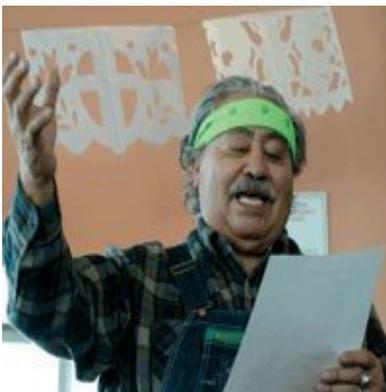
Dr. Priscilla Falcon is the director of Hispanic Studies at the University of Northern Colorado. She has worked throughout the continental United States, as well as Mexico, to promote social justice for people on both sides of the border. In the past she worked in Chiapas, Mexico, with the Zapatista guerrilla movement and is currently working on the Colorado Oral History and Migratory Labor Project. Dr. Falcon is involved with her husband Ricardo Romero's organization *Al Frente de Lucha*. The non-profit organization is a youth outreach program that focuses on advocating for immigrant and Chicano communities.

Belinda Garcia



In 1990, Belinda Garcia founded *Sisters of Color United for Education*, a program that helps women and families with emotional and educational support, as well as health services. Belinda started the *Sisters of Color United for Education* because two of her students died of AIDS. This drove her to do something about it in the community. *Sisters of Color United for Education* is still going strong, and still providing many families and people with the help they need.

Artists:



Lalo Delgado (Poet)

Lalo Delgado was born on November 27th, 1930, in Chihuahua, Mexico. Delgado was driven to become an activist and poet after working with impoverished youths at a community center in El Paso, Texas. Lalo Delgado's primary focus during his early activist days, was helping kids find jobs and receive an adequate education. During this time, pre-1960-civil rights movement, Latinos were still being segregated in schools. In the early 1960's Delgado also worked with Cesar Chavez in the Farmworkers Movement.

Delgado was also considered "*El Abuelito*", or the grandfather, of the Chicano Literature Movement. He wrote fourteen books which were all self-published and became one of the first Chicano writers to emerge from the Chicano Movement. Delgado's best known work was, "*Chicano: 25 pieces of a Chicano Mind*," that was published in 1969. He wrote poems for mothers and fathers, on every Mothers and Father's Day which, were shared at his church. For 17 years Delgado was an instructor at the Metropolitan State College of Denver, Colorado, now called, Metropolitan State

University of Denver. Delgado lived to see his culture in the academic world become widely established and on July 23, 2004, Lalo Delgado passed away from cancer at the age of 73. He wrote a poem titled, “*Stupid America*” that became widely known after he attended a conference where white teachers had blamed Chicanos for their failures as educators and for other Chicanos being socially disenfranchised. Articles.latimes.com/2004/aug/01/local/me-delgado1

Dr. Ramon Del Castillo



Dr. Ramon Del Castillo is recognized as a leader in the Chicano community, struggling for human and civil rights. During the Chicana/o Movement, under the auspices of the United Mexican American Student (UMAS) Organization, he was selected as one of the coordinators of the lettuce boycott in Northern Colorado. In 1998, he was awarded the prestigious Colorado State Division of Civil Rights Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award. In 2009, he was awarded the Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales Civil Rights Award from LARASA. As a past columnist for the Rocky Mountain News and a current columnist for *El Semanario*, Dr. Del Castillo is known for his thought provoking and insightful commentary on social justice issues in the community. In 2002, he was the winner of *El Semanario*’s Journalist Award, for Writing and Literary Mentorship.

As a published poet, he has won several poetry contests including the Mestizo Award for Poetry. His publications include 4 books of poetry and numerous publications in literary magazines and books. His newest book, *Tales from a Michoacano* was published in 2002. His work was featured in the 1999 *Chicano Literary Encyclopedia*, and part of his dissertation is included in *La Gente: Hispano History and Life in Colorado*.



Tony Garcia (Playwright)

Tony Garcia is the Executive Director of Su Teatro. He teaches Theater and Film at Metropolitan State University of Denver. In 1972, Garcia joined the Su Teatro theatre and in 1989, he became its Executive Artistic Director. As a result of Garcia’s artistic vision, he has received numerous awards including being named the Denver Post 2010 *Theatre Person of the Year*.

Leo Tanguma

Leo Tanguma is famous for his mural paintings located at Denver International Airport. His paintings are based on, and include an organic, multi-step process that intertwines Me



xican Heritage, world history, spirituality, progressive social ideals, and personal anecdotes. As can be seen in Tanguma’s large-scale public murals on the fifth level of DIA in the Jeppesen Terminal, he enjoys depicting the subject of politics and cultural theory. The people represented in his paintings are “real people

Emanuel Martinez

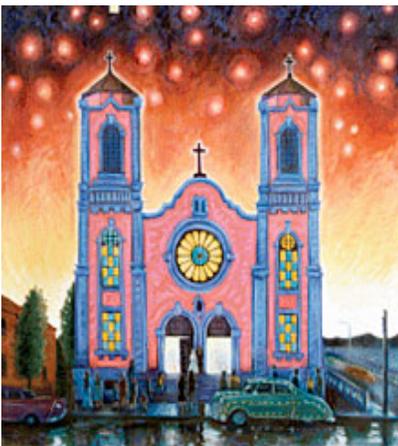
Emanuel Martinez worked in the late 60's with Cesar Chavez on contemporary murals. Other paintings of his artwork can be seen at The Museum of American Art at the Smithsonian in Washington D.C. One of his works can be viewed locally in Denver on a mural located on one of the exterior walls outside the La Alma Recreation Center. Martinez was born in Denver, Colorado in 1947. He embarked on his artistic pursuits in order to escape the oppressions he experienced during his childhood, and was also a participant in the civil rights movement with Cesar Chavez in the late 1960s. Martinez created the contemporary art movement, "art for a living". His art can be found in galleries located in: Albuquerque, NM, Texas, Colorado Springs and Breckenridge, CO. He founded **The Emmanuel Project**, an organization created to bring art into the lives of high-risk youth. He believes that art is an important positive outlet for children who are having life struggles. Martinez created the large-scale mural (shown in the picture below) that he called, "La Alma." He considers this painting to be his favorite work, as he created it with the help of kids in the community depicting an icon for the west Denver neighborhood. The mural represents the importance of community and what it means. "La Alma" got its name from being painted on the side of the La Alma Rec Center in Lincoln Park.



"La Alma"

Mural at La Alma Recreation Center in Lincoln Park-MURALIST AND ARTIST EMANUEL MARTINEZ'S CAREER WAS LIT DECADES AGO BY A MATCHSTICK BY EMILIE JOHNSON WEDNESDAY, JULY 24, 2013 <http://www.westword.com/arts/muralist-and-artist-emanuel-martinezs-career-was-lit-decades-agby-a-matchstick-5816446>

Carlos Fresquez



Carlos Fresquez was born in Denver Colorado. He graduated from Abraham Lincoln High School in 1964. Fresquez received a Master's of Fine Arts Degree at the University of Colorado in Boulder. His artwork has been displayed in galleries in several countries. He now teaches at Metropolitan State University of Denver.

A Westside Wedding (El Aniversario)
Screen-print 27" x 25" (2007)

<http://carlosfresquez.com/print.html>

Name one major student group in Colorado that was part of El Movimiento?

MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan): MECHA began during the 1960s, empowered by the political movements of the time, especially the civil rights and Chicano Movement. The group was originally made up of several smaller organizations that had come about during this turbulent decade and joined together at a conference in Santa Barbara, California; and is best remembered for their contributions to the Chicano Movement.



Elected officials today who are

servicing in office Chicano

State Rep. Joe Salazar Democrat, elected into chamber in 2012. (2012-2014). Now serving from 2014-2016 and is running for reelection. (Dist. 31 Thornton) (Colorado Native).

State Senator: Jessie Ulibarri is democrat and was elected in 2012 and is still serving his term. Serves as Sen (Dist. 21 Adams County) Colorado Native (Federal Heights).

Denver City Council: Paul D Lopez Serves Dist. 3. He was the youngest city council to ever be elected. First elected in 2007, got it again in 2011 because he when unopposed. Currently is trying to get reelected again.

Denver City Council: Deborah "Debbie" Ortega was elected to have at large seat in 2011. She has serve 1987-2003 she served on Denver city council representing Dist. 9.

State Rep. Crisnata Duran: Elected to Colorado House of Representatives as a Democrat in 2010. She was elected as the Colorado House Majority leader in November 2014. (Colorado Native)