



Latino Leaders Network
Presentation of the Eagle Leadership Award to
Anthony Rendon

November 17, 2022
The California Club
Los Angeles, California

Anthony Rendon: First of all, thank you, Mr. Mayor. It was 2003. I had three weeks vacation left at MAOF and I took all three to volunteer on your campaign. It was the best thing I did, and it was the smartest thing I did. Thank you for your leadership, your friendship, and your mentorship. You've been incredible. Thanks.

I want to thank Mickey. Long before I knew Mickey, I knew of Mickey, I knew of his incredible work. It's a testament to how old I am now that I first became aware of your work. Not on the last census, not on the census before that, but on the census even before that. Your leadership and commitment to our community is unparalleled. So thank you very much, Mickey, and thanks for this honor.

To Barbara, it's funny to share a stage with an artist. I always say I got into politics because I didn't have the artistic skill to match my love for the arts. My first job was two blocks away, at the Museum of Contemporary Art. I wrote my doctoral dissertation on early 20th Century avant-garde Dadaism and Surrealism. My honeymoon was in Zurich because I wanted to go to Cafe Voltaire where Dadaism began. My wife went, which is proof that she loves me, but to be with an artist -- I always say that politics in a democracy is about providing obviously leadership. It is. We know that. But within the context of a democracy, what we do in governments, what we do as politicians is to make sure that the will of the people is adhered. So we're not necessarily always at the vanguard. We're trying to make sure that we are, but we're trying to adhere to what society wants. Artists are not like that. Artists are way ahead of all of us. So thank you for being ahead of us. That means a lot to us.

And here goes my speech. Mickey dropped by the office about a month ago, and he asked me to receive this award. I said: What do you want me to talk about?

Oh, I should look at the clock. I got to get out of here too.

I said: What do you want me to talk about? He said: All I want you to talk about is your story. As someone who's

interested in the arts, as someone who's interested in storytelling, the first thing I thought of was which story do you tell. Right? There's a lot of stories. A lot of different aspects of me. A lot of, sort of different subjectivities.

Antonio talked about the kid who was in high school that had a 0.83 grade point average. He was, the polite phrase in the 1980s, academically disqualified from school. He started college at 20 at the community college. There's that story. There's that part of me. There is the academic who wanted to study early 20th Century avant-garde because he wanted to live in Zurich. He wanted to go off and study the most arcane and specific elements of something very minute to live quite intentionally a life that was to an extent insular and looking backward.

Then there was someone who fell in love with public service and worked for the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation in Plaza for about 20 years doing really childhood education and gang programs. Then the person who went on to run for office and to serve in elective office. Those are all stories. Those are all different aspects of me and they're all seemingly contradictory in a lot of ways. In a lot of ways, it doesn't seem like the same person who's lived through all of these things.

And when I think about our community, that's really what we're like. I often hear people say here's somebody who tells their story and they say that's the immigrant experience or that's the Latino experience. There's not a Latino experience. There's millions and millions and millions and millions of different types of stories. If we're living our lives meaningfully and with great intention, then we're conscious of those different places where we've come from, and we're conscious of the different people that we're in the room with. And right now, this is a damn good room. I could just about thank everybody in this room for the role that they played in my life.

When you think about the experiences of our community and Mickey says tell your story, again a million different stories. To go to El Salvador with my friend Wendy Carrillo, the first Salvadorian-American who ever served in the California Legislature, and to hear her story. We think we're a big deal when we become speaker, Antonio. I remember the president of El Salvador pushed me out of the way because he saw Wendy. He was like get out of my way. She's a celebrity. Her story is a distinct story, an important story, and a story that needs to be told.

So in thinking about the story that I would choose -- and I'm glad you mentioned TELACU because I was telling Michael

today. I've been awake since 1:00 in the morning. I have a three-year-old. She had a tough night. Then I had to go join the striking workers at Starbucks at 6:00. So by the time she fell asleep I looked at my clock and I thought, if I fall asleep now, I'm going to sleep for two hours. This isn't very helpful.

So this morning I watched the sunrise. I remember a very distinct story that I think helps to sum up my life and our community. I saw the sunrise. It was the first week of October in 2019. Shortly before COVID. And our daughter was born on September 16th, Independence Day. Our daughter was born on September 16th, and my wife and I had this sort of alternating thing. Like you get up and feed her. Then we go back and forth. Right? And 24 days after my daughter was born, my brother-in-law John was released from San Quentin. He'd been incarcerated for 17 years, and he got out 24 days after my daughter was born.

Of course, my mom wanted to be with the baby in the house. Then Annie's mom wanted to be with the baby in the house. Then we decided that we would take John in because he'd been incarcerated for 17 years. I'm a guy who lived alone for 26 years of his life. Now I'm living in a house with a baby, two grandmothers, my brother-in-law, and my wife. I'm just like, ugh, I'm freaking out.

I remember we used to call it the alarm going off. The alarm was the baby. So the baby starts crying. I get up and I go into the kitchen. You know there are seven people in the house. I go into the kitchen. I'm tip toeing. I have the baby in my hands. I'm trying to get the baby away from my wife, so she could sleep. I go into the refrigerator to get food for the baby. I look up and my mom is on one side and my mother-in-law is on the other. My mom, a very tough Latina woman. My mother-in-law, a very tough Vietnamese woman.

I'm opening the fridge and they say what are you doing in a bunch of different accents. What are you doing? And I say -- well, I'm kind of embarrassed. I'm like I'm getting out the breast pump container. And they looked at me like a pathetic hipster. Like, you know, what's a breast pump container? And I'm like, well, we read about it on the Internet. And they started telling me their advice, what you should be doing, this and that.

Then all of a sudden, we hear this: Ahem. Remember six people or seven people live in the house. We don't have that many bedrooms. So my brother-in-law was sleeping in the living room right off the kitchen. If you've been to my house -- you're all invited after. If you've been to my house, the kitchen feeds into the living room. My brother-in-law was sleeping on the sofa. Then we see him and then my wife comes

out. Now it's 3:00 in the morning and there's seven people awake in the middle of the living room.

I poured myself some bourbon. I had bourbon on one hand and breast pumped milk in the other. It's like a new hipster cocktail. And we all sat down. All seven of us or six-and-a-half, we all sat down. I remember my brother-in-law looking out the window and then saying -- you can't see the sunrise because of the way the cells are oriented. And he said it was his first sunrise in 17 years.

I remember my mother-in-law talking about what it meant to have him out of prison, and I remember my mom talking about what it meant to have her granddaughter. It's 3:00 in the morning and we're having this conversation, and I'm really sleepy. But I recognized then how meaningful it was to hear my brother-in-law talking about his 17 years, to hear my mother-in-law talk about stepping over human corpses to get on a boat to get out of Vietnam, to hear my mom talk about her stories about my journey and how I ended up here.

For me, that moment was this really sort of special moment where all of our stories kind of combined. That's what's in this room today. The best of us as a city is when we have those moments, those shared moments together, and we tell those stories. And I remember my mom -- the sun was rising. My brother-in-law said it's really beautiful. My mom said: Yeah,

it's very beautiful, but there's also something very sad about a sunrise.

I remember her saying that and I think that's the reality when Mayor Villaraigosa talks about too much poverty, when Mayor Villaraigosa talks about the fact that we're paying too high in terms of rent, when we talk about homelessness. For us to be in a beautiful ornate room celebrating one another is wonderful, but we can't forget the sadness. In every sunrise there is tremendous hope, tremendous potential, but a tremendous need to do good. Over the course of my ten years in the legislature I think we've done good. There's a lot more work to do.

And when Karen Bass walked in, as a father of a three-year-old daughter, I thought this is another beautiful sunrise. This is another beautiful opportunity to make something meaningful of this day. But ultimately that's up to us, right? Every single day, it's ultimately up to us to make something of it.

So I want to thank you for this honor. I want to thank all of you for what you mean in my life and what you mean to our state. But we have work to do. We have work to do to help one another. We have work to do to help our new mayor. So let's do it. Thank you.