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INTRODUCTION

JUDGE MARIA SALAS-MENDOZA

Professor Montoya, Editors of the *Chicana/o-Latina/o Law Review*, thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to share a few words with you. I am so sorry that I was not able to attend, but I would have loved to celebrate alongside with you. I did want to say hello and to thank you, Professor Montoya, not just for this article, but also for all of your work. I believe that the last time I saw you was at a seminar on pipeline efforts, that is, efforts to address the lack of brown and black students finishing high school, getting through college, and making it to graduate school. We were addressing the pipeline issue as it relates to law school, but this problem, in fact, includes all postgraduate programs where we continue to struggle with representation. So, not only did I want to say thank you for your *Máscaras* article and your voice, but also for all that you've done, and continue to do, to try to help Latino students become lawyers and educators. I know, at the very least, you inspired one Latina to become a judge.

I wanted to share with you all my experience with the publication of the *Máscaras* article, which was an amazing experience. As you all know the article was published concurrently in the *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender*. I remember that after receiving Professor Montoya's submission, we at CLLR learned that Harvard had also accepted it. Of course, she did not want to pull it from us, and so the *Harvard Journal* agreed to a dual submission so long as *they* could edit. We, especially me, thought the article to be perfect without need of editing. We within CLLR struggled with the notion that the Harvard Journal was editing it to be "mainstream."¹ I remember at the time we were having conversations about what the *Chicana/o-Latina/o Law Review* should be publishing. Up to that point, if you were to go over the issues published, we had more traditional pieces than non-traditional legal scholarship. I think that CLLR has always tried to maintain a space for both discourses. In keeping with our status, we published articles that were scholarly and accepted by the mainstream, while also providing a forum for those great professors and writers who resisted those external pressures to publish

¹ Please note that the author clarified this paragraph during editing phase.

and write only in the traditional style. The *Máscaras* piece is an amazing reflection of this. It was essentially, and still is, a slap in the face to those external pressures; the piece says, “legal discourse is important and valuable, even when it doesn’t meet the criteria of the mainstream and the traditional.”

Personally, Professor Montoya’s article was an opportunity for me to hear a voice I could identify with. The article was all about me, not just in putting my legal education in a personal context, but I was that little girl with braids. I don’t know how many of you had your mother braid your hair, but I shared this experience with Professor Montoya—my braids too were so tight that I always had a scared look. As Professor Montoya wrote, our braids had to be that tight to make it through to the end of the day. That’s a funny memory from reading *Máscaras*, because I remember being that little girl in *trenzas*.

But also, Professor Montoya gave me a voice, a way to talk about my resistance to how I was being taught and a way to understand why I was not able to identify with how I was being taught. *Máscaras* gave me permission to continue to struggle, to resist the pressure to see the law without gender and without class and without color. It was an important validation for me, and it is a struggle that continues today for all of us. Every day as lawyers we put on suits because that’s the uniform; we comport with the conduct that’s accepted in the courtroom and in our legal writing; *every day* we continue to comply with the mainstream. So for us to be able to have value in our perspective, and remind ourselves that our perspective matters, is just as important as putting on the suit.

When Justice Sotomayor was being considered for the Supreme Court, and there was all the flak about her identifying herself as, or saying that she was, a wise Latina, I can remember thinking that I didn’t understand it. Obviously she’s a wise Latina! She would not be where she is if she was not a wise Latina! The idea that somehow her perspective, her view of the world in gender and ethnic terms, made her less competent, or less than qualified was ridiculous to me, and yet it continues to be that way.

Not only is our perspective always there, but it also brings value to the work we do. I can tell you, having passed the bar exam in two states, having colleagues that are different politically and have different ideologies, I regularly see how our analysis of an issue doesn’t have different results because of our different perspectives, but rather, *the quality*

of our analysis is different. For me, without hesitation, because of my experience with Professor Montoya, because of this beautiful, amazing article, I can say without condition whatsoever that my analysis is richer because I don't force myself to view the world without those things, without those important experiences that shape me and shape the real people that come into the courtroom each and everyday. If we forget the richness of our experiences, I think that we are worse off.

So Professor Montoya, I thank you for having given me that validation way back then, and for revealing my freedom to bring those ideas with me to the forefront of my work and opening up the discussion of the value they bring to the law.

Editors of the *Chicana/o-Latina/o Law Review* keep doing what you do, know that our voices matter, know that the legal discourse that has been shared with the world through CLLR is important, and truly worthy of celebration.

Congratulations to you Professor Montoya, my deepest regards.

Hasta Pronto.

Post-script: My apologies for my repetitive and disjointed remarks. I was overwhelmed by the opportunity to be able to surprise Professor Montoya and lament not having prepared written remarks. Thank you for permitting me to edit the transcript even though what remains is much more exuberant than articulate.

