



**Remarks by Antonia Hernández
Latino Leaders Luncheon Series
Eagle Leadership Award**

November 12, 2020

Antonia Hernández: *Buenas tardes* to everybody. Thank you to Mickey Ibarra for this wonderful recognition. I know that I'm speaking to folks throughout the United States, but allow me to be local for a few minutes. I want to recognize the folks in this room. You know the Chairman's Award was given to Rich Ballatore. We go back probably 6 decades. We graduated from Garfield High School. His lovely wife Angie and I were in the drill team at Garfield High School.

I tutored the troublemaking Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa back in the late '60s and my best friend, Gloria Molina, who we've been friends for over four decades. It takes a village and whole bunch of other people to struggle together on behalf of our community. I'm so proud to be in a room with some of my closest, dearest friends.

Now to the larger community who is here and participating via virtual. I'm a Chicana. I am an immigrant. And the message I want to give to millennials is to embrace who you are.

The language that you speak is not a deficit but an asset. Embrace it and do not forget it. The culture, our culture, who we are, is what makes us unique and gives added value to the mix of what America is. This is our home. This is our land. For the millennials, the future is yours but you are walking on the footsteps of many who's struggled. Whether you're in corporate America, whether you're in politics, whether you're an advocate, step up to your purpose. Your purpose is to represent your community. Our community is not homogenous. Our community is diverse. There are the Maltecos, Salvadoreños, Argentina, Mexicanos. We're the same and yet we're different.

The one message I want to give to the rest of the audience, the rest of the world doesn't know the difference. And if you think that you are different, let me tell you after five decades of struggle they paint us with the same brush. But that's okay. We are Americans and we're going to put our imprint to this society as we have done in the past. It is our obligation to represent our community. It is not a onus. It is a privilege.

As an immigrant, this is my hood. I am standing in the neighborhood that I grew up in. In high school I worked at a store in Brooklyn and Saint Louis. In 1974 I started my legal career in Model City. It's three blocks away. On the first floor was the legal office for those in the art community. The

second floor was Sister Karen who started Self Help. It is those struggles that we have to take on the responsibility.

I have spent most of my life - well, with the exception of the last 17 years - fighting for political empowerment. But political empowerment is not enough. One lesson I have learned is that we have to have economic empowerment, good jobs, starting businesses, showing the way as a communal community. It's our family. I came from *Ahedo* [sounds like]. It's a *rancho*. It's my cousin from three degrees who I never met, who my mother said is *supremo*. Okay? It's our town. It's our hood. It is our obligation to make it better for everyone.

As Richard said, we are in a transitional period. The future of this country rests upon us. It's not what's good for the Latino community because what's good for the Latino community is good for the country. I leave you with this message. Don't make the mistake of the past. When we bring ourselves up from our bootstraps, we have to bring everybody else. It is our obligation. Thank you very much. It is a privilege to receive this award. Thank you.