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Viva La Raza: A History of Chicano Identity and Resistance. By Yolanda Alaníz and Megan Cornish. Seattle, WA: Red Letter Press, 2008. 366 pp. Maps, photos, appendix, notes, and index. \$19 (paper).

A well-known Chicano *dicho* states, “We did not cross the border, the border crossed us.” This poignant aphorism captures the Mexican American experience well. It emerged largely in the context of the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, when advocacy for social equality coupled civil rights to ideologies of cultural separatism. The Chicano Movement, or El Movimiento, united Mexican Americans around a broad range of social justice issues, ranging from political rights, farmworkers’ rights, the restoration of land grants, and access to higher education. Yet for as much as the maxim reveals about Chicano positionality, the *dicho* also recognizes the political and historical divisions separating Mexicans from Mexican Americans. Thus, it articulates the complexity of a Chicano identity and history that is simultaneously binational and nation centered. Despite several transnational histories of Mexican-descent peoples living in the United States, few scholars of El Movimiento employ cross-bordering frames. This is not the case, however, in Yolanda Alaníz and Megan Cornish’s *Viva La Raza*, a tome that attempts to restore the transnational, working-class influences of Chicano history.

In perhaps the first Marxist history of the Mexican American experience, the authors’ most central preoccupation is applying a materialist approach to Chicano history. At stake, however, is nothing short of liberation from classism, racism, sexism, and homophobia. “Arriving at an accurate assessment of the fundamental forces at play in modern capitalist society is of utmost importance to achieving social change,” argue Alaníz and Cornish. “With sound theory as the basis for effective action, resistance can grow into revolutionary transformation” (p. 28). For Alaníz and Cornish, the ideological bane of the Chicano movement lay squarely in the adoption of cultural nationalism, a politically oppositional identity embedded in the myth of the ancient Aztec journey to Aztlán, what is today the American Southwest. For Chicanos, the mythical trope buttressed claims to land and social belonging as both indigenous peoples of the Americas and as ancestors of colonized Mexicans, but in the view of Alaníz and Cornish (and many others), Chicano cultural nationalism also obscured gender and class differences in exchange for ethnic-based cohesion. *Marxism and the National Question* (Calcutta, 1975), a Leninist-inspired work on nationalism and class struggle, suffices for Alaníz and Cornish as an appropriate framework to critique Chicano nationalism while supplying El Movimiento with guiding principles for liberation.

The ensuing chapters outline a history of Mexican Americans from 1848 to the present. The authors’ reinterpretation of Chicano history consists of highlighting particular class-based and/or antiracist impulses of well-known stories. Desperados Joaquín Murrieta, Tiburcio Vásquez, and Juan Cortina, as well as anarchists Enrique and Ricardo Flores Magón, signal moments of resistance, while labor struggles in

the textile and mining industries in the early twentieth century draw attention to the radicalism of Chicano working-class activism. The most original and compelling story, however, concerns the anti-immigrant practices of César Chávez and the United Farm Workers (UFW). To prolong UFW strike activity, Chávez often aided in the deportation of Mexican replacement workers. His collusion with immigration authorities included turning over names of unauthorized immigrants to the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the use of “UFW Border Patrols” (p. 163). Chavez’s willingness to sanction violence—at odds with his carefully crafted pacifist public image—reveals one of several ill-fated organizing strategies adopted by the UFW.

Alaníz and Cornish’s work is compelling in its use of a Marxist framework throughout. Despite its many attributes, *Viva La Raza* is not without flaws, some more serious than others. First, the authors’ understanding of Chicano nationalism as a narrow phenomenon obscures the internationalism that was crucial in organizing workers. In other words, cultural nationalism often united workers in the common cause of resisting exploitation rather than cloaking the sources of oppression. By overlooking this important feature of Chicano working-class organization, Alaníz and Cornish miss an opportunity to comment on the racial hegemony of the state and the power of white racism to divide the American working class, specifically the Chicano-Mexican working class. These are no small shortcomings, since the stated purpose of *Viva La Raza* is more manifesto than monograph. Alaníz and Cornish, nonetheless, raise important questions about the past and future of the Chicano movement, and they invite further research.

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The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space. By William David

Estrada. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008. xv + 357 pp. Maps, photos, illustrations, notes, and index. \$60 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

William David Estrada’s history of Los Angeles Plaza is a thorough and compelling study of the core of Angeleno cultural memory. Estrada creates an account of the Plaza’s importance to Los Angeles through excellent research and vivid storytelling. He merges concerns with maintaining the public space of the Plaza with a story of Los Angeles losing and reclaiming its roots as a Mexican city. Like many previous studies of cities in the Southwest, Estrada discusses the Americanization of Spanish/Mexican space, but this account combines spatial studies with cultural history, detailing not only the economic and political restructurings of a vital public arena, but the voices of the communities of the Plaza. Estrada recounts the multiple layers of this Plaza’s history, from the initial interactions between European set-