



REAL CHANGE

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Reclaiming History

■ **Viva La Raza: A History Of Chicano Identity And Resistance**

By Yolanda Alaniz & Megan Cornish, Red Letter Press, 2008, Paperback,
368 pages, \$19

Chicanos hold a unique place in American culture. Chicano and the feminine term Chicana, refers to United States-born and long-term U.S. residents of Mexican descent, as opposed to recent Mexican immigrants and people of Central and South American extraction. *Viva La Raza: A History Of Chicano Identity and Resistance* is that rare book about Chicano culture.

Written by Seattleite Megan Cornish and former Northwest resident Yolanda Alaniz, both members of the Freedom Socialist Party, *Viva* is divided into two sections: theory and history. The theoretical section draws the conclusion that the core of Chicano/a suppression is racism, one based on “the ideology that people of color are inherently, genetically inferior to whites of European stock.”

The longer, historical section begins with the conquest and the subsequent colonization of Northern Mexico — AKA: How The West Was Stolen. (It’s interesting to note, amidst calls to protect “our” borders, that parts of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, California and Texas were Mexican owned before being won by the U.S. in wars and broken treaties.) This portion talks

about Chicano organizing against police brutality; garment industry strikes; the Chicano role in the gay rights movement; and resistance in farm worker and mining struggles.

Casting an eye locally, the book chronicles the struggle to unionize farm workers in the Yakima Valley, once known as “The Fruit Bowl Of The Nation.” Chicanos from California and Texas moved to the area in the 1930’s and ’40’s. At that time, there were many strikes for better wages and working conditions. But by the 1970’s the United Farm Workers were the primary organizers of Chicano workers in the area. According to the authors, the UFW has never organized well outside of California because the organizations’ primary interest is California. With somewhat absentee leadership, unions in Yakima became more fragmented and less powerful. It’s a problem that still exists today.

While the authors’ Socialist perspective of the political issues might be a turnoff to some, *Viva* is worth reading. It provides a history that isn’t widely reported — that of the Chicano struggle.

—R.V. Murphy

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