

porting death sentences for two juvenile offenders would not be consistent with her beliefs and character. Furthermore, as a feminist who had with other women “established Mujeres de La Raza Unida, a women’s caucus within the party that advocated for the recruitment of women as members” (Dreeze), Cotera responded with a feminist consciousness to her son’s murder. Rather than demanding eye-for-an-eye patriarchal retribution, Cotera as a feminist focused on both healing her family and preventing other African American teenagers from resorting to despair and nihilism. Cotera’s critique of white feminism, in fact, concerned white women’s relative passivity and vulnerability—their lack of “activist experience,” lower levels of “labor participation,” and less “experience with community involvement” (Kira Schwarz). Whereas Bernard Shaw, the 1988 Presidential debate moderator,

thought of Kitty Dukakis primarily as a potential victim needing her husband’s protection, Martha Cotera viewed herself and other women as empowered to restore justice and promote healing.

Neither Martha nor Juan Cotera desired the execution of their son’s killers in order to achieve closure or peace. Rather than closure, they sought an opening to a more just, more equal, more hopeful future. Wrestling with their sorrow and personal torment, they knew that sparing the lives of their son’s killers could open that door.

Works cited can be accessed through [lavoz@esperanzacenter.org](mailto:lavoz@esperanzacenter.org)

BIO: *Rachel Jennings teaches English at San Antonio College and is active with the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP). Her wish is to see the end of the death penalty in Texas and the U.S. She is also a board member of the Esperanza.*

## 2023 Poet Laureate, Nephtali De León



*Felicidades to Nephtali De León, San Antonio’s new poet laureate thru March 31, 2026. A recognized author, educator and cultural warrior he is also a longtime Chicano activist who wrote several poems commemorating the recent 50th reunion of Raza Unida in 2022 in Austin, TX.*

### Raza Unida Women

they’re cool, contained,  
smart, sophisticated brains,  
gracious, but no nonsense,  
not with a chip or an edge,  
but don’t you mess  
in their bounds  
or you’ll get trounced

at the anniversary  
of Raza Unida  
50 years más tarde,  
they were tired,  
some were snappy,  
volunteers  
at unseen labor  
months of detailing amends  
candle burning at both ends

dog tired women,  
un-tattered and un-frayed,  
regal, warrior leaders,  
majestic, no dismay

Chicana Angels de la Raza  
strong un-frail women  
made of steel  
not fierro but acero  
enough to hold the sky  
and all cloud nines  
donde la Raza dreams...



Juan and Martha Cotera, founders of the Raza Unida Party, pictured in 1970 packing up for Crystal City.

they almost kicked  
me in the teeth --  
hyperbole ! ha ha,  
when I interrupted  
and I asked  
if I could celebrate  
La Raza with a poem

but they agreed  
and I read my poem  
to the attendees  
and the women,  
bless their soul,  
asked me for a copy  
so they could post it  
on the Raza Unida  
website

—Nephtali De León



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