

# BREATHING DIFFERENCE, SHARING EMPOWERMENT

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We celebrate Margaret E. Montoya's *Máscaras, Trenzas, y Greñas* as a canonical article in critical race theory because its deft interweaving and unbraiding of stories helps us consider the marginalizing assumptions of the legal world, the way normativity translates into authority, and the means by which the mainstream is disguised as unbiased.<sup>1</sup> She does these things effectively through an exercise of courageous candor that lays bare the kind of feelings and thoughts that we usually keep to ourselves or only share with intimates. I imagine that her article feels like a mirror for some people—they have been there, seen themselves in her likeness, and are probably grateful to her for helping them feel that they are not alone. For me, *Máscaras, Trenzas, y Greñas* is more like a prism through which her narrative refracts my binding but privileged experiences as the biracial daughter of a White mother, a Brown father, and as a woman whose higher education was largely influenced and facilitated by a cadre of Black professors.

Within the spectrum of my social relationships, I have encountered both the contestation of identity and the acknowledgement of difference. While the former often delineates boundaries and alienates people from their potential allies, the latter engenders empowerment through solidarity with others. Montoya pierced one boundary when she became the first Latina accepted to Harvard Law School; by doing so, she created space for many Others to walk through the door. Her very presence in the legal academy helped change the face of her profession, but it is her ideas and her practices that push back against the constriction of normativity and make room for difference to breathe. I am grateful to Margaret Montoya and the generations of scholars who continue to champion justice through the acknowledgement of difference because they have empowered me and countless others to lift our voices and

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret E. Montoya, *Máscaras, Trenzas, y Greñas: Un/Masking the Self While Un/Braiding Latina Stories and Legal Discourse*, 15 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 1 (1994).

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make our contributions in the classroom, within our disciplines, and in our communities.

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One of my earliest retrievable memories of racial self-identification is as a fourth grader living on the northern outskirts of Los Angeles County in the late 1980s. I held a sharp Number 2 pencil in my hand and was carefully filling in the bubbles of the California Achievement Test. We were just starting our week of examination and were told to first provide some information about ourselves. Though the test had not officially begun, I was paralyzed by a difficult puzzle masquerading as a straightforward question. The query before me asked for my race and stated that I could pick only one, though by my account, there were two equally correct categories. I knew that England and Mexico were distinct parts of the world, but since I was growing up proud of, connected to, and loved by both branches of my family, how could I pick only one, and which one would it be? If I didn't fill out the whole form, I might get in trouble at school, but if I followed instructions, my parents might think I was ashamed of half my family. I was at a loss, but Mrs. Winwood would know what to do.<sup>2</sup>

I raised my hand and Mrs. Winwood walked over, bent down at the waist, and hovered by my head to create the shortest distance possible between her ear and my question. In a hushed voice, I pointed to the race question and asked, "Mrs. Winwood, which one do I pick?" Whereas I pondered, second-guessed, and performed moral gymnastics, Mrs. Winwood looked at the question on the sheet and whispered back without hesitation, "You fill in Mexican." My, that was quick! I'm not sure why she instructed me as she did, but it felt better to shift the weight off my shoulders and onto hers. I didn't know it then, but that would be the last time someone else would be accountable for my racial self-identification. I was on my own from there on out.

The lesson I learned that day shaped my racial identification for many years to come; I could be biracial and call myself Mexican, but it was not feasible to be biracial and identify as White. I already had inklings of this phenomenon at age seven when my father told me that he and I were Mexican—a claim that stood unrefuted in our household since neither he nor my mother ever told me that I was White. My White

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<sup>2</sup> I use pseudonyms in place of real names when referring to teachers and professors.

peers seldom made a fuss about my identity when we were in elementary and middle school as most would recognize my difference, but ultimately conclude that I was a lot “like them.” In more ways than not, I was treated “the same” in culturally White, but racially diverse spaces like our school, but in other circumstances like Girl Scouts, I experienced microaggressions from a certain troop leader who consistently treated me with less friendliness and patience and somehow forgot to give me a permission slip for a much anticipated outing. I remember how sad I was that my friends would have this great adventure without me, and how my sadness turned to anger as I put the string of previous slights together to make sense of my being left behind.

I heard a lot of disparaging things about Mexicans, Blacks, and Asians come out of the mouths of certain White adults during my childhood, and though they would comprise only a segment of the total White population in our predominately White neighborhood, their claims were nasty and unapologetic, and they made me realize just how commonplace racism was. When they spoke about Mexicans in front of me, they would usually indicate that they were talking about *some other type of Mexican*: one that didn’t want to learn English, one that dropped out of school, one that worked for below minimum wage, one that crossed the border in the desert, one that gangbanged, one that had too many babies. *Those Mexicans* were no good because they were cheating the system, but my dad and I were acceptable because we played by the rules. Our supposed exceptionality was intended as a compliment, but it always felt like a slap in the face.

My lighter skin and monolingual English no doubt attenuated a lot of the direct discrimination I would have incurred at the hands of White people in my youth. Ironically, it was those very traits that made me susceptible to repeated teasing from small handfuls of Mexican peers on the other side of the color line. The things my racist White neighbors would say disgusted me and made me nervous, but thinking back on how certain Mexican kids would tease me for not being able to speak Spanish or for being only half-Mexican, evokes strong memories of hurt feelings from being pushed to the outside. These children might be boisterous and say things like, “What-eev-ver, Tehama! You’re not a *real Mexican!*” or they could make their point explicit in other ways by speaking to me in Spanish and then laughing—sometimes as a group—knowing that I would only catch words here and there. It was the kind of taunting that

stung in reverberating ways, and made me feel disarmed because there was nothing I could do in that moment to amend my seeming inadequacies. It hurt to be made fun of in this way because being Mexican was real to me and it was something I could see and feel when I was with my father's family, but to some Brown children and adolescents my Mexicanness was inauthentic. I didn't set out to provoke anybody, and I certainly didn't get my laughs by making fun of others because of who they were or where they came from. For the most part I got along with all my schoolmates, including the very handfuls of peers who would put these thorns in my side; so where was this coming from?

When I wasn't holding back tears, I would try to look through the eyes of people who made fun of me and think about what they were going through. It didn't take an emotional rocket scientist to figure out that the kids who teased me had to develop thick skin because the world handled them with a rougher touch. Unlike me, the handful of children that exacted these capricious ribbings was from the *barrio* over the hill. They were Mexican and their first language was Spanish, and wouldn't it be nice if once in a while that gave them the upper hand on the playground? Whereas I was a fourth-generation American and, at the time, middle-class, some of these kids were recent immigrants and the children of farm workers, while many others who had deeper roots in the United States were desperately trying to live on the straight and narrow lest they be dragged neck-deep into gang culture. Unlike many other kids of Mexican descent, I was not taken out of class to spend hours upon hours in the ESL program. I was in the *normal* class, they were in the *different* class; the wind was at my back and in their face. The California Achievement Test, the public school systems, and the more mundane spaces of American life were and still are made to support the fluent English speaker, and more specifically, the native English speaker. I was that person, and maybe it made them feel good to make me feel different.

My mom, the high school English teacher, spoke to me with the language her ancestors communicated in for untold generations. My dad spoke to me in English, the only language his bilingual parents taught him to speak fluently. As American-born children who both served during World War II in their teens and early twenties, my Nonie and Grandpa Lopez knew the sting of stigma and the embrace of inclusivity, and without saying as much, didn't want their children's Americanness to be called into question. To be assimilated, respected, and upwardly

mobile, they knew one had to speak English well, and at the sacrifice of placing a linguistic wedge between their children and their parents, they dropped Spanish with the hope of giving my dad and his siblings a better chance. English was probably also a kind of patriotic glue for them, an adhesive that would diminish difference and make one “us” out of many “thems”—a lofty dream in the days of Zoot Suit Riots, internment camps, and Jim Crow.

Having full command of English is a blessing in this Anglophile country, but having little command of the Spanish language felt like a curse. I heard Spanish a great deal when my grandparents wanted to speak privately in public, and this would help me pronounce words correctly once I learned them. However, with no direct engagement I could do little more than greet, swear, and order food even though I carried the quintessential Mexican last name. Up until my teen years, I honestly felt I was lacking something that was naturally supposed to be mine. I even wondered if there was something biologically wrong with me because I seemed to have a weaker handle on Spanish than any of the other kids I knew who were mixed-race and of Hispanic heritage. In this way, I felt alone and unrelatable. Most people would probably not recognize the identity crisis that tormented me as I was fairly popular and respected, got along well with different cliques on campus, and by middle school was a full-fledged social butterfly.

In Montoya’s memoir, she tells us how her mother would prepare her to engage with “They-Who-Don’t-Speak-Spanish” as they “would see [her] as different, would judge [her], [and] find [her] lacking.”<sup>3</sup> I can speak from my own experience that They-Who-Can-Speak-Spanish are capable of similar inflictions though they may strike for other reasons, and the wound may tear, fester, and heal differently. By the time I hit middle school, I learned to bear the teasing because I figured out this wasn’t about being malicious for malice’s sake. This shit talking had a twoness; it was a power trip for the kid with a “Kick Me” sign on her back, and it was also a test of my character and loyalty. Did I think I was better than other Mexicans because I could pass as White? Would I come to the defense of a fellow Chicano? Would I claim to be Mexican when no other Brown people were around? For me the teasing was a kind of hazing because I would have to learn how to stand up for myself and what I believed in when no allies could be found. Taking the flack

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<sup>3</sup> Montoya, *supra* note 1, at 4.

and not backing down allowed my adversaries to know me better, and I later came to find out that the kids who busted my chops were the same people who would “have my back” or come to some other Brown kid’s rescue if we were called *beaners* or *wetbacks*. They taunted me and said I was different, but they also saw me as one of their own and told me as much in a variety of plain and oblique ways. From the twoness of shit talking, another duality unfolded: the recognition of difference and the potential for solidarity.

I would continue to identify primarily as Mexican, Mexican American or Chicana despite being told otherwise because I felt that claiming Brownness secondarily or as an afterthought would come off as an attempt to mitigate stigma, and I did not want anyone to think I thought being Mexican was something that needed to be concealed. Being proud to be Mexican was and still is a necessary option for people of Mexican descent because our society was and still is saturated with mainstream messages of our inferiority, laziness, dirtiness, criminality, illegality, and limitations. Like many people on the margins, the *barrio* youth and the Mexican middle class alike resisted these messages with pride, attitude, posture, and conviction. My resistance would require a delicate dance as I felt I needed to make my Mexican identity prominent without denying my mother, our loving family, and their contributions.

As my senior year of high school neared, a different kind of chatter arose. I became one of millions of people around the country applying to college and everyone was looking for an edge. And so it began, the snide remarks and derision of White people who believed that (1) affirmative action was an abominable act of “reverse discrimination” and (2) I should not get to benefit from such a policy because I “really wasn’t *that* Mexican anyway.” The fact that women of all races were considered an underrepresented group was not totally lost on these critics, but it was racial preference that really made their blood boil. I was told explicitly by my mother and father to not be ashamed of being a beneficiary of affirmative action. People fought hard to change this country, and this policy, however imperfect, was part of that change. I was to always do my best, and take advantage of the opportunities that were not available to people of color or even White women in previous generations. They were proud of my hard work, my talents, and my drive, and wanted me to be proud of myself—I should not let anyone take that away from me.

When I enrolled at the University of Virginia in 1997, it was both the number one ranked public university (tied with University of California, Berkeley) and it graduated the highest percentage of African American students of all public universities in the country. During my first three years, African Americans comprised 10% of the student population and Asian Americans made up 9%; in my fourth and final year, these percentages flipped. Hispanic American student enrollment, however, was a mere 2% when I began and 3% when I graduated. In some regards, UVA was a national leader in racial diversity. In other ways, it was deeply anchored in over one hundred years of White, wealthy, Southern male culture.

The good ol' boy networks were easy to find within the Greek system even though some of the traditionally White fraternities and sororities had broadened their memberships and started to shed their exclusive reputations. Although it was an immensely popular scene and counted two-thirds of the student population among its members, I was not interested in what the Greek system had to offer me, and so I forged my social life in a multitude of alternative spaces while remaining friends with folks who gave their time to Delta-this or Beta-that.

I shied away from joining campus organizations that required too much of my extracurricular time because one of the things that I loved most about college was being able to meet people from multiple walks of life. While I had many dear friends of European ancestry, a larger proportion of my friends and acquaintances were not White because, like me, most of them had opted out of the traditionally White Hellenic institutions. I knew other American students of Puerto Rican, Salvadorean, Dominican, Costa Rican, Ecuadorean, Panamanian, Nicaraguan, and Peruvian descent, but I do not recall ever meeting another Mexican American. The fact that we represented such a small portion of the student body but represented a multiplicity of ancestral origins made the pan-ethnic moniker "Latino" useful when we referred to ourselves as a group, and I started to adopt it as an acceptable label of self-identification.

Some of my dearest friends were Latin American students who identified more with their countries of origin than the U.S.-specific "Latino." Their racial paradigms, I learned, were different from those in the United States, and their primary political interests were tied up in their respective countries or international affairs. Most of these students were also from their region's elite class and quite affluent. On paper, we

probably didn't have very much in common at all. In person, something felt familiar, welcoming; and together we formed an inclusive space that effortlessly overlapped with other circles of international students and their American co-ethnics whom I also hung out with and formed tight friendships.

It would be in predominately Black spaces that I would find the kind of racial ideologies that made the most sense to me, and it was with Black students that I would hear the political voices that most reflected my left-leaning upbringing. In majority Black social settings, I heard perspectives that brought nuance to my racial consciousness, and I developed coping mechanisms that could be shared with community. I witnessed anti-Black racial profiling up close and was sometimes subject to the fallout of this discrimination even though it was clear to me that my Black peers were the targets and I was the collateral damage. In more formal predominately Black learning environments such as Introduction to African and African American Studies, I started to recognize my racial assignment in fourth grade as a practice of hypodescent, which helped me find the words I was looking for to talk about my identity and experiences as a biracial American.

I had many excellent courses with the faculty at UVA, but I hold a special place in my heart for the two Black professors who recognized something in me, made their offices a welcoming place, and became my academic mentors. Professor Hughes taught the aforementioned introductory course and told us about the golden age of Timbuktu, the matrilineal orientation of the Ashanti, the dimensions of the Triangle Trade, the horrors of the Middle Passage, the roots of call-and-response, the transplantation of the banjo, and the transition from slavery to sharecropping. He showed me compassion when my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer shortly after Thanksgiving break my freshman year, and he made himself available to me for the next seven semesters even though I never took another course with him. He gave me books for independent study and as gifts of friendship, and then surprised me in the beginning of my final year of college when he refused to write a letter of recommendation for doctoral programs because he insisted I first get some non-academic life experience before burying my head in the sands of graduate study. I was at first anxious and upset by his stubborn position, but following his advice would open the door to experiences I wouldn't exchange for anything.

Professor Mathis's Minority Group Politics was the kind of course I had been waiting for since I was a teenager. We familiarized ourselves with great social movements, tracked the gradual enfranchisement of the American people, weighed descriptive versus substantive representation, discussed the possibility of coalition-building, and studied Chicano history, something I would only get to do twice in a classroom setting. Towards the end of the semester, Professor Mathis asked me if I was interested in being one of her research assistants—that sounded great to me! Most of my work would entail reading newspapers, clipping stories about race-related issues, and then filing them away in manila folders. It was easy work that kept my interest, and it brought me together with her four other undergraduate assistants who were sharp, funny, and equally interested in social justice. The other four students were either Black or biracial with one Black parent and one White parent. One of the other biracial students was by many accounts passably White in phenotype, and I found it affirming to swap stories with someone who could relate to the treatment I received as someone who identifies as a person of color, but is often read as White. She could empathize with the way people would squint their eyes to look me over as though visual focus would accentuate their racial acumen, and how they would sometimes cock their heads to the side like a confused puppy to mull over the seeming contradiction between their perception and my identification. Once they relented, they might say, "Yeah, I can see that" or "I knew you had something in you." That I insisted on identifying with being Mexican, Mexican American, Chicana, and more recently Latina even though I could frequently pass as White is a matter that elicited a wide range of reactions that profoundly shaped my racial consciousness. When I told people that I am Mexican, some smiled and were put at ease; others were surprised and curious; some people felt vindicated because their gut feeling was "correct;" and some people acted hostile, suspicious, and on guard. This new friend knew just what I was talking about, and it was an education in itself to know that such a specific part of my racial identity could be mirrored in the Black experience.

One day while I was clipping away at race stories, Professor Mathis asked me if I was applying to the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute (RBSI). I told her I had never heard of it, to which she responded, "Well, you're applying." I smiled and laughed a little with excitement, "Okay,

well what is it?" *It* was the program that would change the course of my life.

The Ralph Bunche Summer Institute is a graduate school pipeline program for underrepresented students in their junior year who are interested in pursuing a doctorate in political science. The year that I applied was a watershed moment for the program because it was the first time it would open its doors to Latino and Pacific Islander students in addition to African Americans. There were twenty of us in all: thirteen Black students, six Latinos, and one male student proudly representing the people of Guam. For five weeks we would live together, learn together, eat together, keep each other awake, and keep each other on our toes. We came together not knowing the first thing about graduate school or how to get in, but by summer's end we had a roadmap.

We learned to use statistical software, conduct basic quantitative analyses, and pursue a research question inspired by our rigorous course on race and American politics. They introduced us to the GRE and paid for a practice test because they knew this kind of preparatory instruction was beyond most of our financial reaches. Perhaps the most enlightening thing they did for us was hold a graduate school fair so that we could directly speak with representatives of different political science programs around the country in a relatively unintimidating atmosphere. We learned about their strengths, their weaknesses, their faculty, and the biggest surprise of all, their financial packages. I literally had no idea that so many doctoral degree-granting programs would essentially pay us to become PhDs through tuition remission, multiple-year fellowships, and medical insurance. It wasn't a secret, but it was the kind of information that people like us did not even know to ask about. That this institute and its supporting faculty laid out for us that which we did not know without making us feel stupid or in anyway undignified was a way of reaching out that I have tried to emulate for junior peers, and now my own students.

The people we met that summer would become our first professional network in the academy. Many of the senior scholars they brought to speak to us were the first of their racial group or gender to get a degree from this department or the other, and we were inspired by their stories and humbled that they would travel from across the country to spend a little time with us. Half of us were selected to present our summer research projects at the annual national meeting for political scientists in

the United States, and we were nervous standing by our posters amidst actual graduate students and junior faculty. In a show of camaraderie, our RBSI predecessors came to the poster sessions early and helped us prepare for the difficult analytical queries that lay ahead. A few of us received antagonistic questions from older White men, and we started to see how research on race could be contentious and unwelcome in our discipline. Nevertheless, we left the conference with overwhelming optimism because we met dozens of other people from all racial groups who were happy to see us there, welcomed us to their affinity-based caucuses, introduced us to more professors and graduate students, and said they looked forward to seeing our applications in the fall.

When I enrolled in the political science doctoral program at the University of Chicago, I knew more people in our field than anyone else in my cohort, by a long shot. Professional meetings at the regional and national level felt more like reunions and parties than ego-wielding contests. Being around African American, Latino, and Asian American pioneering scholars and their protégés, hearing their accomplishments, their adversarial tales, their coping strategies, and watching them support each other as they took one another's scholarship to task made me feel like I wasn't merely entering a profession, I was joining a community.

With many excellent options before me, I chose Chicago in large part because the director of their Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture said they aimed at fostering an academic community that would produce engaged scholarship and embrace community activism, effectively repudiating the notion that intellectual and political pursuits should be cordoned off from one another. The faculty there recognized the urgency of everyday struggles in American life and committed themselves to a professional agenda that would respond to these matters with the attention they deserved. Two Black women, in particular, took me under their wings, guided me through fields of critical ideas, and introduced me to the benefits of intersectionality so that my race-driven research would avoid the pitfall of reifying imagined monolithic communities.<sup>4</sup> As my dissertation questions percolated in my mind, theory met praxis in the things we did together outside the classroom.

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<sup>4</sup> I would be greatly remiss if I did not also recognize my dissertation chair, a dear man to whom I will always be grateful for his mentorship and unwavering support. Many graduate students of color do not expect to find their champion in a White male or female faculty member, but advisors like him remind us how misled we are to believe that our "kin folk" and our "skin folk" are the same group of people.

Professor Gray taught me and a group of other students how to harness the resources of the university for the benefit of surrounding community members through the Program of Academic Excellence for High School Juniors and Seniors, which connected University of Chicago graduate students of color with motivated young people at the neighborhood public high school. These upperclassmen and women represented a school that was over 80% Black and largely low-income, and we designed our program to provide new ways of thinking about the things that were closest to home. We created curriculum that revolved around questions of race, but changed things up from year to year by developing four different courses: Race, Religion, and United States Contemporary Politics; Race and Representation; Hip Hop and Feminism; and finally, Race and Health. I enjoyed the energy of our students, the breakthroughs they would make, and the lessons they would teach me.

Professor Baker, my other close mentor, hired a small army of graduate students from Chicago universities to assemble a new national survey of Black youth politics that would be able to draw comparisons with Latino and White communities. This public opinion survey was novel because it fielded responses from people ages 15 to 25 years old, recording the experiences and capturing the opinions of people who were not yet old enough to vote. With an overemphasis on electoral politics, most political scientists frequently overlook the political lives of young people even though they are constantly responding to multiple arenas of governance and are often subjected to the heavy surveillance of family, teachers, and police. The questions themselves were enlightening as we asked about sexual practices, HIV and AIDS, hip hop, gang activity, gender and sexual orientation, boycotting, and blogging. In its initial phase, everyone who worked on the project was of African descent with the exception of myself, one other Mexican American woman, and one White male peer. Our team looked nothing like the portraits of past university presidents that hung in the dining hall with our darker-skin, female bodies, dreadlocks, and single faux hawk. This was a special opportunity, and for me, a sign of progress.

With so much of my life's energy spent on understanding marginalization and the contours of difference, I was both nagged and intrigued by questions of normativity. My dissertation would pursue the phenomena of racial privileges embodied by Whiteness, the perception of privilege within the self-identified White population, and the political

consequences of framing racial inequality in terms of advantage. I would become articulate about Whiteness, and how I was attached to it in peripheral ways. Unlike many White people who are consistently ascribed a normative racial identity, I did not have the luxury of thinking of myself outside the realm of race. My whole life has been peppered with questions of racial authenticity and belonging, racial introspection, and never being able to fully anticipate how I might be read and subsequently treated. I knew I was on the margins of Whiteness because I was called a “half-breed.” I knew I was “too White” to be fully Mexican because I was called a “coconut.” I learned that I could be cast completely outside of Whiteness because I was called a “spic,” and I experienced the otherness of being Mexican when I was profiled as an “illegal alien” at my doctor’s office. And yet, I learned that I share many attributes with White people who will never incur these types of slanders and assumptions. Because of my lighter skin, full command of English, and educational pedigree, I am often treated as an insider and an individual. In so many ways, this is the American dream.

During my data collection, I interviewed numerous White racial justice activists, and as an observer of their political choices learned that I, too, have a responsibility to account for my own axes of privilege. Part of my strategy for being mindful of the ways I am systemically advantaged is to identify more vocally as biracial *in addition to* Mexican so that I can invite conversations about the liminality of race that might not otherwise be initiated. Adopting this approach has given me unexpected psychological relief as I believe it more adequately describes my proximity to Whiteness and my conditional access to White privilege, while recognizing my vulnerability to discrimination as a woman of color, my familial affiliation with discriminated peoples, and my consequential racial and political consciousness that ties me to the underdogs and the marginalized.

My phenotype is a genetic roll of the dice, and my likelihood of passing as White or any other racial identity is contingent upon a number of factors that are largely out of my control and not altogether predictable. Contests over my racial identity, I figured, would likely never end, so I decided that the most successful way for me to deflect or deflate challenges to my racial authenticity is through my politics. My politics are my values, my priorities, my allegiances, and my dreams.

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I am gravely concerned in the year 2013 that the road to higher education is becoming narrower for young people from communities who are disproportionately beset by financial strains. I was heartbroken to learn that my beloved Ralph Bunche Summer Institute was canceled this spring because the National Science Foundation, which provides the largest bulk of funding for the pipeline program, was unable to release its monies due to restrictions in one of Senator Tom Coburn's (R-OK) amendments to the Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013. He short-sightedly claimed that the pipeline program and many other political science projects are a "low-priority" because they are not "vital to national security or the economic interests of the United States."<sup>5</sup> A more damaging decision followed this summer when the Supreme Court ruled in *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* that college admission plans taking race into account be absolutely necessary to achieve a diverse student body in order to ensure their constitutionality.

As a beneficiary of affirmative action and the product of a broad pipeline committed to ensuring a presence of people of color in higher education, I am grounded in a hard-fought legacy and reminded that achievement and success are rarely, if ever, realized in isolation. That my academic successes are a reflection of community investment in no way diminish the value of my own efforts and abilities, nor does it impair my self-esteem. Instead this connectedness adds purpose to my professional undertakings, and informs the way I behave in my personal and public life. In the wake of these new setbacks, I am committed to the creation of more opportunities for people who have been forced—as Montoya once noted—to wear ill-fitting masks and tightly braided hair to be seen as human and deserving by the status quo. I hope together we will devise creative and bold strategies for more inclusivity, because at its best, the legacy of affirmative action in higher education is not simply about advancing qualified people from underrepresented communities to college, graduate school, and university staff, faculty and administrative positions. It is about cultivating a community of people who make room for others to breathe their difference and share empowerment.

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<sup>5</sup> *Senate Votes to Protect Wine Trains Over White House Tours*, TOM COBURN, M.D. (May 20, 2013), <http://www.coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2013/3/senate-votes-to-protect-wine-trains-over-white-house-tours-limits-political-science-grants>.