

Enriqueta Vasquez  
and the  
Chicano Movement:  
Writings from  
*El Grito del Norte*



EDITED BY

Lorena Oropeza

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**Enriqueta Vasquez**

**Edited by Lorena Oropeza and Dionne Espinoza**

**With a Foreword by John Nichols and a  
Preface by Enriqueta Vasquez**



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With love to Ruben, Ramona, and Bill

Dedicated to

Gloria Anzaldúa,

a mestiza who could weave words

of serpentine grace to form

vision and song of

mystical sounds carried in the divine breath

of Ehecatl

now echoing in the *más allá*

creating new worlds on

both sides of the border

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# Foreword

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These articles, written in the late 1960s and early 1970s, are as relevant today as they were many years ago. The issues have not changed, and the United States seems to have regressed into a time that incorporates the worst of the McCarthy period and the Vietnam War together. We need Enriqueta Vasquez's wise and passionate voice now more than ever.

The columns are disarmingly straightforward, often conversational. They read like steel tempered by a gentle and courageous humanism. The manner of address is often touched by humor. The message is sophisticated and vitally important to all struggles for human rights and environmental sanity.

The writing teems with folk wisdom presented as part of a radical call to awareness. Although the articles are often focused on revolutionary concepts connected to the militant Chicano Movement, their intent is always universal.

Enriqueta insists on reason and hope, and she has a fierce determination to open our eyes and our hearts to the possibilities of a better future on earth.

Her columns speak to all issues of social justice, ethnic pride, environmental well-being, a skewed economy, poverty, and feminist issues that were (and still are) important within La Raza's call to forge Aztlán, and also within the wider need of all women on earth to be treated as co-equals.

Many of the columns are serious history lessons presented concisely in just a sentence or two. In a direct and comprehensive way they may also deconstruct complex economics so that the core issues are beautifully revealed. Her analysis of American "interests" in Latin



America captures in a couple of pages the entire history of U.S. Imperialism in this hemisphere.

A strong environmental message underlies many of Enriqueta's observations. Well ahead of the times, her brief protest against insecticides elucidates a major ongoing problem threatening this planet. And her three-page dissertation on cars and smog could well be a chapter from a current *State of the World* report.

Repeatedly, I was reminded of this fact: her vision that is ostensibly for the future of La Raza is a vision that *all* humanity must soon realize if the natural and human ecology on earth is to endure.

Many articles contain an ongoing discussion of racism discussed with blunt honesty yet seldom shrill polemics. Enriqueta's powerful writings might be compared to the native herbs of a *curandera*: occasionally bitter yet always part of the healing whole.

Which reminds me that this collection also includes several lovely and sensible forays into natural healing the indigenous way.

Without raising her voice, Enriqueta can lambaste the U.S. educational system, urging her readers *not* to accept the skewed academic values that attempt to program our children with a sense of cut-throat competition above all else.

Included in every column, implicit or explicit, is the history of those times. As such, the collected essays are very valuable as historical documents of a volatile and evolutionary as well as revolutionary era.

Some columns also provide a fascinating specific history of Mexico and the Southwest and the origins of mestizo/Chicano history.

And much of the writing is both in English and Spanish, emphasizing the living culture it is speaking about.

Enriqueta shies away from no subject matter: one brief, yet very perceptive commentary on hypocrisy within the Catholic Church must have taken great courage to write.

And there is a gentle yet powerful and touching cry to restore the unselfish spirit of Christmas before capitalism crams it into the cash register of market greed.

The article on Chicana activism is an important liberation document pertinent to all women of the USA, Afghanistan, Guatemala, Brazil. The essay “Soy Chicana Primero” is a forceful analysis on how general exploitation must not be allowed to destroy the liberation struggle between men and women of an oppressed minority.

Enriqueta can speak on the most serious subject, yet her commentary is often touched with a smile, maybe a wink, and an endearing underlying tolerance for humanity and its foibles that makes her voice friendly no matter how heavy the topic under discussion.

Sometimes I am reminded of the wonderful cartoons of Rius, who could explain Marxism or Capitalism or oil development in Mexico with a sardonic chuckle and an amazing ability to highlight the complex problem (and the complex answer) in just a handful of expert strokes.

“*Hijole*,” Enriqueta more than once remarks, “how stupid do they think we are?”

In the end, each analysis is simple and direct and wise, presenting the heart of the matter in just a few clear paragraphs, no adornments.

Her columns, entitled “¡Despierten Hermanos!” can be read as fables, morality tales, and recipes for a more organic life. And although the columns always speak directly to La Raza, at the same time they really speak to us all. This entire collection is a call for the more humane, sustainable, and egalitarian lifestyle that the earth needs for life to survive.

Always, the gist is a strong radical politics couched in a quiet humanity.

And the bottom-line message is that we must learn in order to empower ourselves, which will enable us to feel much joy about being alive.

Yes, the voice of Enriqueta Vasquez was truly important thirty-five years ago . . . and it is just as truly important today.

*John Nichols*  
*October 2005*  
*San Cristobal, New Mexico*

## Preface

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The publication of these articles, written over thirty years ago, resulted from the encouragement from my friend, Lorena Oropeza, who together with Dionne Espinoza made such a publication possible. It has been an honor to have known Lorena and Dionne who came to my home to interview me. Both are now profesoras at universities. That we have scholars and Chicana PHDeers of this caliber teaching in our educational institutions fulfills a vision of what we hoped would come out of the Chicano Movement. Even more extraordinary is the fact that most scholars do not forget “La Causa Chicana,” thus watering the *raíces* of the ancient past and living the Chicano epic.

*El Grito Del Norte*, a Chicano newspaper based in Española, New Mexico, was born from the revolutionary flames that engulfed the Southwest in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It began as the official newspaper for Reies López Tijerina’s La Alianza Federal de Pueblos Libres, an organization with a membership of 6,000 heirs representing descendents of fifty Mexican and Spanish land grants. With the help of Beverly Axelrod (RIP, June 19, 2002), we formed a cooperative of editors who came together as volunteers, community peoples and political activists. Elizabeth (Betita) Martínez led the pack, so to speak, by holding down the fort of *El Grito* headquarters in Española as it became a beehive of movement and activism. The variety of skills and people from all walks of life that united in producing this newspaper generated a phenomenal power of and with the people. *El Grito* reported Alianza demonstrations, courtroom battles, injustices and the growing militancy of the Spanish/Mexican population, Black Power, American Indian movements and national and international issues. The presentation of history and culture in the form of poetry, stories,

recipes, and songs made *El Grito* appealing to everyone and it soon grew to be a very successful member of the Chicano Press Association, an organization of the time that included some fifty newspapers.

Doing a newspaper became an important part of our lives and a priceless education to those creating it. One cannot separate *El Grito* from the Civil Rights Movement which empowered Raza with political knowledge and experience. Evolving with the activism of the times, we embraced a new literary form, breaking all conventions regarding proper English, language purity, and word usage. Intellectual development grew with the use of bilingual lyrical abilities in a unique, creative, self-refined way, a people's way. This new Spanglish, as some call it, gave such freedom so that even my words and expressions in writing came from childhood family conversations as well as experience in community meetings and political conferences across the country.

I learned to listen, not only to words, but to the hearts of people; thus capturing the passion, anger, outrage, and indignation when discussing racism, greed, repression and exploitation. These sentiments became an eruption of hundreds of years of repressed thought now set free. This reflection of the past revealed who and what we had become and what we had lost, "por eso estamos como estamos." It deciphered the difference between "Justice" and "Justus" and in the process of activism, we envisioned a humanitarian way of governing by putting people before profits; a way to make people proud with honor and dignity.

During this time, the newspaper and our homes were under constant surveillance and we were followed by local, state, and federal authorities. Many of us are in the congressional record with telephone, car license numbers, and personal information openly targeting us to whomever. Despite all of this, our home in San Cristobal, where we had moved to help start La Escuela Tlatelolco which would be based in Denver, became a hub of activity and a source of inspiration in reading, studying, discussing, and learning with family and friends. Our neighbor, Craig Vincent, became a mentor to many of us, as did Cleofas Vigil. They joined our home circle when visitors stayed with us and we learned of activists and activism across the country. Our kitchen table became the heart and axis of movement secrets,

laughter and discussion. My children always listened and marvel saying, “Wow, Mom, if these walls could talk.”

My articles and column, “Despierten Hermanos,” today I would also say Hermanas, became a regular in *El Grito del Norte*, a *grito* that could be read and heard from New York to Mexico, Cuba, Latin America, Puerto Rico, and all over the Southwest. I named the first column “Despierten Hermanos” and when I sent the next article, Betita called me to ask what I wanted to name it and without thinking I said, “Oh, call it ‘Despierten Hermanos.’” And so the column became Despierten Hermanos.

I am but one of many who walked this path of change: it took a movement to change what this place called North Amerika had become. These essays represent labor and thought at a time when we even debated what to call ourselves. They are non-professional, most unplanned, some with logic and some with no logic, some great, some not so great and although diverse in subject, they remained consistent in taking racial attitudes, institutions, and ruling powers to task. I never claimed to be the best; actually I never even thought of myself as a writer or columnist, other people said that, not me. I just rambled, wrote my opinions my way, and ideas took shape flooding my mind with new ones. People either liked them or if they didn’t like them, it made them think and pay attention to what took place in the country. A new dawn opened for La Raza.

Of all of my writings probably the article that created the biggest whoooraah turned out to be “The Woman of La Raza.” This lost me friends and made me a target for the renowned “Malinche” label. But, like so many of my writings, the rewards were many and this article opened centuries-old flood gates that poured forth in women’s words and thoughts. I knew “This is very important,” and from this article came a whole women’s history book, *The Women of La Raza*, hopefully to be published soon. This women’s book begins to define the side of that mestizo face medallion we wore so proudly, La India.

The Chicana/o Movement is a vital chapter of Southwestern history, a history needed to inspire new dreamers as activists become the elder generation. As we recall this chapter in Chicano history, we

reseed the harvest of the Civil Rights Movement and cultivate the harvest of “La Revolución Chicana” remembering that our ancestors planted the first resisting seeds of non-defeat. This Revolución is the foundation of today’s evolving issues, the metamorphosis of activism that makes all movements more important than ever. It will take more than thirty years to change 500 years of colonial racist exploitative attitudes, changes which only you can make possible as we live the sun of justice, The Sixth Sun.

## ၅၅၅

As I look back I remember, “To think that at one time even my mother accused me of being a communist and threatened to report me to the government as such.” I always respected her and had never answered her, but this time I answered:

“Go ahead, I will call the FBI for you and you can turn me in. Who do you think I learned to be a revolutionary from? Remember when you would say: ‘Si yo supiera hablar inglés, ¿ya me hubieran echado a la prisión?’ Pues yo sí sé inglés, y ahora, ¿usted me acusa de ser comunista? Ándele, entrégueme.”

Her little eyes blinked and after a long silence we both laughed, hugged and cried as she said, “Hija de tu nana, me ganaste.” I thought, “Of course, I won, what do you expect from the daughter of the Mexican Revolution?”

Later, in 1968, I brought her to visit me in New Mexico and took her to hear Reies Tijerina when he spoke at Española High School. I will never forget the incredible look that came over her face as she drank up every word. After he finished, my mother walked right over to Reies, talked to him and hugged him, tearfully saying, “Nunca creí que oyera en este país las palabras y verdades que ha dicho usted.”

After we left, I smilingly hugged her and reminded her that now, she too was a communist. ¡VIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN, SIEMPRE!

*Enriqueta Vasquez*

*August 14, 2005*

*San Cristobal, New Mexico*

## Acknowledgements

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