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2018 NACCS Scholar Award Speech

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2018 NACCS Scholar Award Speech

Rosaura Sánchez

Buenas Tardes. It's a real honor to be recognized, especially by one's own and I'd particularly like to thank Julia Curry and Angie Chabram for their kind words as well as other former students, like Clara Lomas, Rosalinda Fregoso, Demian Pritchard, and Lauro Flores for nominating me, all of whom, I might add, also deserve to be recognized with this award. I also wish to thank June Pedraza and Kathryn Blackmer for this nomination. I am truly honored.

We stand on the shoulders of the many that have come before us. As I thought of this day I considered mentioning others who also deserve to be recognized and when Julia sent me the list of 41 former NACCS Scholars I found that just about everyone I knew was already on the list. I then looked to see who wasn't on the list that I would propose for future recognition. All are scholars, writers, and teachers who have made substantive and sustained contributions to our field and the list is ever-growing.

María Herrera Sobek of UC Santa Barbara

José Limón formerly of UT Austin and Notre Dame

Helena María Viramontes of Cornell University

Juan Rodríguez formerly of Texas Luther College

Mario García of UC Santa Barbara

David Montejano of UC Berkeley

David Gutiérrez of UC San Diego

Nick Kanellos, our Chicano-riqueño from the University of Houston

Marta Sánchez formerly of UC San Diego and Arizona State

Manuel Hernández of Arizona State

Marcial González of UC Berkeley

Deena González of Loyola Marymount University

Emma Pérez of University of Colorado, Boulder and University of Arizona

Denise Segura of UC Santa Barbara

Adelaida del Castillo of San Diego State

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo of UCLA

Ben Olguín of UC Santa Barbara

I am doubtless leaving out many names of senior and not so senior colleagues. There are of course many more to come

When I first started teaching at UCSD in the 1970s, there were few of us in Chicano/a related fields. While it might seem unbelievable to you “youngsters,” Chicano Studies courses did not exist in universities, at least none that I knew about, and those of us entering the field had, for the most part, studied something else, especially Latin American and Peninsular literature or U.S. and Latin American history. There were no Chicano scholarly journals to speak of; libraries had made little or no space for our work, whether academic or creative. Today, of course, there are close to 60 million Latinos/as in this country and Chicano/a and Latino/a courses are available throughout the Southwest in colleges and universities and even in the Midwest and Northeast. There are now hundreds, if not thousands, of us in Chicano/a fields.

The landscape has shifted significantly. And yet, ...and yet... according to statistics shared by Alvaro Huerta, only 7% of UC tenured faculty are Latino/a; only 10% in California State Colleges are Latino/a tenured faculty; and only 15% of tenured faculty in Community Colleges are Latino/a. When one considers that Latinos/as are the largest ethnic population in the state of California, with 39% of the population (or 15 million), then it is evident that we are not doing very well.

I am hopeful that these statistics will improve in the near future, as we will by the end of this century be the largest ethnic population in this country. But what will it mean? According to the PEW Research Center,ⁱ by the 4th or 5th generation only half of U.S. adults with “Hispanic” ancestry identify as Latino. It should be clear then to us all that new immigrants are crucial to sustaining our identity. Otherwise it could well be that in 100 years ethnic identity as Chicanos/as will no longer be relevant, except perhaps as some type of perfunctory holiday, as it is today for those who celebrate St. Patrick’s day by wearing green.

But clearly there are other structural factors that will ensure that we will continue to identify as Chicanos and Chicanas, and those are issues of class, barrio residence, racism, and poverty. Unless there is a total change in the economic and political structure of this country, these factors will continue to be relevant and will sustain some type of Chicano/a or Latino/a identity. It is the ever more globalized capitalist system that dispossesses workers in the south that will guarantee their continued migration north. I think there will always be first and second generation Chicanos/as in this country, at least during this century, and for them, as it was for my generation, identity as a Chicana/o or Latina/o will continue to be defining and a site of contestation.

Chicano/a Studies has taken many turns and adapted itself to changing issues, but it has always been tied to social movements and activism. My hope and expectation is that it will continue to do so. As it has become institutionalized it has become more “professional” and conservative, and survival as a university entity has become a dominant issue, but during times of crises at home and abroad, it has also come through and supported our causes and those of others. Today we support our Native American brothers and sisters that continue to be displaced and dispossessed as well as subject to fracking and the contamination of their water supplies through mining. We stand with our Black brothers and sisters that, like Chicanos and Chicanas, suffer police brutality and harassment. The police killing of young black men is almost a monthly occurrence in this country; it is something that cannot continue. We are now living under an administration that blatantly favors the rich, opposes women’s right to choose, discriminates against Moslems and gays, opposes gun control, and is willing to discriminate against our undocumented brothers and sisters. And here again, Chicanos and Chicanas have shown their support to all DACA students and others as well, both students and adults, who have to live in fear of being deported. We are here also to lend our support to the Palestinian people who face dispossession and military aggression from Israeli settlers and military forces on a daily basis. I am proud to know that NACCS has supported the BDS movement.

At its best, Chicano Studies has both an educational and political mission; this twofold mission and commitment is something that we all must support if we are to continue to have relevance both within and without the academy. And there are so many issues that affect us all, including the disproportionate incarceration of Black and Brown men and women.

In California we just marked the 50th anniversary of the LA student walkouts. This anniversary comes at a time when youth across the nation have walked out to protest the sale of guns, powerful military weapons that are used to murder youth and adults alike. This is one more protest that we need to support.

I certainly could have used the support of a Chicano Studies scaffolding when I was coming up the ranks. As a senior faculty member I can say that getting tenure at UCSD was not easy. In my time mentors were few and far between, especially if one was not aiming to please or was not a “monedita de oro” que le cayera bien a todos. Chicano literature, linguistics, and history were not considered legitimate fields of study in many university departments. Getting published was problematic then too. Things have changed somewhat in the last three decades, although today ironically publishing in Latino/a – Chicano/a venues is still difficult if one is not writing trendy and sexy things, especially articles dealing with sexuality, or politically “in vogue.”

I however continue to see Chicano Studies as a field in which one can write and lecture against the grain. And isn't that what it's all about? Saying and writing what is not "in," what challenges dominant opinion, what has not been said, what has been erased, that is what we are here for. It is in that contestatory site that we need to continue to make our mark, aunque disguste; otherwise our work will just be another line on some academic CV.

I have been fortunate that despite going against dominant opinion, even within Chicano/a Studies, I have been able to work in a number of different areas: I've done critical work in linguistics and literature, in theory, and creative writing.

And I've learned, in the process, to think outside the individualist box. In the 1980s as I read the work of scholars and students at the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, I came to admire how they did research collectively and wrote theoretical papers collectively and I wished we could do the same in my graduate seminars, but requirements always have been set up for student production on an individualist level, despite all knowledge being collective at bottom. In the last three decades, however, I have discovered that researching and writing with others allows for better work as two heads are always better than one. Even creative writing can be done collectively. I am fortunate in having been able to work together with several generations of graduate students and more recently jointly with Beatrice Pita on a number of projects. We are now finishing a project on enclosures in Texas and New Mexico and we have a second science fiction novel in the works, to be finished when we have more time.

In closing, let me just say that in all that I have done, I have always written for Chicanos/as – Latinos/as. I do not write for the mainstream. Others have and will no doubt continue to do that. Being recognized here in this venue, *en casa como quien dice*, by Chicanos/as is thus a special honor for me as you are my intended readers. Writing is and has always been an important part of my life. Above all things, however, I think I am *a teacher* and preparing others to continue this scholarly and political work has been my greatest accomplishment. Thank you, *de todo corazón*, for this honor.

ⁱ PEW Research Center, "Hispanic Identity Fades Across Generations as Immigrant Connections Fall Away" (1/26/18).