

For Texas and Chile, an Axis of Anti-Poetry

Dave Oliphant

Sep 22, 2006, 12:00 am CST



Diana Melendez, Karen Villareal, and Nicanor Parra

photo by Alvaro Corral

Forty-one years ago, in July 1965, I made my first trip to Chile, as part of an exchange program suggested by Vice President Richard Nixon after his car was stoned in Venezuela in 1958. This State Department-sponsored program matched universities in South America with U.S. universities to create good will and better mutual understanding. But after a couple of years, only the exchange between the University of Chile and the University of Texas at Austin continued, lasting from 1959 to 1968.

Before leaving on what would prove a life-changing adventure, I flew with our group of 15 students to Washington, D.C., to be briefed on political issues, perhaps the hottest among them being the recent U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic. Most of our group was made up of “student leaders,” like Kaye Northcott, editor of *The Daily Texan* [later editor of the *Observer*], and Ricardo Romo, the University of Texas track star who is now President of UT-San Antonio. In previous years, Carole “Grandma” Keeton Strayhorn and Lloyd Doggett had participated in this same exchange program. I had been the editor of *Riata*, the UT student literary magazine, and was probably chosen partly because a few years earlier Oscar Hahn, now considered one of Chile’s leading poets, had come to Texas in the program. My role was basically to demonstrate that Texans, too, were “into” poetry, including the poetry of Chile.



Supp
indep
invest
jour
in T

Bec
memb

LEAR

Supp
indep
voice
jour

