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.” 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.

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.

In 1975 her dissertation work in Chicano and feminist studies was not accepted by The University, 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 Andemicael

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

Quotations

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

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

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

Endnotes


9 Visit the Gallery of Great Texas Women website for additional resources: http://www.utexas.edu/gtw/