



The Butterfly Effect

Meet the Radical Monarchs, the next generation of young women working to change their communities and the world at large.

By Meg José Mateo
Photography by Gabriela Hasbun

Radical Healing. Radical Self-Love. Black Lives Matter. Radical Pride. These are just a few of the badges that adorn the vests of the Radical Monarchs. Made up of young women of color ages eight to fourteen, this girls' group moves beyond simple volunteerism, sewing crafts, and outdoor education—components typical of traditional girls' groups—to learn

about what it's like to really stand up for your community.

The idea for the group came about in early 2014 when Anayvette Martinez's daughter Lupita was in fourth grade. At the time, Lupita wanted to join her local Girl Scouts troop. But Anayvette didn't think it would speak to her daughter's experience, especially after hearing that the group was

not diverse. A community worker for local youth, Anayvette wanted something more for her daughter; something that connected to the socially conscious values of their family and centered on the experiences of young girls of color. Anayvette daydreamed about what a troop like that might look like, and even what types of badges they might get. It sent her mind whirling. "I mentioned

Lupita Martinez,
Juliana Contreras &
Sabina Contreras

Namixtulu
Esteva



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the idea to my daughter, and she was really into it,” Anayvette says. “My life was busy and months went by, but Lupita never forgot. I told my friend Marilyn Hollinquest about it—and she thought it was an amazing idea.” Marilyn, a middle school teacher and community advocate, and Anayvette got to work. In December of that year, Radical Brownies (the group’s initial name) was born. The first troop began with Lupita and her friends, but grew to include more girls from the Oakland community.

The news of the group made instant headlines—“Badges for Badasses”—and spurred Fox News host Sean Hannity to surmise, “We think the girls are being exploited.” While Radical Monarchs provides an alternative to the Girl Scouts, it’s not as if they were the first to create such an option. Multiple girls’ groups with badge-filled vests exist—from Camp Fire and Frontier Girls to American Heritage Girls, which has a conservative Christian focus—but no one has attempted what Radical Monarchs are going for: a girls’ group with a social justice foundation focusing on issues that affect young women of color.

“There’s a lot of rampant injustice happening. We have to teach young people how to be advocates and allies in order to be in community with each other and achieve social justice,” states Marilyn. For the group, Anayvette and Marilyn generate curriculum related to timely issues in the national conversation and what’s going on in the girls’ lives, as well as anything the girls want to work on. They set each unit to last about three months, with the culmination of their learning manifesting in an activity or a project like screen-printing posters

(for their “Radical Roots” unit) or making flower essence sprays and herbal first-aid kits (for their “Radical Healing” unit).

In many ways, the cofounders are creating an experience and a sisterhood that they wish they had had themselves at that age. “I made these types of connections, but much later in life,” says Anayvette. “What would it look like for an eight-, nine-, or ten-year-old to make those types connections now rather than waiting until college?”

Born in San Francisco, Anayvette, thirty-four, is of Central American descent. Her father emigrated from El Salvador in the early 1970s, and her mother is a first-generation Nicaraguan American, the first in her family to be born in the States. “My mother was born in San Francisco and was actually in the Girl Scouts in the 1950s. She was the only person of color in the group,” Anayvette recalls. “I can only imagine how it was for her back then.”

Anayvette and her family moved around the city’s neighborhoods—Sunset, Excelsior, Mission—all throughout the eighties and early nineties, their living situation constantly threatened by spreading gentrification. When Anayvette was in the seventh grade, the dot-com bubble burst; her parents lost their jobs and decided to move to Miami. She returned to California for college, graduating from UCLA, where she majored in Chicano studies and minored in women’s studies. At San Francisco State University (SFSU), she completed a master’s in ethnic studies in 2007.

While at SFSU, she met Marilyn, who was in the same program. “Marilyn and I instantly connected. We shared identities as queer women of color, passionate values

rooted in social justice, and even a birthday!” Anayvette remembers.

Radical Monarchs cofounder Marilyn Hollinquest, thirty-eight, hails from California’s Central Valley. She grew up in Tulare, but was born in Hanford, a rural farming town where generations of her parents’ families had lived since the Great Migration. The oldest of five siblings, Marilyn was raised in a single-parent household after she lost her father. When she was in fourth grade, her family moved to Sacramento because her mother wanted more job opportunities beyond the limited agricultural and retail offerings in Tulare.

In Sacramento, her mom was able to get certificates to serve in various medical capacities, including working in a nursing home and doing medical billing and coding. She often worked multiple jobs. Watching her mother, Marilyn struggled to understand the inequalities they experienced. “I saw how hard my mother worked, how much overtime she put in,” she says. “I would see other people’s parents, and they seemed to be able to be around more and work less and have more money. People would say, ‘Work hard,’ but my mom *was* working hard and her ends weren’t meeting. I wondered why that was happening.” It was these types of experiences and questions growing up that led Marilyn to pursue a degree in community studies at UC Santa Cruz and a master’s in ethnic studies from SFSU.

During its first three years, Radical Monarchs remained a side project and difficult to juggle for both Anayvette and Marilyn. In July 2017, Anayvette was laid off from her day job. “The layoff was very

Scaru Esteva
& Amia
Ramanathan



Marilyn
Hollinquest
(Cofounder)



Xander
Asamamlay
(Marilyn's
husband)



Amia Ramanathan,
Namixtulu Esteva,
Lupita Martínez &
Neveah Kelly

unexpected,” she says. “But I took it as a sign from the universe, because I wanted to do Radical Monarchs full-time.” Things began wondrously falling into place soon thereafter: In November, the Radical Monarchs received a grant that budgeted for the duo to work on Radical Monarchs full-time. With that, they took on specific titles: Anayvette as CEO of programs and communications and Marilyn as CEO of finance and operations.

In June 2018, inaugural Troop #1 graduated, ending their year with a “Radical Media” unit in which each girl had the choice to make a short film, zine, or podcast for their final project. The big event included keynotes by Alicia Garza, a cofounder of Black Lives Matter, and Isa Noyola, a national translatina activist. Looking back over the past three years, Anayvette and Marilyn recognize the girls’ transformation. “We saw them develop and flourish, rooted in who they are and in their voices and being advocates for themselves and their community,” Anayvette says. “But we didn’t make them fierce. They came in as fierce girls already.” **gc**



