



A Reflection in 2020 of Chancellor Tomás Rivera: Lessons on Leadership, Community and Empowerment



Presented by

The Honorable Vilma Socorro Martínez,
Former U.S. Ambassador to Argentina

TOMÁS RIVERA LECTURE SERIES



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF HISPANICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION (AAHHE)

2020

A Reflection in 2020 of Chancellor Tomás Rivera: Lessons on Leadership, Community and Empowerment



The 36th Tomás Rivera Lecture

Presented at the Annual Conference of the AAHHE

Costa Mesa, Calif.

March 5, 2020

The Honorable Vilma Socorro Martínez
Former U. S. Ambassador to Argentina

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PREFACE

ETS is pleased to join with the AAHHE to publish the 36th Annual Tomás Rivera Lecture. This year's lecture was delivered by The Honorable Vilma Socorro Martínez, an attorney and indefatigable advocate who throughout her career has wielded the law as a lever to secure the rights of Mexican Americans guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

Among her many credentials and accomplishments, Martínez was the first woman to serve as the United States Ambassador to Argentina, a post to which she was appointed by President Barack Obama in 2009 and in which she served until 2013. In recognition for her tenure and work, the Argentine government awarded her that nation's Order of May. She has been a member of the Inter-American Dialogue since 2014.

A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and Columbia University Law School, Martínez worked as a staff attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund; an associate at the New York City law firm Cahill, Gordon & Reindel; and a partner in the firm Munger, Tolles & Olson in Los Angeles, where she advised companies on steps to enhance their equal employment opportunity policies and build diversity and inclusion initiatives into their business plans.

Education has been a central concern and a personal passion. As the first woman President and General Counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), she led the organization's efforts to require school districts to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking students. She served as Chair of the Board of Regents of the University of California from 1984 to 1986 and was a regent from 1976 to 1990. She also chaired the Pacific Council's Study Group on Mexico and served as a member of the advisory boards of Columbia Law School and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California. Appointed by President Bill Clinton, she served on the Advisory Committee on Trade Policy and Negotiations from 1994 to 1996.

In her Tomás Rivera Lecture, Martínez calls on her audience to engage in the "twin challenges" posed by rising racial and ethnic discrimination and demographic changes that urge Hispanic Americans to "respond to the challenge of leading on behalf of all our fellow citizens."

As Martínez notes, it is work that is never finished. At ETS, we couldn't agree more. And we are honored and proud to support that effort.



Walt MacDonald
President and CEO
ETS

ABOUT THE TOMÁS RIVERA LECTURE

Each year, a distinguished scholar or prominent leader is selected to present the Tomás Rivera Lecture. In the tradition of the former Hispanic Caucus of the American Association for Higher Education, AAHHE is continuing this lecture at its annual conference. It is named in honor of the late Tomás Rivera, former President of the University of California, Riverside.

About Tomás Rivera



Author, teacher and lifelong learner, Tomás Rivera, was born in Texas to farm laborers who were Mexican immigrants. Neither parent had a formal education.

He received B.S. and M.Ed. degrees in English and administration from Southwest Texas State University, and his M.A. in Spanish literature and a Ph.D. in romance languages and literature from the University of Oklahoma. Rivera also studied Spanish culture and civilization at the University of Texas, Austin, and in Guadalajara, Mexico.

He taught at Sam Houston State University and was a member of the planning team that built the University of Texas, San Antonio, where he also served as Chair of the Romance Languages Department, associate dean and vice president.

In 1978, Rivera became the Chief Executive Officer at the University of Texas, El Paso, and in 1979, he became Chancellor of the University of California, Riverside. Rivera was an active author, poet and artist. By age 11 or 12, he was writing creatively about Chicano themes, documenting the struggles of migrant workers. He did not write about politics and did not view his work as political. He published several poems, short prose pieces, and essays on literature and higher education.

He served on the boards of ETS, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the American Association for Higher Education and the American Council on Education. In addition, Rivera was active in many charitable organizations and received several honors and awards. He was a founder and President of the National Council of Chicanos in Higher Education and served on commissions on higher education under Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan.

Tomás Rivera Lecturers

2020	Vilma Socorro Martínez	2001	Félix Gutiérrez
2017	Michele Siqueiros	2000	David Hayes-Bautista
2016	Antonia Hernández	1999	Jim Cummins
2015	Manuel T. Pacheco	1998	Samuel Betances
2014	Yvette Donado	1997	Albert H. Kauffman
2013	Francisco G. Cigarroa	1996	Rolando Hinojosa Smith
2012	Luis Ubiñas	1995	Ronald Takai
2011	Rachel F. Moran	1994	Norma Cantú
2010	Charles B. Reed & Jack Scott	1993	Gregory R. Anrig
2009	Marta Tienda	1992	Henry Cisneros
2008	Jamie Merisotis	1991	Toni Morrison
2007	Sonia Nazario	1990	Tomás Arciniega
2006	Michael A. Olivas	1989	David Hamburg
2005	Raúl Yzaguirre	1988	Arturo Madrid
2004	Angela Oh	1987	Ann Reynolds
2003	Piedad Robertson	1986	Alfredo G. de los Santos Jr.
2002	Harold L. Hodgkinson	1985	John Maguire

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication reproduces the keynote address delivered at the AAHHE annual conference in March 2020 in Costa Mesa, Calif. AAHHE is grateful for the leadership of its Board of Directors and the members of its conference planning committee for coordinating the appearance of keynote speaker Vilma Socorro Martínez.

At ETS, Shanay Bell, Tom Clark, Marita Gray, Terri Flowers, and Darla Mellors provided editorial and production direction and support. The ETS Center for Advocacy and Philanthropy (CAAP) gratefully acknowledges the guidance and support of AAHHE and particularly its President, Loui Olivas, in the publication of the Tomás Rivera Lectures.

THE AAHHE–ETS ALLIANCE



For 15 years, ETS has enjoyed a partnership with AAHHE. As Executive Director of CAAP, I have had the pleasure of working closely with President Loui Olivas in sponsoring and designing the Annual Doctoral Dissertation Competition and the Latino Student Success Institute.

Each of these highly rewarding initiatives aligns with ETS's commitment to support the underserved and underrepresented student populations, as well as with our mission of helping to advance quality and equity in education for all learners. We are honored that Vilma Socorro

Martínez was selected to present the 2020 lecture.

Lenora M. Green
Executive Director
Center for Advocacy & Philanthropy
ETS

VILMA SOCORRO MARTÍNEZ DELIVERS TOMÁS RIVERA LECTURE

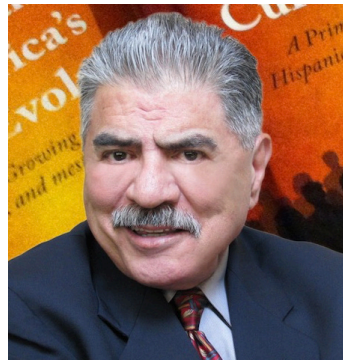
It's a wonderful, wonderful pleasure this evening to introduce to you one of the giants in the field of education. She follows what is becoming a tradition at AAHHE — and that's to have powerful, successful, well-educated women present their perspectives to you, the future of our community. We have her listed as the former ambassador to Argentina on the program, but that's not how I know her.

To give you a little bit of background, last year we presented to you Dr. Mari-Luci Jaramillo — the former Ambassador to Honduras — who told me that being with you here last year was one of the highlights of her life, for being recognized by her own people for what she has done in her life. Tonight's speaker follows that theme of people who are successful at doing things that make it possible for all of us in this room to be here tonight. And that is, to gain an education that has made us successful, proud contributors to our own communities from across the nation.

Vilma Martínez was the first Latina to serve as a U.S. Ambassador to Argentina, and she's been a member of the Inter-American Dialogue since 2014. She's also a previous partner with the law firm of Munger, Tolles & Olson here in Los Angeles, where she specialized in federal and state court commercial litigation — advising companies on steps to enhance their equal employment policies and build diversity and inclusion initiatives to enhance their equal employment opportunities policies.

She served as Chair of the Board of Regents of the University of California from 1984 to 1986 and as the Chair of the Board of Regents and on their board from 1984 to 1986. She also served on one of the committees to find and select a chancellor for the University of California system. It's meaningful tonight that she's here to speak and provide her perspectives as the Tomás Rivera Lecture series [speaker]. Why? Because she was instrumental in her duties as the Chair of that search committee to identify the first Chicano Mexican-American chancellor in the UC system, Dr. Tomás Rivera.

So, it's appropriate for her to be here tonight to share not only her experiences, but also some of the steps that she's taken to protect our rights to an education in the United States of America. Kudos to everybody who's talked about



*Jim Estrado,
AAHHE Board Member*

demographics. You can't fight city hall, and we're becoming city hall. Our numbers are amazing in the terms [that] we grow five times faster than the general population. We're already over 25–30% of the student body population of K–12 in the entire country. Over one million Latinos turn 18 every year and become eligible to vote. And this year, we may have the highest ethnic voting participation of any group in America. It's going to happen. If it doesn't happen this year in the elections, it will happen pretty soon.

Vilma was the first woman President and General Counsel of an organization that many of us are aware of, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, where she led the fight to require school districts to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking students. She successfully based many lawsuits on the 1964 Civil Rights Act and on the 14th Amendment's promise of equal protection under the law. She had the weapons — the law. She had the knowledge and the intelligence and the education to bring them to the forefront. She has won so many battles that make it possible for us to be here in this room.

As an attorney and civil rights activist, Vilma Martínez's major tool was constitutional law. She got some of those credentials at the NAACP, where she worked in Washington, D.C., before coming out west. Vilma has been a popular speaker at educational institutions across the nation, including the Harvard Law School, Yale University, University of Notre Dame, Stanford University, and her alma mater — the University of Texas at Austin — where she earned her Bachelor of Arts. I hear that she applied for the law school at the University of Texas, and they rejected her request for admission. So, being the fighter that she is, she went on to Columbia to get her law degree.

She has been a member of the California Bar Association, and truly, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you yet another of the giants on whose shoulders many of us stand. Please welcome to the podium, The Honorable Vilma Socorro Martínez.

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Vilma Socorro Martínez,
Tomás Rivera Lecture Presenter

Thank you, Jim. Thank you American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education and Dr. Olivas for this very special invitation — the 36th Tomás Rivera Lecture at this, your 15th annual national conference. This is special for me because I knew Chancellor Rivera and was privileged to serve on the search committee which recommended his selection as Chancellor of the University of California’s Riverside campus.

It is also special to me because the invitation comes from you, educators who hold the key to so much that I hold dear: knowledge, creativity, and promotion of a healthy and cohesive society.

Reading through the abstracts of the four scholarly papers being presented at this year’s conference on issues such as food and housing, security for our Latinx college students, the role of higher ed institutions in promoting Latinx civic engagement, chartering STEM pathways and strategies to promote Latina leadership, it is clear to me that the future of our Latino community as well as that of our larger community is in excellent hands. So, thank you. Today my contribution is to take you on a trip down memory lane and what I know about Chancellor Rivera’s journey, and mine, and our efforts to empower our communities. Chancellor Rivera would relate to your conference theme: ¡Adelante! Honoring Latinx Courage and Conciencia. In an interview he gave to a San Antonio paper upon his selection as Vice President for Administration at UT San Antonio, Chancellor Rivera said, “Everything is still ahead. As soon as I attain something, I set out plans for other things.” This came true for him, and it will come true for all of you.

As many of you know, the Chancellor went on to serve as Executive Vice President and acting V.P. for Academic Affairs at University of Texas, El Paso. And in July 1979, he became University of California, Riverside’s fourth Chancellor — the first minority Chancellor in the university’s history and the youngest Chief Executive in that nine-campus system. He brought to this job a résumé of great accomplishment: Award-winning poet for his fabulous book, *Y No Se Lo Tragó La Tierra*, experienced and tough-minded administrator, superb teacher and impressive leader. So much of his teachings and imparted wisdom resonate for us today. I would like to share some of them with you.

For example, he wrote brilliantly and incisively about immigration. In an article he wrote and published in the *San Antonio Express News*, September 7, 1975, entitled “We are All Immigrants,” he said, “Although we are to a great degree a pluralistic

culture, we have strong affinities and original experience that continue to bind us as a nation. Out of many, one signals the American experience of immigration. This is a personal and original act, with the exception of the Native American, of every American household. He concluded with these words, which help us in these troubled times, he said, “From the time that immigration became a personal question and experience, I have felt an affinity with other Americans. Somehow the abuses, conflicts, disillusionments of our country are outbalanced by the attitudes gained when one takes risks, when one searches, when one struggles, when one defends oneself. This is part of our intra history. It is our heritage. We were here, this was our land, we had a commitment, we had a future.”

For those of you who are professors, administrators, staff, Chancellor Rivera had advice for you, as well. In an interview he gave to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, published February 15, 1984, approximately three months before he died, he discussed the role of the Chicano professor in higher education. He argued that while Chicano educators can be social and political activists, he insisted that the first role and the primary role of Chicano educators is to be an academic who excels in teaching and research. If you are a Mexican American teaching physics, and you’re good and the students are Anglo, then that group is going to have a different attitude about Mexican Americans because you taught them well.

Chancellor Rivera also touched on the role of administrators and he said, “I don’t think the way I perform my job is very different from the way any other chancellor performs, but just the fact that I do it is important in developing a kind of academic intelligentsia among Chicano Americans. If I do my job well, I hope others will follow.”

Being Tomás Rivera, a man renowned for his warmth as well as his academic brilliance, he had advice that serves all of us well. In an interview with Veronica Salazar, published in *The Sun*, May 23, 1974, he admonished us to have a very strong love for each other as people, to help the less fortunate, develop a stronger consciousness of what you are and how you can help each other, and to get as much education as possible.

These were bits and pieces of Chancellor Rivera wisdom between 1974 and ‘84, and they caused me to reflect on the bits and pieces of wisdom I might have acquired in my lifetime — which has led me to the Ernesto Galarza Commemorative Lecture I delivered in 1998 at Stanford University. I was asked to address their concerns about what they called “a new mood in our country,” described as “One which attacks immigrants, women, and people of color. And attempts to shut the door on modest gains, which have been made in welcoming women and people of color into the mainstream.”

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My response then, in 1998, is the same today, “this is not a new mood.” At the time, my analysis was that this was discrimination and I described it as a recurring problem which we have to address using old and new strategies. Today, I would add another very important component, which several of you have talked about and that is that our country is changed — not changing — changed demographics. It falls to us to address this condition now, and in various ways, these twin challenges of discrimination against the other and our country’s changed demographics.

In my lifetime and in my work, I have approached these twin challenges in various ways and at different times. As head of MALDEF [1973–1982], working with people like your wonderful professor Al Kauffman, we were concerned with evident discrimination against Mexican Americans. MALDEF’s lawyers and I worked through our legal system to seek redress for discrimination in many areas: education, employment, the vote. One of the tools we used was litigation. For example, in *Morales v. Shannon* and *Alvarado v. El Paso Independent School District*, MALDEF sued the Uvalde and El Paso Texas School Boards to end the segregation of Mexican-race students. These were difficult cases. The defendants argued they had always considered us White.

In the Uvalde case, a group called the German American Parents Association advised us to powder the faces of the children White to avoid any alleged discrimination. Redressing segregation was not enough. So later, in *Serna v. Portales, New Mexico*, MALDEF won a ruling at the 10th Circuit court that limited, English-proficient children were entitled not only to a desegregated education, but also to bilingual education so that they could have an equal opportunity for a meaningful public education. Later still, MALDEF sued the state of Texas to require it to educate undocumented children in the case now known as *Plyler v. Doe*.

Because of the United States Supreme Court decision rendered in 1982, MALDEF was subsequently able [in 1998] to strike down Proposition 187’s provisions, which would have denied undocumented children in California access to a public school education. And most recently, under the brilliant direction of Tom Saenz, from whom you heard last year, MALDEF used those litigation skills to strike down the U.S. Census Bureau’s attempt to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census — an effort to keep our numbers down.

In addition to litigation, MALDEF used other strategies to redress discrimination. For example, legislative advocacy. In 1975, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was up for renewal. It was considered the most successful piece of civil rights legislation ever passed. But it did not cover Mexican Americans. Al Perez, head of MALDEF’s

Washington D.C., office, led the successful charge not only to extend the Voting Rights Act, but to expand it to cover Mexican Americans. Despite the lack of support from institutions, such as the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, MALDEF did get the support of the Japanese American Citizens League, the Black Caucus and Joe Rowe of the AFL/CIO.

Thanks to a conversation I was privileged to have early on at my career at MALDEF, with Dr. Galarza himself, the organization used other strategies recommended by Dr. Galarza such as community education and community outreach efforts. This is why since 1980, every time there’s a Census, MALDEF works with communities to try to make sure that a full and complete count is taken. Once I approached the Archbishop of Los Angeles and asked him to preach a “Census Sunday,” I kissed his ring and he agreed to do so.

The MALDEF leadership program equipped Latinos and Latinas to serve on city boards and commissions, and the MALDEF organization created a department of public policy and research — because in those days there was no UCLA Latino Policy Institute, no Tomás Rivera Center and the like, which brings me to my second point. One result of what I call our country’s changed demographics is that it is not enough, albeit necessary, to challenge this continuing discrimination. Increasingly, we must respond to the challenge of leading on behalf of all our fellow citizens. This happened to Tomás when he took on those responsibilities at UT San Antonio, at UT El Paso, and ultimately in his Chancellorship at UC Riverside, and in spite of all of his invaluable service on the many boards and commissions focused on improving educational opportunities for people.

It happened to me, too. As a member [1976–1990] and then as Chairman [1984–1986] for the Board of Regents at the University of California over a span of 14 years and as the United States’ first woman Ambassador to Argentina, I was not the first Latino. There were other ambassadors before me, but I was the first Latina — and most recently, as the President of the Board of Harbor Commissioners, which oversees the economic engine that is the Port of Los Angeles. In jobs like these, you are responsible for the well-being of the entire community. For those of you in this audience that have such a privileged and important role to play in developing and honing what Chancellor Rivera called, “a kind of academic intelligentsia among Hispanic Americans,” you have a most important job given the twin challenges you and your students are facing now and will be facing in coming years.

Reflecting on where we are today, I spoke at MALDEF’s 50th Anniversary Gala in 2018. I want to share with you what I said there. I must admit that when I first thought about 50 years of life for MALDEF, part of me was disappointed because

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I had hoped that MALDEF's work would be finished — complete. On reflection, however, I have come to understand that breathing life into our nation's ideals and goals is work that never ends. When I look at where we are today, with a president who stokes fear and division, who disrespects the other two co-equal branches of government, the Congress and the judiciary as well as the press, it is clear that our country's commitment to our ideas and goals — such as the notion that all men are created equal, entitled to equal protection under the law, that we are a country committed to *E Pluribus Unum*, are fashioned out of many indigenous and immigrant streams, that we are one nation under God — this commitment is under attack as never before in my memory.

I reflect on the MALDEF 50th anniversary with shared pride on our past accomplishments and with confidence that MALDEF's work is in the best of hands: MALDEF's. On that occasion, I was addressing these thoughts to MALDEF, but I think they apply equally to you. Our nation needs all, all that you have to offer it.

I want to close with one final Tomás Rivera story, one where he recounted a visit he made as a child to a Carnegie Library somewhere in the Midwest. He read the words “Carnegie Library” and went inside looking for carne. Well, he said, he didn't find that, but he found something more precious: books and knowledge, which he generously shared with us throughout his lifetime and beyond. I am so happy to report to you that today, students at UC Riverside's campus enter the Tomás Rivera Library when they are in search of that knowledge. Thank you.

SPEAKER'S BIOGRAPHY

Vilma Socorro Martínez was the first woman to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Argentina. She has been a member of the Inter-American Dialogue since 2014.

Martínez was previously a partner at Munger, Tolles & Olson, where she specialized in federal and state court commercial litigation — advising companies on steps to enhance their equal employment opportunity policies and build diversity and inclusion initiatives into their business plans. She also served as President and General Counsel of MALDEF. Her previous professional endeavors include work as litigation associate at Cahill, Gordon & Reindel in New York and as a staff attorney with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Martínez served as Chair of the Board of Regents of the University of California from 1984 to 1986 and was a regent from 1976 to 1990. She previously served as a board member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association and the Los Angeles Board of Harbor Commissioners; the Chair of the Pacific Council's Study Group on Mexico; and a member of the advisory boards of Columbia Law School and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California.

She was appointed by President Bill Clinton to serve on his Advisory Committee on Trade Policy and Negotiations from 1994 to 1996, and in 2009, President Barack Obama appointed her as U.S. Ambassador to Argentina. She served in this post until 2013. In recognition of her tenure and work, the Argentine government awarded Martínez the Order of May.

Over the years, she has been a popular speaker at educational institutions around the nation, including Harvard Law School, Yale University, the University of Notre Dame, Stanford University, and her alma mater, the University of Texas at Austin, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts. She also received a Bachelor of Laws from Columbia Law School and is a member of the California Bar Association.

About ETS

At ETS, we advance quality and equity in education for people worldwide by creating assessments based on rigorous research. ETS serves individuals, educational institutions and government agencies by providing customized solutions for teacher certification, English language learning, and elementary, secondary and postsecondary education, and by conducting education research, analysis and policy studies. Founded as a nonprofit in 1947, ETS develops, administers and scores more than 50 million tests annually — including the *TOEFL*® and *TOEIC*® tests, the *GRE*® tests and *The Praxis Series*® assessments — in more than 180 countries, at over 9,000 locations worldwide.