



La Voz de Esperanza

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Editor: Gloria A. Ramírez

Design: Monica V. Velásquez

Contributors

Antonio Chávez Cabral, Antonia Castañeda & Luz María Gordillo, Mary C. Flores, Marina Saenz Luna, Rogelio Saenz, Yoly Zentella

La Voz Mailout

Juan Díaz, Mary & Charlie Esperiqueta, Juanita Gallardo, María Helia García, Gloria Hernández, Lee, Leroy, Lydia Hernández, Mildred Hilbrich, Patricia Llinas, Olga Martínez, Ray McDonald, Angie Merla, Eliza Pérez, Maria Reed, Blanca Rivera, Mary A. Rodríguez, Mike Sánchez, Guadalupe Segura, Roger Singler, Argelia Soto, Helen Suárez, Dorelia Uler

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Graciela I. Sánchez

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Esperanza Interns

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- We advocate for a wide variety of social, economic & environmental justice issues.
- Opinions expressed in La Voz are not necessarily those of the Esperanza Center.

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Esperanza Peace & Justice Center
922 San Pedro, San Antonio, TX 78212
210.228.0201 • fax 1.877.327.5902
www.esperanzacenter.org

Inquiries/Articles can be sent to:
lavoz@esperanzacenter.org
Articles due by the 8th of each month

Policy Statements

* We ask that articles be visionary, progressive, instructive & thoughtful. Submissions must be literate & critical; not sexist, racist, homophobic, violent, or oppressive & may be edited for length.

* All letters in response to Esperanza activities or articles in La Voz will be considered for publication. Letters with intent to slander individuals or groups will not be published.

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Dr. Antonia I. Castañeda will be honored at the Esperanza this month. Her work as a historian is legendary, less known is her lifelong passion for community activism and the arts. The following article, *The Vagina Monologues: Re-membering Body and Soul in San Antonio in the April 2002 issue of La Voz demonstrates Antonia's passion for social justice and the cultural arts:*

Walking down Houston St., we joined throngs of women ...to hear *The Vagina Monologues*. The Empire Theatre was filled to capacity. Dressed in brilliant red tops and black trousers, the three monologuers walked on stage to roaring applause and launched into an hour and a half of woman talk and women's voices peeling off the layers of silence about that unmentionable space of woman power, the Vagina. Women laughed and cried as they heard their own unspoken fears, joys, rages, passions and desires about their sexuality issue forth... The vagina and the performers got a standing ovation.

...All evening long I kept hearing how brave the author and the performers were to bring this first-ever public presentation on the vagina to San Antonio. No, I said to myself. As important as this performance is and as brave as the performers are, it is neither the first performance on the vagina in San Antonio, nor perhaps, the bravest.

Monica Palacios, the courageous and outrageously funny "Chicana Lesbo Comic," performed a vagina monologue in her *CONFESSIONS... A Sexplosion of Tantalizing Tales*, at the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center in 1997. The equally courageous Rosemary Meza followed Palacios on stage in a performance entitled, *The Laughter Between My Legs and Other Phenomena*.

...Though the artists treated basically the same subject, women's sexuality, why was *The Vagina Monologues* extolled and hailed, and the productions at the Esperanza denigrated and dismissed in the local press? At issue for columnist Roddy Stinson, who disparages by ridicule, and who in this instance directed his barbs at both the Department of Cultural Affairs (DACA) and at the Esperanza, was that the artists performed "at a theater partly funded by city tax dollars."

...Despite city-wide support for public funding of the arts, at its September 11, 1997 meeting, the City Council cut public funding to all arts organizations by 15%, but singled out the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center for complete de-funding... Sexuality was the viewpoint at issue; and, more explicitly, homophobia the taproot of the discrimination.

Refusing to be cowed or silenced, the Esperanza filed an unprecedented lawsuit in Federal Court against the City of San Antonio for viewpoint discrimination. Esperanza's courageous lawsuit—its unshakeable defense of the right to one's cultural and sexual self as an inalienable human right—won that right for all of us in this city. In publicly naming and challenging the politics of culture and the politics of sexuality in San Antonio, Esperanza created a public space for performance of sexuality, and most specifically, of women's sexuality.

Limitations of time do not permit me to expand the discussion to issues of race and class, ...also on my mind as I watched the performance at the Empire Theater.

...Let us not allow that historical memory to be erased. Let us remember that the unflinching struggle the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center waged from 1997 to 2001, and the production of *The Vagina Monologues* in San Antonio in 2002, are seamed together in the cultural fabric and history of this City.

Let us remember that women's bodies led, and bore the weight, of that protracted struggle. And let us remember that it was the Esperanza's *Arte es Vida* campaign with initial support from The Coalition for Cultural Diversity and later the San Antonio Arts Coalition plus the everpresent support of comunidad that remembered body and soul giving voice to public space for women's stories and recovering the cultural memory of the gente of San Antonio.

- Antonia Castañeda

Note: For more on Antonia Castañeda, Su Obra y Su Vida see the next article and back page.

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VOZ VISION STATEMENT: La Voz de Esperanza speaks for many individual, progressive voices who are gente-based, multi-visioned and milagro-bound. We are diverse survivors of materialism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, classism, violence, earth-damage, speciesism and cultural and political oppression. We are recapturing the powers of alliance, activism and healthy conflict in order to achieve interdependent economic/spiritual healing and fuerza. La Voz is a resource for peace, justice, and human rights, providing a forum for criticism, information, education, humor and other creative works. La Voz provokes bold actions in response to local and global problems, with the knowledge that the many risks we take for the earth, our body, and the dignity of all people will result in profound change for the seven generations to come.