

JAMES W. FOLEY

# Zapata Vive, La Lucha Sigue<sup>1</sup>

BILLY WAS HUDDLED like a wounded animal, one of his legs dangling loosely in the wrong direction, his Nikes shredded to a pulp of leather and blood. The uniforms started sweeping back the crowd that had gathered around his body. The crowd pushed back and then surged forward like the tide, coming stronger now as neighborhood crews mixed with older residents. I think I saw Francisco's and Shorty's faces somewhere in the heat, before the chant started. I don't know who started it, maybe old Padre Winito, who I saw in the thick of things, carrying a half-chopped baseball bat till one of the cops took it away.

"*Aquí estamos y no nos vamos. Aquí estamos y no nos vamos*"—the shouting beginning with the women's voices and carrying to the men's.

An older woman in curlers stepped out, raised her hand, and spat her lines straight into the backs of uniforms doing their best to hurry the handcuffed men away from the crushed van and into the police cars. From up on Adobe, an ambulance siren pierced through the voices, the police sirens leaving and ambulance sirens coming now, mixing with chants from the crowd. Two EMTs got out of the ambulance and approached Billy carrying a stretcher. Eddie crouched like a guard dog, not letting go of Billy's arm until they nudged him aside. When I turned around Patricia was gone. I walked back to the car, the disgust in my stomach mixing with another feeling—how could men come into a neighborhood and capture and handcuff other men because these men didn't have the right papers, the right words? Billy was dead, or half dead, I didn't know.

TODAY I WOKE UP DIFFERENT. I felt like I had crawled out of a cornfield, my throat crying for water. The sun was streaming through the

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blinds. I drank a lot of coffee before class. In my mind I was going to do something, something big. At school I got out notecards and started writing on them, front and back without thinking. By the time the bell rang, I'd drunk so much coffee it felt like my veins had gone brown.

They sat at their desks, shouting out names, disagreeing on who had been taken—so and so's cousin, or her best friend's tía, Mrs. Rodríguez. Not Xavier's mother, someone else's. I didn't say anything. I walked to the front of the class with my notecards.

"Hey, hey, ho, ho," I shouted. They all stopped.

I started reading from the first card. "I'm a white boy. I'm not from de Vaca. I don't speak Spanish. I don't know how to teach. I don't care about your problems. I am here today. And I have been here for the past three months."

"Yeah, no kidding," someone said.

"Mr. Foley's had too much coffee," Mario said.

"Yes, yes, you were right all along. I'm a white boy. I never told you where I'm from. I'm from New Hampshire. I've been hiding behind school shirts. I grew up with a loving mother and a supportive father. I went to a nice high school. I didn't know any Mexicans or blacks; I didn't know anything about them except that I saw them on TV being criminals. I came here because I thought you all needed help. But I've learned I can't help you. Most days I come to class afraid."

"Yeah, huh," Benny said. "You don't know anything about us and we don't know anything about you."

Patricia stood up. "So what are you going to say about what happened yesterday? They can't just go in there and take people away 'cause they look Mexican!"

"That's right," I said. "There are plenty of U.S. citizens who look Mexican. It could have been any of you, or even your parents."

"But they only took the wetbacks."

"Wetbacks? They only took the wetbacks, Xavier? Since they only took the wetbacks, we shouldn't care, right?"

"Because what if you weren't a citizen?" Susana said.

"If I'm a citizen, it didn't happen to me. I don't care," I answered.

"But what if the rules changed?" Mario said. "What if they said they were taking everybody back as long as you weren't born here?"

"Exactly, Mario. Then almost all of you would be gone," I said. "It would just be me with some white kids. And how many white kids are there at this school, about two?"

They were sitting up in their seats. Xavier kept raising his hand. Patricia was turned from her cubicle toward the rest of the class. Then Anton and Francisco walked in late, with jack-o'-lantern-sized grins. They sat at opposite ends of the class, leaning back in their chairs; they kept looking at each other and then bent over laughing. They were both stoned. The rest of the class started to feel like self-conscious schoolkids.

"Listen up, you all," Francisco said, his eyes half closed, standing up and pounding his fist into his hand. "What we need is a revolution, a revolution. Lock up all the white people and send them on the Migra bus back to Canada."

Everyone laughed.

"Let's do it," I said.

"Yeah, send your ass back to Canada, Foley."

"Yeah, but first put up. Let's do the revolution. Right here."

"You ain't leading no revolution, Foley. You're a buster; you're on the Migra's side. Yeah, I saw you, Foley. Just watching while Billy went out like a real motherfucker."

I didn't try to come back at him. I let the words sink in like teeth. I let them stare at me and didn't say anything. At recess, I rifled through Francisco's and Anton's desks and coat pockets. In the oversized jean jacket slumped over Anton's chair, I found a rolled baggie. In the baggie were some loose buds and what was left of a half-smoked joint. I took the baggie and put it in my desk drawer. I went outside and grabbed Susana and told her to run up and tell Anton that Foley had found something in his pockets. Back inside, I could hear Francisco and Anton coming, Francisco yelling about how no one was going to say shit about him smoking on school grounds. I turned off the lights. When they came in, I grabbed both of them by the biceps. They flinched.

"Listen up. You two brought drugs into my class. You bring drugs in, you shitheads go in the closet."

"Fuck, Foley, you can't do this, grabbing us and shit."

"Yeah, we know that the Guada got you last time you grabbed Anton."

"Fuck that. You want me to show her that little baggie in your pocket? You know la Guada will kick you two out of school. Get in the closet, both of you."

They put on stiff faces, but they were freaked about what I was going to do next. I opened the closet door. They stepped in and I locked it.

"What the fuck, Foley," Francisco's voice said from behind the door. "You're going to get fired for this shit. This is wack. This is prison shit."

“Listen up,” I said into the door. “I’m talking now. We’re going to do something. And you two are going to lead it. You two are going to act like leaders or you’re getting kicked out of this school. You get it?” They didn’t say anything.

After that I ran to the art room and got three different shades of brown construction paper and two bottles of rubber cement. I ran back to my room and began cutting. Making a brown paper cone for my head, I cut out two horns and rubber-cemented them to either side of the paper cone. I cut out some brown splotches and taped the paper skins to my body. I went over to the portable CD player, put on the Geto Boys, and turned it up loud. I opened the door and got in the closet with them.

“Foley, what the fuck. We ain’t gay, Foley.”

“Shut up,” I said. “When I bust out of here, you two follow. Play along like I’m a crazy man, but I know what I’m doing. I’m going to be dressed like a cow. Make sure they all listen.”

Over the thump of bass, I could hear the class shuffling in. I put on my horns, threw open the door to the closet, and marched through the desks, shouting from the notecards.

“Listen up. Listen up. I am not alone. I am not alone. I am Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *el conquistador* from the Old World, *España*. I am wrecked on your shores. I got rotten shoes; my armor is rusted; my gunpowder is wet; my sword is lost. My blue eyes can’t stand the sun; my hair comes out in clumps. I slog through the thicket and wade swamps; the deer and small animals scatter from my path. Dark eyes peer at me through feathers. I see the distant fires crackling in the night. I run. I have lost my fire and I have lost my gun.”

They look at me like I’d gone as wacked as Padre Winito caught in a D.T. shake. I ran between the narrow rows of desks, flapping my arms with the brown splotches taped down the sides to look like cow spots. I got up on my teacher’s desk and shouted.

“I am Cabeza de Vaca. Who is with me?”

Susana raised her hand, “Foley, what are you talking about?”

“Not Foley. Núñez Cabeza de Vaca.”

“Fuck yeah,” Francisco said, the smell of weed rising from the closet, his eyes refried on supplies kept in their pockets. “Cabeza de Vaca. Big ass cow head.”

I ran off my desk and grabbed Francisco, and the class flinched like I was going to flip. Francisco was too stoned to react. I knelt down in front of him, and raised my arms wide.

“Give me your women,” I shouted. I sprinted across the room to Anton, trying to exit, and got in front of him, shouting, “Shoot me with your arrows.” I grabbed Patricia by her hands and begged, “Give me your fire!”

I raised my hands to the fluorescent lights, the spittle dried on the side of my face. No one said a word. I jumped back on my desk and pointed to Francisco. Francisco strutted down the rows and started grabbing the sides of desks, shaking them to the beat, the books rattling out between their pinned knees. Patricia got on top of her cubicle and started chanting.

*“Aquí estamos y no nos vamos. Aquí estamos y no nos vamos.”*

Anton started throwing pieces of chalk.

“We are on a tremendous journey, a journey from God,” I yelled. “On the back science table you will find a blank piece of oak tag, taped to a yardstick. One person from your group will take one of those with the pack of markers next to it. Bring it back to your group; on one side write, ‘*Aquí Estamos y No Nos Vamos*’ and on the other write in English, ‘Stop the Violation, Free the Population.’”

Mario raised his hand. “Foley, that’s not what it means in Spanish.”

“Whatever. We need something that rhymes in both languages.”

“Who’s going to see this?”

“First we’re going to march around the pond. Then when all the classes and all the teachers have seen us, we’re going to march to the deVaca park.”

“Is it going to be illegal?” Mario asked.

“Not unless our First Amendment is illegal.”

“So it’s not even a little illegal?” Patricia said.

“The other teachers won’t like it, but if they’re not going to like it, we have to make a lot of noise. We have to march and be serious and keep our signs straight and decide what we’re going to say before we get out there.”

“And none of you better be pussies,” Francisco said.

They scurried to the science table for supplies and back to their groups. Their backs hunched over squeaking markers while the two fried spirits of Cabeza de Vaca looked on.

After ten minutes I called them up. “Rise, rise to your feet!” I said.

Even Mario and Susana jumped out of their desks. Xavier knocked his over and candy bar wrappers went flying.

PATRICIA HAD TAPED her stuffed toy Clio to the top of the stick so that she looked like a dirty bunny on a pike. They filed out quietly into the baked afternoon. Their signs were crudely written and poorly carried. Francisco ran to the front, knocking their backs straight and into single

file. He stood on a rock in front of Guadalupe's fish pond and started pulling shoulders by him like he was operating a turnstile. Anton started pushing like a pudgy bulldozer from the back. Mario tripped over Benny.

"Patricia," I said.

Patricia started shouting, "*¡Zapata Vive, Vive!*"

Marisela's clique, not to be outdone, shouted, "*La Lucha Sigue, Sigue.*"

Patricia's clique, then Marisela's, back and forth: the girls' voices scratched at each other until they could be heard all the way to the cafeteria.

With the girls shouting and the gangsters pushing, the whole line began single-filing around the gate of Guadalupe's fish pond. A class going out to music slowed, another sweaty from recess stopped. Faces ran to classroom windows to see what all the noise was about: teenage bullshit, organized into chanting and steps. Teachers came outside, their wrinkled expressions blinking in the sun. Mrs. Wilson recognized me under the paper horns and I waved. Everything was under control. As they marched, sweat popped on their soft faces and the voices started to slow into a meditative, deeper chant, "*Aquí estamos y no nos vamos. Aquí estamos y no nos vamos,*" until the sun started to bleach their voices.

I stood under the big creosote tree and watched the machine go. Francisco stepped over the fence and got up on the big rock next to the pond. He raised his arms and—before I could react—threw himself into a perfect cannonball, landing dead center in the green water. Algae splattered over the rock side; the white and orange scales flew back and forth across their scummy pool in a panic. The march stopped. We stood, appalled, as Francisco, his feet touching the slimy bottom, pretended to doggy-paddle over to the rocks. I ran quickly and pulled his arm out; Francisco tugged back. For some reason, the magic left their bodies when Francisco plunged. Marisela whipped her sign into the pond. The yardstick made a boomerang into the water. Then they all started boomeranging their signs, the oak-tag sails arching and crashing down on each other, the water becoming a floating armada of soaking oak tag and running ink. Mrs. Wilson pushed through the crowd, yelling for the kids to pick them out. Francisco offered to help and disappeared underwater. I pointed toward the far gate, toward de Vaca Park.

"*Vámonos,*" I said.

Then the afternoon bell rang, and they scattered in all directions.