

# CÉSAR CHÁVEZ IS NOT THE ONLY LATINO THAT AMERICANS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

By Dr. Cynthia E. Orozco

Many have heard of the famous Latinx activist César Chávez—but which other Latinos do we know? Most of us in the US cannot name another Latinx significant to US history. That sums up the 2023 report “*Analyzing Inclusion in Latino Contributions in US History Curricula for High School*” by Unidos US, a national civil rights group, which presented its findings at a recent conference of the national *Organization of American Historians (OAH)*.

Another event that recently took place *The Yale Center for the Study of Race, Indigeneity, and Transnational Migration* sponsored a “meeting of Latinx Historians” with about 75 people to talk about future collaborations as Latinx historians. This *Yale Center* event is noteworthy as the *first* national Latinx historians meeting since the field of Latinx history developed over fifty years ago.

Yet another historic moment occurred when Latina history professor, Dr. Natalia Molina of the University of Southern California, was named Vice-President of the *OAH* thereby ensuring a future presidency. While there have been three other Latino national presidents of the organization, the association has existed since 1907 with only seven Latinx board members ever (including the three presidents).

The same weekend, members of the *Alliance for Texas History*, a state history organization founded in 2024, elected Dr. Sonia Hernández, Professor at Texas A&M University at College Station and a Chicana, as president. Women constitute more than half of all US historians, but they are overwhelmingly white. The “*Chicanas Changing History*” project at the University

of Michigan headed by Chicana Dr. Lorena Chambers, revealed that less than 120 Mexican American women hold doctorates in US history.



**Cynthia Orozco was awarded the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Scholar Award in 2023 recognizing her significant contributions to the field of Chicanx studies. She is the author of several books including *Agent of Change: Adela Sloss-Vento, Mexican American Civil Rights Activist and Texas Feminist* that won the 2020 Liz Carpenter Award for Best Book in Texas women's history from the Texas State Historical Association.**

The *National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS)*, a professional association at the collegiate level, just celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. NACCS has been advocating for ethnic studies and Latinx history in the college curriculum for half a century. I can't even imagine how little we would know without this organization.

Do we teach the important and interesting stories of Latinos in US history?

César Chávez should not be the only Latinx in US history textbooks. He only got written into the textbooks because someone fought to put him there. Why do so few of us know of significant folks like San Antonian Alonso S. Perales, principal founder of *LULAC* (the oldest major Latinx civil rights organization), US diplomat, attorney, and author? Or Puerto Rican Luisa Capetillo, labor

organizer and feminist, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Or Luisa Morena, Guatemalan labor activist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the face of our exclusion in textbooks and history organizations, these recent landmarks help us all understand why we call for inclusion and diversity. We historians tell the unknown and untold stories of Latinos in the US and world history. ¡*Si se puede!* (*It can be done!*)

The Trump administration's anti-Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives seek to purposely erase our Latino/a/x heritage, culture, and language. We are already omitted, and we will not permit further erasure.