

May 14, 2020

RE: Provost's Faculty Achievement Award Nomination

Dear Nomination Committee Colleagues,

It is our pleasure to nominate Christina Sue, CU Boulder Associate Professor of Sociology, for a 2020 Provost's Faculty Achievement Award.

We are nominating Dr. Sue on the basis of her seminal book *Durable Ethnicity: Mexican Americans and the Ethnic Core* (Oxford, 2019), fully co-authored with Edward Telles. The book is a major contribution to the conversation about ethnicity in the United States because it makes three key points. First, a sense of ethnic identity can persist across generations thanks to continued migration from the country of origin and institutions that bolster a sense of common origins. Second, different components of hyphenated identities become salient depending on context. The emphasis on Mexican or American is different if a person is looking for a job, partner, or debating a political issue. Finally, it is misleading to treat Mexican Americans, or for that matter the larger panethnic category of Latinxs, as an agglomeration of co-ethnics with homogeneous attitudes and behaviors. Like other ethnic groups, Mexican Americans vary significantly in thought and practice according to demographics and class location. For instance, in the political arena, self-identified Mexican Americans hold a wide range of views on immigration ranging from support to raising concerns about what new arrivals will mean for U.S. citizens.

To make these points, *Durable Ethnicity* draws on a clever combination of in-depth interviews and surveys and an iterative analysis that moves among different kinds of sources. It is one of two books dealing exhaustively with ethnicity among Mexican Americans – the other being Tomas Jimenez's *Replenished Ethnicity* – but the first ever book to draw on such extensive and diverse evidence. Sue and Telles offer insights on racial formation and ethnic persistence in a group that is often taken for granted in the still strongly black-white perception of the American racial landscape and in politics. It changes the conversation on race and ethnicity in the United States by adopting a view of race as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy, challenging the reduction of hyphenated identities on one or another of its components, and not taking for granted the political or other behavior of an ethnic community.

Mexican Americans are unique in the array of American ethno-racial groups in that they are the descendants of the largest and longest-lasting immigration stream in U.S. history. Today, there are approximately 24 million Americans of Mexican descent living in the United States, many of whose families have been in the United States for several generations. In *Durable Ethnicity*, Edward Telles and Christina Sue examine the meanings behind being both American and ethnically Mexican for contemporary Mexican Americans. Building on a large-scale longitudinal and representative survey of Mexican Americans living in San Antonio and Los Angeles across 35 years, the authors draw on 70 in-depth interviews and over 1,500 surveys to examine how Mexican Americans construct identities and attitudes related to ethnicity, nationality, language, and immigration. In doing so, they highlight the primacy of their American identities and variation in their ethnic identities, showing that their experiences range on a continuum from symbolic to consequential ethnicity, even into the fourth generation.

Such an investigation is critical in the contentious arena of contemporary immigration politics, and the authors provide essential insight into lives, identities, and challenges from the perspective of Mexican Americans themselves. In contrast to imposing external interpretations and stereotyping an entire population, *Durable Ethnicity* give voice to the Mexican American experience including both variation and commonalities in perceptions of identity and culture.




*Durable Ethnicity* offers a comprehensive exploration of how, when, and why ethnicity matters for multiple generations of Mexican Americans, arguing that their experiences are influenced by an ethnic core, a set of structural and institutional forces that promote and sustain ethnicity. The authors develop this concept to explain the dual phenomena of variation within the Mexican American population, as well as the group's ethnic durability. The concept of ethnic core is also meant to offset mainstream-centric approaches to assimilation theory or the idea that cultural change, social interaction, and progress are in the direction of an "Anglo core" or "mainstream". The focus on movement toward the mainstream results, according to the authors, in the neglect of forces that strengthen or maintain ethnicity. Thus, by introducing the concept of ethnic core, Sue and Telles aim to offer a missing piece in theories about assimilation and integration.

While only published last year, there are some very strong early indications of the book's impact. For instance, *Durable Ethnicity* has already been accepted for Author-Meets-Critics panels at four major, multi-disciplinary academic conferences. Panels of this kind are reserved for works anticipated to have significant impact on the field, and to inspire new scholarly conversations. The book is also the centerpiece of an upcoming symposium of the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, the premiere journal in the subfield of race and ethnicity which only features books deemed by the editors to have high potential impact. The symposium participants are all top scholars in the field. One of these participants, Dr. Jessica Vasquez-Tokos of the University of Oregon, states: "The innovations of the ethnic core and consequential ethnicity, which counterbalance the mainstream and symbolic ethnicity, respectively, have been a long time coming and are much-needed additions to race/ethnicity and migration/assimilation literature and Mexican American/Latino sociology."

On the basis of this groundbreaking work, we recommend Dr. Sue wholeheartedly for a Provost's Faculty Achievement Award.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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