



CHANGES IN THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT WORLD: EARLY SUCCESSES

EDUCATION:

Ricardo Valencia

The struggle to have a curriculum that includes people of color, the working class, women and LGBTIQQ Community has existed since these lands were stolen to become the United States.

Ethnic Studies focuses on the history and culture of the marginalized, especially concerning Black, Latino, Asian and Native Americans. Many of us from these groups have ancestors that have been on these lands as long --or longer-- than many white Americans. Yet, we are the ones treated like foreigners. Some of us didn't cross the border, the border crossed us.

Those with a colonized mentality insist that this curriculum is divisive because it "promotes the segregation of the races and teaches people they are oppressed," that "it is un-American". Discrimination is full of contradiction. If we truly know our history, we know that racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia are as American as apple pie. Those of us that want to fulfill the ideal that we are a nation "with liberty and justice for all" are called radicals for having the audacity to try to make those words a reality. When we march or demonstrate, it's called a riot. When my white brothers and sisters do the same, they are called "patriots". I don't mind making people uncomfortable and frustrated as long as it's for the right reasons.

You are currently pretty much within eyeshot of the epicenter of the Ethnic Studies Movement, which took off right here at SF State. Our very own Ruth Goldman was part of the Third World Liberation Strike, which helped create the first, and still only College of Ethnic Studies in the country. The distinguished gentleman who introduced me is the Dean of the prestigious College. I am just one seed of the many fruits of that labor.

Progressives of all colors have a history of coming together. Folks like Ruth risked their jobs before they even got started. It is an honor for me and the New Leader Scholars to continue that struggle.

Prior to re-establishing Chicano/Latino Studies at my high school, doors were literally closed on me. I asked my colleagues if I could advertise the course for 5 minutes in their classes. Some said "no", including folks in my own Social Studies Department. Fortunately though, the majority said "yes". If I simply focused on all the "no's", I wouldn't be here with you sharing "early successes in the Not-For-Profit World".

Ethnic Studies is not just a curriculum; it is a mindset. Many of my colleagues do not trust me because I stand with students, parents, and community members that are putting pressure on my school to make it better and more relevant.

It hurts that even some of the few Latino teachers at my school, who I believed I might be able to connect with, think I am "too radical or too Chicano". Union representatives lobbied me saying that I would be "stepping on colleagues' toes" if I provided another elective class option. Still, I'd rather lose

a colleague or a friend than my dignity and integrity. Fortunately, allies of all colors help me keep my sanity and resolve. All the people in this room are just one example.

Chicano/Latino Studies has existed sporadically for over 25 years in my school. Unfortunately, it was allowed only once every few years and only one class at a school that is 90% Latino. Thanks to the advocacy from students, families and our community, my class has grown from 0 sections when I arrived 5 years ago to 4 sections last year. My students are choosing a college prep elective over many less rigorous choices. My student Elizabeth Jimenez states "...our school is mainly Latino, yet we know nothing of our history and Mr. Valencia encourages us to go to a university and tells us we can do it".

My goal is to further expand the course offerings at my school and to provide other schools in my district the same opportunity. From there, I hope to be part of a state and nationwide movement to empower all communities with the opportunity to learn who they are.

Cesar Chavez gave an address to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco on November 9th, 1984, and said, "Once social change begins it cannot be reversed, you cannot uneducated the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore."

I still get scared of the repercussions of my activism. Nonetheless, we owe it to our families, our ancestors and ourselves to continue. We are worthy of study, of learning about.

As Maggie Kuhn so eloquently declared "Leave safety behind. Put your body on the line, stand before the people you fear and speak your mind- even if your voice shakes... Someone may actually listen..."

We should all get the chance to study who we are and create our own future. Thank you.

HEALTH:

Haleh Badkoobehi

My name is Haleh Badkoobehi. My parents are Iranian. They were studying abroad in the United States when the Iranian hostage crisis and Islamic Revolution began. My parents were unable to return to Iran. I was born in the United States a few years later. I grew up in a safe, free country, while my cousins grew up under the Islamic Regime, during the Iran-Iraq war. At a young age, I learned about the ugly truths of Sharia law, war and terror. It profoundly affected me. I felt guilty about my freedom. About my safety. About my opportunity. From a very young age, I wanted to right wrongs, to make things fairer for people less fortunate than myself.

Thirteen years ago, when I was a junior at UC Berkeley, I applied to the New Leadership Scholarship. I told The Goldmans and other interviewers about my dreams. I wanted to change the world for children in dire circumstances. They invested in me and they mentored me for over a decade.

When I got the scholarship, I was putting myself through college. My major was Molecular and Systems Neuroscience. At the time, I did research in neuronal signaling. I worked as a court appointed special advocate for children in the foster care system. I mentored foster children and advocated for their needs in court. I later established an art therapy program at a women and children's transition home in Berkeley. I did a video documentary looking at social oppressors that kept them in the transitional center and unable to integrate into society. I recruited volunteers to help mothers with resumes, job applications and mock interviews.

After college, I traveled to Cambodia, and worked at Angkor Hospital for Children and at a Buddhist Commune for children in an integrative health and education program. I met children who lost limbs from unspent land mine ordinance. I saw these child amputees without prosthetics trying to survive. This really stuck with me.

I went to medical school at Albany Medical College and did research in HIV and Alzheimer's. I published multiple peer-reviewed articles by the end of medical school. After graduating, I pursued a MPH at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. Through Hopkins, I did research in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at HEAL Africa Hospital. I trained and mentored orthopaedic nurse trainees while studying war injuries sustained by children living between Rwanda and the Congo. I also traveled to Idjwi Island as a representative of HEAL Africa, and I wrote an investigative report to the World Bank regarding the high prevalence of deformity and still births on the island. I knew I wanted to continue this work and treat orthopaedic deformities and injuries in children; to give kids functional bodies that were taken from them by war and disease. So, I came back to the United States for more training.

I did an Orthopaedic Surgery Residency at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center. Today, I am a Pediatric Orthopaedic Surgery Fellow at Children's Hospital, Los Angeles. I love my work and continue to learn how to treat kids better every day.

Since I entered the NLS family, I've faced challenges. And I've had really happy times. Ruth and Bill have been with me through it all, consistently, for thirteen amazing years. I'm a dreamer as are all the other scholars here tonight. Something all of us commonly hear as we are starting out is, "you can't do that, that's ridiculously hard, nobody can change that, etc. etc." Essentially, "think smaller." You never

hear that from Ruth and Bill. They listen to your dreams, they understand them, and they help you achieve them. I love them for that.

This is what the New Leadership Scholarship is about. They believe in you when your dreams are just ideas. They see you through bad times and good. They are in it for the long term. They are flexible. They are so smart. I'm incredibly fortunate to have crossed paths with the NLS family. And can't wait to give back in the way you have all given to me. Thank you.

GOVERNMENT:

Tonia Bui

It's very fitting the New Leaders Scholarship community is across from San Francisco's city hall tonight. City Hall is a place that governs and serves the people. As New Leader Scholars, we also serve the people. So, I want to talk about improving our communities through government and political engagement.

Nearly 10 years ago, I bought a one-way ticket to Washington DC and left California with no job. I only had two essential things: my passion to serve underrepresented communities and my life savings.

Taking this leap of faith in myself led me to doors I never dreamed of walking through.

I've walked the halls of Congress, pushing for health care reform legislation.

I've built an outreach program for a brand new Federal government agency to ensure that victims of foreclosures are protected.

And I've also spent over a 100 hours in a car with a legislative candidate to visit constituents in conservative, anti-immigrant regions of Virginia – in hopes of electing the first Vietnamese American to the Virginia State Assembly.

These experiences addressing inequities in the nation's capital – and many others – could not have happened without the support of the New Leaders Scholarship.

Like many in this room, NLS encouraged me to go after my calling as a public servant when I was a student at UC Berkeley. As I reflect back, one theme emerges from my journey. In many places, I was the only Asian American woman in the room.

And my presence, me standing out - gave people mixed signals. I began noticing colleagues treated me as the token minority; they would pull into important meetings to demonstrate they supported diversity initiatives.

I became the go to person for policy issues related to Asian Americans, and I often found myself reminding policy makers to not ignore disadvantaged communities.

But on the political campaign trail, I found myself the only female (or person of color). My own campaign director was threatened by me. He told me he already knew how to do outreach and didn't need me because he assumed all Asian Americans were all "assimilated".

At the same time, my own community couldn't accept I was working in politics. There were countless times I was mistaken as the candidate's wife as we met with potential voters at campaign functions.

But I refrained calling out the ignorance that I experienced among my colleagues. I did not do what naturally came to me, which was to voice the injustice that I faced.

Why? Because I recognized that my presence making others uncomfortable was a good thing.

Having others challenge my right to be at the table was starting a dialogue that may not have been there before. My visibility brought to the surface negative stereotypes that had to be addressed.

The fact that I was there in a room, and being the only woman, Asian American, person of color - was an act of activism itself.

There was something powerful to be the one questioning, why are certain community groups left out of the policy discussions? Why is it that I have to give up a campaign manager position because when the voter base see me, and assume that the candidate would only advocate for only Asian Americans?

These are questions that I began raising, which brought me to help build the pipeline for other women of color to take on leadership positions in politics and government.

And I encourage my fellow NLS alumni and recent scholars to do the same. To raise questions of your own, and to think about where you are now, and your visibility when you are the only one advocating.

You may be outnumbered, but please do not see this as a disadvantage. The reality is you are agents of change, and you have the ability to shape the communities that we represent. Be present. Be visible.

Thank you everyone.