

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Gloria Anzaldúa, Author and Activist, 1942-2004

In various contexts Gloria Anzaldúa referred to herself as a “mestiza, Chicana, Tejana, dyke, feminist, cultural theorist, third world warrior, and patlache poet.”¹ She broke with conventions of academic writing, instead combining personal experience, poetry, and historical analysis into riveting insights. Her works have become textbooks in minority studies programs throughout the country.²

Gloria was born to seventh-generation inhabitants of the Rio Grande Valley. As a youth she worked in farmers’ fields alongside her family. Upon graduating from Pan American University, she taught bilingual classes and special education in Valley schools. In 1973 she earned a master’s in English and education from The University of Texas at Austin.³

In 1975 her dissertation work in Chicano and feminist studies was not accepted by The University,⁴ so, shouldering disappointment, Gloria moved to California. Here she found stimulating ideas in a circle of feminist scholars. She co-edited the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (1981). This book was groundbreaking in its broad inclusion of lesbian voices.

In 1987 she published her seminal *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In a mixture of prose and poetry, the book addresses boundaries and intersections of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality.

Gloria produced subsequent anthologies and bilingual children’s books. She was finishing her Ph.D. at the University of California-Santa Cruz when she died suddenly from diabetes. Her death sparked an outpouring of tributes from readers whom she had inspired and affirmed.

She made liminal spaces less frightening and taught us to respect and navigate our borderlands, and she began to ease us out of isolation.—Iobel Andemicael⁵

I learned to claim, with her, the fullness of my whole self, the shape of my multiple identities.—Graciela Sánchez⁶

Quotations

*By focusing on what we want to happen, we change the present. The healing images and narratives we imagine will eventually materialize.*⁷

*Voyager, there are no bridges; one builds them as one walks.*⁸

*To survive in the Borderlands you must live sin fronteras, be a crossroads.*⁹

Photo

Still searching



Endnotes

¹ “Gloria Anzaldúa, b. 1942,” Voices from the Gaps: Women Artists and Writers of Color, University of Minnesota, http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/anzaldua_gloria.html (May 27, 2005); Maylei Blackwell, “Tongues of Fire: Lessons Learned from the Life and Works of Gloria Anzaldúa,” *La Voz de Esperanza*, May 2005, p. 7.

² Institutions sometimes disregarded her scholarship, but Chicana academics regularly assigned her books in their classes and discussed them in seminars. See Blackwell, “Tongues of Fire,” p. 7; Deena J. González, “Remembering Gloria,” *La Voz de Esperanza*, July/August 2004, p. 21; AnaLouise Keating, “Remembering Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004),” *The Women’s Review of Books*, October 2004, online <http://www.wellesley.edu/WomensReview/archive/2004/10/highlt.html> (August 1, 2005).

³ Biographical information from “Gloria Anzaldúa, b. 1942,” Voices from the Gaps, University of Minnesota, online; from “Gay Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa dies,” *Contra Costa Times*, May 22, 2004, online <http://www.contracostatimes.com/mld/cctimes/news/state/8731238.htm> (April 8, 2005); and from Cordelia Candelaria, “Una vela para Gloria/A Candle for Gloria,” *Frontiers* 2004, University of Nebraska Press, online http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3687/is_200401/ai_n9473435 (April 8, 2005).

⁴ The University of Texas at Austin rejected her dissertation proposal as “unsuitable.” See Blackwell, “Tongues of Fire,” p. 7; “Gay Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa dies,” *Contra Costa Times*, May 22, 2004, online; Ellie Hernández, “Memory of the Mestiza Consciousness,” *La Voz de Esperanza*, July/August 2004, p. 22.

⁵ Iobel Andemicael, “Los Ojos de Gloria,” *La Voz de Esperanza*, July/August 2004, p. 8.

⁶ Graciela Sánchez, “Patlache Warrior,” *La Voz de Esperanza*, July/August 2004, p. 9.

⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, quoted in AnaLouise Keating, “Almas Afines,” *La Voz de Esperanza*, July/August 2004, p. 8.

⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, from preface to 1983 edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, cited in AnaLouise Keating, “Remembering Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004),” *The Women’s Review of Books*, October 2004, online <http://www.wellesley.edu/WomensReview/archive/2004/10/highlt.html> (August 1, 2005).

⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, from the poem “To live in the Borderlands means you....” *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spink, 1992). Visit the Gallery of Great Texas Women website for additional resources: <http://www.utexas.edu/gtw/>