

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

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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Chicanas, Organize!

Introduction

Dionne Espinoza

Enriqueta Vasquez examined how racial discrimination, poverty and sexism negatively affected Chicanas both in U.S. society and within the Chicano Movement. Despite the positioning of Chicanas at the bottom of race, class, and gender hierarchies, she refused to construct Chicanas as victims. Rather, she focused on how Chicanas' experiences of oppression positioned them as an untapped pool of activists and nation-builders for the Chicano Movement. In "The Woman of La Raza I," Vasquez pointed to women's cultural knowledge, personal strength, and survival skills in upholding family life as single mothers. For Vasquez, here was ample evidence that Chicanas would make ideal political actors within the movement family.

Although she couched many of her observations of women's roles in terms of *la familia*, in "The Woman of La Raza, Part I," "The Woman of La Raza, Part II" and "La Chicana: Let's Build a New Life," she questioned the idea that tradition equaled women's subordination. In each of these pieces, she criticized a static understanding of tradition and advanced alternative histories and models of family life that valued women's roles and contributions. For example, in contrast to the representation of the family as inherently and historically male dominant, Vasquez recounted a pre-colonial history in which women were revered for their contributions to tribal society. In "La Chicana: Let's Build a New Life," she presented a vision of communal life based on women's pre-existing networks and ties to each other. Simultaneously drawing upon ideas of radical feminism, the cooperative movement, and indigenous ways of life, Vasquez imagined a community that fostered women's flourishing.

Nevertheless, as she ventured into the terrain of alternative models of communal life, Vasquez continued to grapple with the contradictions of cultural nationalism. Written in the midst of a widespread rejection of Chicana feminism by men and anti-feminist women who accused feminists of selling out to the "white women's" movement, the column "Chicana Resolution," which reported on the Denver Youth Conference of 1970, underscored the position that Chicanas would maintain the familia of Aztlán rather than build autonomous women's groups. "¡Soy Chicana Primero!" called for a distancing of Chicanas from the women's liberation movement. She declared, "YOU MUST BE A CHICANA FIRST, for when you are a Chicana Primero, you can wander all over, you can relate to many struggles, for they must all someday

come together, BUT you will be home, in Aztlán, working with your own familia." Such a statement revealed her desire to affirm the value of certain nationalist impulses, which she conjoined to woman-identification, while also opening the door to coalition politics.

While many of Vasquez's columns had been reprinted in other newspapers, Vasquez's report on the First National Chicana Conference, a conference that was held on Memorial Day weekend in 1971 at the Magnolia Branch YWCA, is not widely known. A turbulent moment in Chicana/o politics, the conference was marked by conflict among women activists regarding the relationship between the male-defined agenda of the Chicano Movement and the agenda of an evolving Chicana feminism. The piece initially expressed a deep faith and joy in women's ties to each other. However, as she reported, Vasquez was among a group of women who walked out of the conference. The walkout and the divisions among women that emerged at the conference were a testament to the larger issues facing Chicanas of the time: How to both pursue the goals of the Chicano Movement agenda while demanding that the Movement contribute to women's empowerment and flourishing.

La Chicana: Let's Build a New Life

Bueno, Comadres, here we go again on the woman thing. The other day I was listening to a group of young people talking about how the Southwest is a homeland for the Chicano wherever he may be. They were saying this is an area where the Chicano can identify with the land, and how the culture is rooted here, and how it would be good to have our families move onto the land and raise our children here in OUR homeland of Aztlán.¹

After listening to this talk for some time I sat back smiling and said, "There is only one group of Chicanos that I think would really be able to do what you are talking about." And guess who that is, "The CHICANA."

Having lived in housing projects in the city, I know many of the women there that were from small cities and farms and would love to go back to live in the country. Many of these women have anywhere from 2 to 6 children, live on Aid to Dependent Children, do not own homes, own very few belongings, have no jobs and truly have very little to tie them down to the city. Not only this, but in the city the problems of raising children are multiplied many times over and some of these Chicanos would welcome the chance to leave the city with their families.

¹ During the Chicano Movement, activists' understanding of the Southwest as a "homeland" derived from the fact that the territory that now comprises much of the southwestern United States had been acquired from Mexico after the U.S.-Mexico War, a war initiated when General Zachary Taylor crossed into Mexican territory. See John R. Chávez, *The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: UNM P, 1984), 35-42. Scholars have debated the precise location of Aztlán, but its symbolic significance as the "birthplace" of the Aztecs, said to be a "land to the north" of Tenochtitlán, fit well with the understanding of the Southwest as a lost territory.

Then, what would they do? Well, let's say that a co-op of about six such families would buy about ten acres of land. In a summer they could do their home repairs and building. For the Chicana, building is no problem. I have talked to many Chicanos in the area and they still remember the times when it was the woman who did the building. They did the home repairs and mudding of the walls, etc. Many of the old-timers say that the woman is every bit as capable as the man when it comes to building.

Once these families get themselves built-in, they could begin to think about planting and growing crops to help feed themselves and learn from the land. And this is the beauty of the whole thing, in that they would be cultivating themselves and also be teaching the young ones how to relate to the earth. These women could actually build a satisfying home life for themselves and their families. They could work and play together with the children and they could study together and learn about nature, crops, and life in general. There would be a deep spiritual relationship and bond there.

Not only could the children grow all strong and beautiful, Raza, but the woman could also lead full, fruitful lives. For example, I know of a woman who lives in the projects, who enjoys fixing cars. She can't do this in the city, but she does fool around fixing radios and electrical appliances. She really enjoys this kind of work. In a community such as this of which we speak, each woman could find the things that she really enjoys and they could all learn to do these things and do them as a contribution to the community. These women could teach and learn together, relate to each other and read and study together.

What are the advantages of this kind of life? Well, all throughout the Southwest, the Raza has been forced to move from rural areas to the cities to make a living. Many of these people leave and abandon entire homes here. Our Raza goes to the city to make more money, not realizing that it costs more money to live there in the dog-eat-dog rat race. Life there is a vicious circle. Meanwhile, on the land that they left behind, we find the young hippies that have just learned that the city destroys humanity and these young people are running away from the life of comfort that their parents gave them. They are buying many

of these abandoned simple homes that Raza left and fixing them up while they live in them. They seem to manage somehow and are making the attempt at a new way of life.

The thing is that it should be Raza that is coming back to the land. We don't need a new way of life, we have a good way of life already. We know the land well. It is ours. We should be raising our children here, on the land. We should be teaching them to relate to the earth and to other humans. This is part of our culture. And I really think that the Chicana can come back and rebuild the society and homeland that the Chicanos need to relate to. This would be a community that would be giving itself to the people. It would be a community of children that belong to everyone, and the mothers would form the solid foundation of the strong spirit needed from which to draw strength for all Chicanos. This could be the rebirth of a truly tribal community and an example from which would come expansion and more communities like these.

You know, I really think this would be worth trying and I have a lot of faith in the Chicana making it work. So, you there in the barrios and the projects, you with OUR beautiful RAZA children to raise, what do you say? Start to talk about this and start to look into it. You may hold the key to the cultural rebirth of our beautiful RAZA de AZTLÁN. It is worth making this dream a reality, ¿qué no?

November 15, 1969

The Woman of La Raza, Part I

While attending a Raza conference in Colorado this year, I went to one of the workshops that were held to discuss the role of the Chicana. When the time came for the women to make their presentation to the full conference, the only thing that the workshop representative said was this: "It was the consensus of the group that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated."¹

As a woman who has been faced with having to live as a member of the "Mexican-American" minority as a breadwinner and a mother raising children, living in housing projects and having much concern for other humans, leading to much community involvement, this was quite a blow. I could have cried. Surely we could have at least come up with something to add to that statement. I sat back and thought, Why? Why? I understood why the statement had been made and I realized that going along with the feelings of the men at the convention was perhaps the best thing to do at the time.

Looking at our history, I can see why this would be true. The role of the Chicana has been a very strong one, although a silent one. When the woman has seen the suffering of her people, she has always responded bravely and as a totally committed and equal human. My mother told me of how, during the time of Pancho Villa and the revolution in Mexico, she saw the men march through the village continually for three days and then she saw the battalion of women marching for a whole day. The women carried food and supplies; also, they were fully armed and wearing loaded "carrilleras."² In battle, they fought

¹ Vasquez was referring to the women's workshop that took place at the Denver Youth Conference at the Crusade for Justice Headquarters in March 1969.

² "Carrilleras" are long belts with slots to hold bullets. For further information about women participants in the Mexican Revolution, see Elisabeth Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military* (Austin: UT P, 1985); Shirlene Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman* (Denver: Arden P, 1990) 43-46; and Andrés Reséndez, "Battleground Women: Soldaderas and Female Soldiers in the Mexican Revolution," *The Americas* 51 no. 4 (April 1995): 525-553.

alongside the men. Out of the Mexican revolution came the revolutionary personage "Adelita," who wore her rebozo crossed at the bosom as a symbol of a revolutionary woman in Mexico.

Then we have our heroine Juana Gallo, a brave woman who led her men to battle against the government after having seen her father and other villagers hung for defending the land of the people. She and many more women fought bravely with their people. And if called upon again, they would be there alongside the men to fight to the bitter end.

And now, today, as we hear the call of the Raza, and as the dormant, "docile" Mexican American comes to life, we see the stirring of the people. With that call, the Chicana also stirs and I am sure that she will leave her mark upon the Mexican-American movement in the Southwest.

How the Chicana reacts depends totally on how the "Macho" Chicano is treated when he goes out into the so-called "Mainstream of Society." If the husband is so-called successful, the woman seems to become very domineering and demands more and more in material goods. I ask myself at times, "Why are the women so demanding?" But then I realize: This is the price of owning a slave.

A woman who has no way of expressing herself and realizing herself as a full human has nothing else to turn to but the owning of material things. She builds her entire life around these and finds security in this way. All she has to live for is her house and family and she becomes very possessive of both. This makes her a totally dependent human. Dependent on her husband and family. Most of the Chicana women in this comfortable situation are not particularly involved in the Movement. Many times it is because of the fear of censorship in general. Censorship from the husband, the family, friends and society in general. For these reasons, she is completely inactive.³

Then you will find the Chicana with a husband who was not able to fare so very well in the "Society" and perhaps has had to face defeat. She is the woman that really suffers. Quite often the man will not fight the real source of his problems, be it discrimination or what-

³ Noteworthy here was Vasquez's attention to class differences among Mexican-American women, a topic not often discussed in Movement circles of the time.

ever, but will instead come home and take it out on his family. As this continues, his Chicana becomes the victim of his machismo and woe-ful are the trials and tribulations of that household.

Much of this is seen particularly in the city. The man, being head of the household and unable to fight the system he lives in, will very likely lose face and for this reason there will often be a separation or divorce in the family. It is at this time that the Chicana faces the real test of having to confront society as one of its total victims.

There are many things she must do. She must: (1) Find a way to feed and clothe the family; (2) Find housing; (3) Find employment; (4) Provide child care; and (5) Find some kind of social outlet and friendship.

(1) In order to find a way to feed and clothe her family she must find a job. Because of her suppression, she has probably not been able to develop a skill. She is probably unable to find a job that will pay her a decent wage. If she is able to find a job at all, it will probably be only for survival. Thus she can only hope to exist—she will hardly be able to live an enjoyable life.

Even if she does have a skill, she must all at once realize that she has been living in a racist society. She will have much difficulty in proving herself in any position. Her work must be three times that of the Anglo majority. Not only this, but the competitive way of the Anglo will always be there. The Anglo woman is always there with her superiority complex. The Chicana will be looked upon as having to prove herself even in the smallest task. She is constantly being put to the test. Not only does she suffer the oppression that the Anglo woman suffers as a woman in the market of humanity, but she must also suffer the oppression of being a minority with a different set of values. Because her existence and the livelihood of the children depend on her conforming to an Anglo society, she tries very hard to conform. Thus she may find herself even rejecting herself as a Mexican American. Existence itself depends on this.

(2) She must find housing that she will be able to afford. She will very likely be unable to live in a decent place. It will be more the matter of finding a place that is cheap. It is likely she will have to live in a housing project. Here she will be faced with a real problem of being

able to raise children in an environment that is conducive to much suffering. The decision as to where she will live is a difficult matter as she must come face to face with making decisions entirely on her own. This, plus having to live them out, is very traumatic for her.

(3) To find a job she will be faced with working very hard during the day and coming home to an empty house and again having to work at home. Cooking, washing, ironing, mending, plus spending some time with the children. Here her role changes to being both father and mother. All of this, plus being poor is very hard to bear. Then, on top of this, to have a survey worker or social worker tell you that you have to have incentive and motivation and get ahead! These are tough pressures to live under. Few men could stand up under them.

(4) Child care is one of the most difficult problems for a woman to have to face alone. Not only is she tormented with having to leave the raising of her children to someone else, but she wants the best of care for them. For the amount of money that she may be able to pay from her meager wages, it is likely that she will be lucky to find anyone at all to take care of the children. The routine of the household is not normal at all. She must start her day earlier than an average worker. She must clothe and feed the children before she takes them to be cared for in someone else's home. Then, too, she will have a very hard day at work for she is constantly worrying about the children. If there are medical problems, this will only multiply her stress during the day. Not to mention the financial pressure of medical care.

(5) With all of this, the fact still remains that she is a human and must have some kind of friendship and entertainment in life—and this is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks facing the Chicana alone. She can probably enjoy very little entertainment as she can not afford a baby-sitter. This, plus she very likely does not have the clothes, transportation, etc. As she can not afford entertainment herself, she may very often fall prey to letting someone else pay for her entertainment and this may create unwanted involvement with some friend. When she begins to keep company with men, she will meet with the disapproval of her family and often be looked upon as having loose moral values. As quite often she is not free to remarry in the eyes of the Church, she will find more and more conflict and disapproval and

she continues to look upon herself with guilt and censorship. Thus she suffers much as a human. Everywhere she looks, she seems to be rejected.

This woman has much to offer the movement of the Mexican-American. She has had to live all the roles of her Raza. She has had to suffer the torments of her people in that she has had to go out into a racist society and be a provider as well as a mother. She has been doubly oppressed and is trying very hard to find a place. Because of these facts she is a very, very, strong individual. She has had to become strong in order to exist against these odds.

And what usually happens to this woman when she tries to become active in the Causa? One would think that the movement would provide a place for her, one would think that the organizations would welcome her with open arms and try to encourage her to speak up for her Raza. One would think that because of her knowledge and situation the groups would think of liberation schools with child care for the victims of broken homes, in order to teach them culture and history so that they may find self identity. But, NO. Instead one finds that this woman is shunned again by her own Raza. When she tries to speak of Machismo, she is immediately put down and told "We know all about it, there are many many books written on the subject" She receives nothing but censorship again. She tries so hard to say, "Yes, there is much on Machismo, but can't you Machos look at the women and children who are the VICTIMS of your Machismo?" She tries so much to speak up and instead finds herself speaking to deaf ears and a completely closed mind.

Then she tries other ways, perhaps to offer her skills and knowledge in some way. This too is difficult. If she does do a good job, she will have to walk lightly around the men for she may find herself accused of being "Agringada" or "Agabachada" (Anglicized). To top this off, quite often the men will accept or allow an Anglo female to go in and tell them how to run things. The Anglo will perhaps be accepted and be allowed more freedom than the Raza woman. Through all of this, one sees a discouraged Chicana. One that hungers and bleeds to help her people and is being turned away and discour-

aged. What is to become of her? Will she be forced into being a skeleton in the closet that one does not want to see?

The Mexican-American movement is not that of just adults fighting the social system, but it is a total commitment of a family unit living what it believes to be a better way of life in demanding social change for the benefit of mankind. When a family is involved in a human rights movement, as is the Mexican American, there should not have to be a woman's liberation movement within it. There should not have to be a definition of a woman's role. We should get down to the business at hand. Do we want a liberation for the Raza? Is this supposed to be a total liberation?

The woman must help liberate the man and the man must look upon this liberation with the woman at his side, not behind him, following, but along side of him leading. The family must come up together. The Raza movement is based on Brotherhood. ¿Qué no? We must look at each other as one large family. We must look at all of the children as belonging to all of us. We must strive for the fulfillment of all as equals with the full capability and right to develop as humans. When the man can look upon "his" woman as HUMAN and with the love of BROTHERHOOD and EQUALITY, then and only then, can he feel the true meaning of liberation and equality himself. When we talk of equality within the Mexican-American movement we better be talking about TOTAL equality beginning right where it all starts. AT HOME . . .

July 6, 1969

The Woman of La Raza, Part II

When we look at and talk about the Raza woman, we have to really think seriously and realize that we are dealing with a real mixed-up side of the social battle. We must know that we again have a fairy tale to live with. How many times have we heard reference made to the "squaw" of the family? The woman has been stereotyped as a servant to the man and the Raza has come to accept this as a great TRADITION.

Well, Compadres, after doing some thinking and reading, I'll have to blow up that little dream bubble for us. It seems that before the Europeans came to the Americas, our highly cultured Indian woman usually held an honored position in the "primitive" society in which she lived. She was mistress of the home and took full part in tribal elections. The position of the woman was not only free, but honorable. She was a strong laborer, a good mechanic, a good craftsman, a trapper, a doctor, a preacher and, if need be, a leader. It seems that among the so-called SAVAGE people of this continent, women held a degree of political influence never equaled in any CIVILIZED nation. The woman of the Aztecs was far superior to that of Spain, then and now. And in Oaxaca, Mexico, the Mayan woman to this day is equal to her men.¹ As a matter of fact if there is some political issue at hand, it is the woman you will see PROTESTING. They won't take anything lying down. They even tell the government where to go.

So, after all of this, it looks to me as if this continent had a highly CIVILIZED way of life (and that is probably why the European

¹ The indigenous groups that populate the area around and including Oaxaca are the Zapotec and Mixtec. Scholars who have studied this area have shown that women do have a central role in social organization as merchants.

could not live up to it).² The Europeans certainly DESTROYED a good thing. ¿Qué no? And now we talk of the tradition of the woman and say, "No, we must not change the role of the woman, the woman must remain totally dominated in order to keep this tradition." Let's take another look at this family "tradition" the men say we have.

Remember we are Mestizos, a people of Spanish fathers and Indian mothers. Male domination over the woman is a thing of Spain and Europe. Destroying the Indian woman's freedom was necessary in order to conquer and destroy the Indian. It was also a tool used to make subject-wives of the Indian woman, who would have to submit to a European way of life.³

When we look at all of this and see our real history and heritage, we come to realize that a strong Raza woman is inevitable. If our Raza is to survive and endure, it seems that we have to prepare the woman once again to live a strong role in relation to her people. We can expect to see the Raza woman stand up and take more and more action in matters, for it is in doing this that she will be fulfilling the deep thirst of our Indian blood. Our Raza woman will take her place in the social and cultural struggle and this will be nothing new to her, it will be as natural as giving birth.

The woman of the Raza is becoming more and more aware and has been learning in her silent way. She has been watching her people suffer. She is watching her culture being raped. We see that our families are being destroyed, not only as families but also because our children are growing up without the human values we know as ours. We see many a Raza woman having to confront the Anglo world alone and trying to raise a family. She hasn't quite figured it out, but she knows something is wrong.

² During the Chicano Movement, activists often represented pre-colonial indigenous society as an ideal society that was destroyed by conquest. Vasquez used this discourse to argue that pre-colonial indigenous societies were either gender egalitarian or even, in some cases, matriarchal. To be certain, the ways in which indigenous groups organized gender categories varied widely because of regional differences and cultural diversity.

³ The Spanish population in early colonial Mexico was composed predominantly of male explorers, the *conquistadores*. These men saw in the population of indigenous women wives, sexual partners, personal caretakers, and bodies open to sexual violation.

Look at the Reform Schools

And why should we be concerned? In order to see just one of the problems of our young people, we have but to look at the reform schools. For example in the state of Colorado where the Raza is 10% of the population, three reformatories have an average of 62% of the Raza. That's way over our population percentage, no? The biggest percentage of youth there come from broken homes. This alone, hermanos, means that there is a problem and that, my dear sisters, we are bearing the brunt of raising our families in this barbarous society.

One of the things we Raza women must do is to see just what it is that our families must contend with, and what we can do to prepare them for facing up to life. We must make them strong and unafraid in today's world. We must first talk to our children and examine just what it is that they are learning in school. I believe that one of the big problems we will find is the racism in education. We know that in school they are not given a culture that they can identify with. They are not taught who they are. Our way of thinking and our human values are, as a matter of fact, discouraged. Our own children are wandering away from Raza culture and this is mostly because they have been educated to feel inferior. Our own history books in the schools tend to wipe us out as a people. Our children don't know themselves. It is our obligation and responsibility to show them who and what they really are. We must realize that when educators speak of equality, it is in law and in writing but not in practice. And worse yet, what is being taught to our children is that the Americano as well as their history is superior and infallible. This is totally inhuman, and if you really want to see what this attitude does to people, just go to a foreign country and see the behavior of the American wherever he goes. And listen to what people from other countries feel about the Gringo.

Teach the Children to Question

At home we do not only have to learn what the family is being taught, we must teach them to question these things in order to learn. We have to teach them to discuss things, not just sit in the classrooms and accept everything as the "ultimate truth." They have to learn to

relate to the teachers as fellow humans, humans who also have to learn. And we as women, have to support our children in the classroom, go to school and question too. Remember that the teachers and schools are there to SERVE you. You tell them what you think should be taught. Everywhere that our families walk the path of life we must question the things of man. The only thing in life we have to accept and take our place in harmony with is NATURE and its CREATOR.

These are but a few of the things that we have to contend with in the matter of raising the family. Now Chicanos, we must look at the things that are going to give us strength in raising our families. If we are to teach our families something of what is REALLY going on with the Raza, we have to look around and hope to find a strong and lasting bond for our people. We must look and see what is going on with our people. We have to start thinking about the land grant struggle. The Alianza has been in existence for many, many years.⁴ Let's look at some of its claims and see what they are. The Crusade for Justice in Denver is confronting the educational system, the court system, the politicians and all the establishment and making them answer some questions.⁵ They are teaching old schools some things they can't seem to find in books. How to THINK for instance.

Let's Talk to Each Other

And what about César Chávez in California? What's the history of the campesino and what is he fighting for? These are our people too. And in Texas our brothers and sisters have a struggle. Just what is this all about? What is happening to our people? We feel what is happening, let's learn about it and let's start speaking up. Let's talk to each other and let's not be afraid to be heard.

⁴The Alianza refers to the organization of land grantees headed by Reies López Tijerina. For Tijerina's account of the organization and its evolution, see his memoir, *They Called Me "King Tiger": My Struggle for the Land and Our Rights* (Houston: Arte Público P, 2000) ed. and trans. by José Angel Gutiérrez. The religious aspect of Tijerina's political ideas is the subject of Rudy V. Busto, *King Tiger: The Religious Vision of Reies López Tijerina* (Albuquerque: UNM P, 2005).

⁵The Crusade for Justice was a civil rights organization founded by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales in 1966. Made up of families, the Crusade hosted the Denver Youth Conferences and also developed a school that promoted culture and education.

We women must learn to function again like full humans, as did our ancestors. We are the ones that feel the deep AMOR Y DOLOR for our people. I know many women who would give their lives for their Raza. Let's look around and see where we can give the most and where we are needed. And then let's plunge right into action. Let's hold our heads high and proud and walk in beauty.

July 26, 1969

Chicana Resolution

The Chicano Youth Conference in Denver was not only the rebirth of a nation—Aztlán—but with it the birth of hope and inspiration for Raza wherever we may be.

La Raza is opening its eyes. Little by little we see it happening to us and we do something about it. As our eyes open, our mind grows and we see more and more. We see ourselves as a people. We feel as a people. And with this feeling, with this awakening, the woman of La Raza stirs to join hands in the molding of our people, in the cultivating of our culture.

With this in mind, the resolution from the Chicana Workshop can be seen as a source of strength to continue in the struggle for the building and strengthening of our familia de la Raza. La familia de Aztlán.

The resolution from the Chicana Workshop is a combination of many ideas, opinions and expressions voiced by the women in attendance, women working in all levels, varying in ages and experience, and from many different parts of the country.

Resolution from Chicana Workshop

THE CHICANA WOMEN RESOLVE NOT TO SEPARATE
BUT TO STRENGTHEN AZTLÁN, THE FAMILY OF LA RAZA!

With the grave responsibility of the rebirth and forming of our nation of Aztlán, the women have come to realize that they must begin to develop and function as complete human beings. We have reached a point in our struggle for the liberation of La Raza where the growth of our women and their participation has become of utmost necessity. The woman is repressed as a great potential of strength and knowledge. We must, through education, develop a full consciousness and,

awareness of the woman to the revolution and of the revolution to the woman. This is the beginning of women to free themselves as inferior beings, and to educate themselves so that they too can implement the Plan de Aztlán. In order to implement the Plan we must understand all of the things that it calls for.

With the preceding things kept in mind, we resolve the following:

1. All women must participate according to their capability in all levels of the struggle.

2. We encourage all Chicanas to meet in their own groups for the purpose of education and discussion.

3. *Self-determination* of the women in terms of how they will implement their goal of becoming full human beings and of participating totally in the struggle for la Raza must be respected.

4. We must change the concept of the alienated family where the woman assumes total responsibility for the care of the home and the raising of the children to the concept of la Raza as the united family.

With the basis being brotherhood, la Raza, both men and women, young and old, all must assume the responsibility for the love, care, education and orientation of all the children of Aztlán.

When we speak of community control we are speaking of self-determination of la Raza to decide how it wants to live. The changing concept of the family must run through all our actions in the area of community control.

5. All of the preceding ideas must be included in the ideology of the La Raza Independent Political Party so that everyone, men and women, will work consciously towards the goal of a total liberation of our people. For the purpose of unity and direction, the women of la Raza have set up communication in the form of a newsletter to be shared by all women active in the struggle for the liberation of our people.

We resolve not to separate but to strengthen and free our nation of Aztlán, men, women, and children.

April 29, 1970

¡Soy Chicana Primero!

The Chicana today is becoming very serious and observant. On one hand, she watches and evaluates the white women's liberation movement and, on the other hand, she hears echoes of "Chicano" Movement, "Viva la Raza," the radical raps and rhetoric. For some it becomes fashionable—while, for many of us, it becomes survival itself. Some of our own Chicanas may be attracted to the white woman's liberation movement, but we really don't feel comfortable there. We want to be a Chicana primero. We want to walk hand-in-hand with the Chicano brothers, with our children, viejitos, our familia de la Raza.

Then, too, we hear the whisper that if you are a radical Chicana, you lose some of your femininity as a woman. And we question this as we look at the world struggles and that show this accusation as to femininity doesn't make sense. After all, we have seen the Vietnamese women fight for survival with a gun in one hand and a child sucking on her breast on the other arm. She is certainly feminine. Our own people that fought in the revolution were brave and beautiful, even more human because of the struggles we fought for.¹

So we begin to see what our people are up against as we take very seriously our responsibility to our people—and to our children—as we sense the waging battle for cultural survival. We know that this means we have hardships to endure and we wish to strengthen our endurance in order that we may further strengthen the endurance of our coming generations: Nuestros hijos that are here and those that are yet to come. Our people would often say when they saw a strong spirited woman: viene de buen barro (She comes from a good clay). Thus

¹ Vasquez is referring here to the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1917.

we now must make our children strong with the realization that they, too, "vienen de buen barro."

When we discuss the Chicana, we have to be informed and show how we relate to the white women's liberation movement in order to come up with some of our own answers. This requires a basic analysis, not just a lot of static. Looking at the issues of the women's lib movement, it is easy to relate to the struggle itself as a struggle. We understand this because the Raza people are no newcomers to struggles: We can sympathize with many basic struggles. However, it is not our business as Chicanas to identify with the white women's liberation movement as the homebase for working for our people. We couldn't lead our people there, could we? Remember, Raza is our home ground and family—and we have strong basic issues and grievances *as a people*.

In looking at women's lib we see issues that are relevant to that materialistic, competitive society of the Gringo. This society is only able to function through the sharpening of wits and development of the human instinct of rivalry. For this same dominant society and mentality to arrive at a point where there is now a white women's liberation movement is *dangerous* and *cruel* in that the social structure has reached the point of fracture and competition of the male and female. This competitive thought pattern can lead to the conclusion that the man is the enemy and thus create conflict of the sexes.

Now we, Raza, are a colonized people, (we have been a colony of New Spain, we have been Mexico, and have only a veneer of U. S. of A. rule since 1848, just 100 years) and an oppressed people. We must have a clearer vision of our plight and certainly we cannot blame our men for oppression of the women. Our men are not the power structure that oppresses us as a whole. We know who stole our lands. We know who discriminates against us. We know who came in (our parents still remember), threw out our Spanish books and brought in new, fresh-written history books. And we know who wrote those books for us to read. In other words, we know where we hurt and why. And even more important, we cannot afford to fight within and among ourselves anymore, much less male pitted against female.

When our man is beaten down by society, in employment, housing or whatever, he should no longer come home and beat his wife and

family. And when the woman doesn't have all she needs at home or she perhaps has a family to raise alone, she should not turn around and hate her husband or men for it. Both the man and the woman have to realize where we hurt, we have to figure out why we hurt, and why these things are happening to us. And more important, through all of these sufferings and tests, we have to receive and share strength from each other and together fight the social system that is destroying us and our families, that is eating away at us, little by little. And we have to build a social system of our own.

One of the greatest strengths of Raza is that of our understanding and obedience to nature and its balance and creation. This same awareness makes us realize that it takes a male and a female to make a whole. One sex cannot have total fulfillment without the other. Life requires both in order for it to go on, to reproduce. This same basic need of each other is the total fulfillment of beauty in its most creative form. Now the reason that we discuss this is that we must think of life generally, without the BAD and TABOO connotation that has been placed on our most basic functions. We cannot allow negative attitudes in regard to our physical capacities, because when we allow this kind of control on ourselves, we are allowing ourselves to be castrated, controlled and destroyed at our very basic essential level. This can affect generations to come.

In working for our people, a woman becomes more and more capable. This Raza woman gains confidence, pride and strength—and this strength is both personal and as a people. She gains independence, security, and more human strength because she is working in a familiar area, one in which she puts her corazón and love. When a man sees this kind of spirit and strength, the Chicana may be understood as having lost her femininity. A man may misinterpret this and feel it as a threat. But he, too, must stop and evaluate this. He should not react against her because this is a great source of strength for him, for her, for our children, for the familia de la Raza. This kind of spirit and strength that builds and holds firm la familia de la Raza. This is love, my Raza. We cannot compete with "el barro" that has held us firm for so long. This is total *respect* and *equality* of humanity, equality of humans that have love for ourselves, love for our men, love for our

elders, love for our children. It is this love that is the spirit that cannot be broken and destroyed. It is this force that has allowed us to endure through the centuries and it is the strength that carries on the struggle of our people—the demand for justice.

With this kind of strength, how can we possibly question the femininity of the Chicana? Femininity is something more than the outer shell. What the Chicana has within makes the exterior seem so limiting. When we consider the physical and psychological make-up of the women, the exterior stereotyping of the woman seems like such a materialistic attitude. That kind of judgment should not be placed on the woman; it can lead her to become commercial and competitive.

Let us remember that many of the Raza women can and do relate to the earth. La Tierra. After all, many of us have worked in the fields. Many of us come from migrant and campesino workers. We are not afraid of the sweet smell of sweat from our bodies. How many of us who have seen our mothers wearing coveralls with knee patches, thinning beets and working in the fields, would dare to say that this woman is not feminine? This woman is a big part of our people. When we are the sons and daughters of a strong peasant people of the earth, surely we have the strength not to be so materialistic as to judge each other by our exterior and possessions.

No, mi gente, what we have going for us as a people is much stronger than that which we can see. It is that "barro" of which we are made of. It is that which is our spirit within us. Our Indio roots that live. The Church did not give us a spirit or humanity. We have always had it. The Church taught us Christianity and the beauty of Jesus Christ, but the world corporation, the BUSINESS built upon the spiritual concept, is quite another thing. That we have let this corporation control us, is something else that we must question because we can no longer let anything drain our spiritual strength—and we are realizing more and more where our strength is. We must give it to each other.

If the Chicana chooses to go white women's liberation, she has chosen to alienate herself from her people and has chosen to make it on her own, by herself. Her strength is lost to her people. If the Chicana chooses to become a Chicana PRIMERO, to stand by and for her people, then she has become stronger by joining the struggle for her

people. And we do need her very, very much. All of this means that today we face a time of commitment and the Chicana, too, must make a choice. Her people wait for her, la familia de la Raza needs her for the building of our nación de Aztlán. Our own society needs everyone. YOU MUST BE A CHICANA FIRST—for when you are a Chicana primero, you can wander all over, you can relate to many struggles, for they must all someday come together. BUT you will be home, in Aztlán, working with your own familia, to build for your own people, within the spirit that comes from "el barro." PORQUE SÍ VENIMOS DE BUEN BARRO . . .

April 26, 1971

National Chicana Conference, Houston

Viva La Raza, viva la Chicana y viva el Machismo, for I am machismo too. The machismo that protects its people without self-interest.¹ Those are some of the cries heard and passions felt by Chicanas as we were caught up in the ecstasy of sisterhood at the National Chicana Conference in Houston, Texas, last May.²

The best result of the conference is that we all learned. You see, Comadres, that's how Raza lives—by living, by learning, by being vibrant, *con gusto*; by laughing, suffering, crying and learning more everywhere we go, in everything we do. That's our secret of endurance, to live, whether we're getting our teeth kicked in a housing project of the barrio or on the farm. We know we are part of a people, part of a life that throbs for us everyday, within the artery of "El Corazón de La Raza."

The Conference was also good in that it brought together many who had never been involved. Chicanas from all parts of the country met and discussed many important issues, while others renewed friendships within La Causa.

An exciting moment in the conference came Saturday evening, after the mariachi Mass. We were all in the patio waiting to eat and, while we waited, the mariachi group played for us. It was then, that our Chicanismo tore down the curtain of inhibitions and we let out

¹ In a U.S. context, machismo has come to mean Latino male dominance over, and beliefs of male superiority to, women. In a Mexican context, machismo generally refers to culturally specific values and meanings about how men should behave and what values they should hold. In both contexts, the implied outcome is unequal relations of power between men and women with men as the dominant figure, protector of home, and guardian. As viewed in these two sentences, Vasquez was applying the term machismo to ideas about protection of one's own.

² The First National Conference of Chicanas Por La Raza (often referred to as the "First National Chicana Conference" or "The Houston Conference") was held Memorial Day Weekend, May 28–30, 1971, at the Magnolia Branch of the Houston YWCA.

screams of "ay, ay, ay y ¡aajúaa!" We began dancing all over the place. It was exciting and beautiful to see women together gozando de la vida in each other's company. Women danced to the mariachi sounds, out of pure joy. It was a fountain of sisterhood flowing with childlike innocence and delight.

Our dancing was not that of exhibition but the pure expression and partaking of a musical, rhythmic physical pleasure. All was interwoven with enjoyment of our culture, our music, our dancing, our sisters' company in living. Some of the sisters even began dunking each other in a pool in the patio. We went wild.

Perhaps this spark of sharing in joy is the clue to the spirit of our Chicano Movement, our people as a whole. For another thing we learned at the conference is that the Chicana has a lot of soul searching to do. This, in addition to understanding what the Raza movement is all about. Also, that we need a lot of self-development, to learn about ourselves and our culture—and then relate and function *to* and *for* us, as a people.

That we had a walkout the last day of the conference seemed inevitable. There was much expounding about La Chicana, but it didn't tie in with our movement issues. The conference had the aura of being self-centered with a competitive attitude toward the Chicano Movement.

Another thing we seemed to lack was control of our own Conference. The Y.W.C.A. in Houston is smack in the center of a Chicano neighborhood, yet there were few barrio people participating in the conference. We expected Houston participation—particularly after the insane shooting of the Rodriguez family in Dallas and other police killings in Texas.³ Some Chicanas found it hard to be alienated from

³ In February 1971, police stormed a family home in the middle of the night, shooting Thomas Rodriguez and his wife in front of their eight children. Based on erroneous information, the police thought the family was harboring fugitives who, earlier in the month, had kidnapped five deputy sheriffs and killed three. Both Rodriguezes survived and were completely cleared of charges. Their case came to symbolize for many Mexican Americans in Dallas their vulnerability to a violent and prejudiced police force. See Shirley Achor, *Mexican Americans in a Dallas Barrio*, (Tucson, Arizona: U of Arizona P, 1978), 106-8.

the people. Perhaps we must face the fact that an institution of the system isn't going to be an instrument of unity for us.

Let's hope, too, that when there is a conference held under the banner of Chicanismo, there will be a large panel of Chicanas exposed to the news media. Those of us who have long been involved will not be used by any one spokesman (or spokeswoman). We have in our Chicanas a lot of good hard workers that know and live Raza.

After the walkout, many of us marched to Salazar Park, where we broke up into workshops. As we met there, we saw the people come out from their homes and gradually join us. By the time we prepared, collected, and read our workshop resolutions, we had all ages of neighborhood people sitting [and] listening. It was inspiring to see children's faces glow as they related to our "Viva La Raza" slogans. From the Chicana conference "En el Parque," we drew up resolutions that related to the Raza movement as a whole as well as the Chicanas.

We know that the era of the stoic Chicana is becoming a thing of the past. The Chicana is saying "hasta aquí no más," in joining hands with our people on the move. We know too, that we have many issues to resolve. At the conference, for example, there was petty gossip about our own sisters. We better begin by knowing who and what we are angry with. Who is the enemy? Not each other. Let's not fall into the trap of being competitive with each other. One way to test ourselves is by deciding who we are going to be dedicated to—just to Chicanas or to our people as a whole? For it is this decision that will tell us whether we speak only of equal work, equal pay (for men and women), or also about *equal opportunity* minorities.

Let's clarify issues. Shall we worry, for example, about the fact that Jesus Christ was a man and the Bible is written by men, or do we get down to business and face the Catholic Church (90 per cent of us are Catholic) for putting guilt chains on us, instead of letting us know how truly spiritual we are? Maybe we better begin ministering love and Christianity to each other by practicing it.

And what of our culture as to sex? We seem afraid to talk of sex and womanly functions. So, instead, we find ourselves blaming our mother and viejitas. Baloney, we need our viejitas, because *they* have many answers. The Chicana cannot afford the luxury of a so-called

"generation gap." Let's remember we bear the children, we raise them, and we better start figuring out what to teach them.

And on top of all this we have that political monster to contend with. We can't avoid it. We have to learn how he works. Otherwise, we will only be bearing our children to feed into it. The Democratic and Republican animal is a big monster. That's why we need our Raza Unida under the banner of our Nation of Aztlán. We must dedicate ourselves to build what is ours.

The Chicana cannot hold back anymore. We must overcome the fear of giving ourselves to the Raza movement. This will be hard for some of us, mostly because we have been kicked around time and again by the system and by our own. But we must overcome those fears or find ourselves alone again without our people, without our roots, to wander in a dying system that has planned our genocide, to watch our children lose themselves in the hypocrisy of a money-mind.

The legacy of La Chicana is our children, the entire Raza people. We cannot fail now. We must become strong, for that is how we will build our own society. "Chicana: Our children are the spiritual conscience of Raza and the moment of Raza begins with the movement of a child in its mother's womb."

August 20, 1971