

**Panel Biographies**  
***Latina Power: The Next Generation of Activism/ Activists***  
**Presented by The University of Houston Friends of Women's Studies**  
**The Barbara Karkabi Living Archives Series**  
**September 22, 2016**



**Bernadette Torres Alvarez** is an active member of the Houston Community. She was born in Harlingen Texas, in the heart of the Rio Grande but has lived in Houston most of her life. Bernadette received her Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from the University of Houston – Downtown. Her full-time career is leading Bob Lilly Promotions Houston team as the Director of New Business Development. She fills the remainder of her days giving back to the community as Executive Director of the non-profit (501c3) charitable organization Shoes For Kids and she's also an owner of Sunrise Taquitos, a successful restaurant in Spring.

Bernadette's spent over ten years working with the Houston Business sector on opportunities to donate and make a difference within the community. She currently serves on the Steering Committee for the Guadalupe Plaza Park Historical Panel which drives preservation of Hispanic Community Heritage. As Executive Director for Shoes for Kids, the organization successfully donates over 2200 pairs of shoes annually to children in Houston's East End neighborhoods. Bernadette always strives to find new ways to help give back by looking for opportunities to support underprivileged Houston Hispanic youth. Bernadette is a proud wife and mother to a 5-year old daughter.



**State Representative Ana Hernandez** was elected in a special election in December 2005 to represent District 143 in the Texas House of Representatives. District 143 covers part of Houston, Channelview and the cities of Galena Park and Jacinto City. She serves on the House Committee on Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence and on the House Committee on Pensions. She is currently serving her fifth full term.

Ana was born in Reynosa, Mexico and raised in Pasadena, Texas. She graduated from Sam Rayburn High School in Pasadena and received her Bachelor of Science in Political Science and Psychology from the University of Houston. She went on to receive her Doctor of Jurisprudence from the University of Texas School of Law. In addition to representing District 143 in the Texas House of Representatives, she is also a practicing attorney at Soto & Hernandez, LLP and believes in serving her community. Representative Hernandez has volunteered and served on the boards of various professional, civic and charitable organizations and received numerous awards and honors.



**Yudith Nieto** was born in Mexico and grew up in the fence-line refining community of Manchester in Houston, which inspired Yudith to become involved in the environmental justice movement. Yudith now works with Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (t.e.j.a.s) to address the environmental impacts, public health, and urban development issues in her city. She is a member of the Environmental Justice & Health Alliance and the Moving Forward Network. Earlier this year she was named one of the 15 youth leaders of Climate Justice workgroup within the EPA's National Advisory Council of Environmental Justice. She is a 2013 graduate of the Four Directions Intergenerational Youth Exchange of Los Jardines Institute in Albuquerque, NM, where she learned how to build an intergenerational movement along with how the Chican@, Mexican American, and Indigenous cultures are intrinsically linked to the struggle of environmental justice.

Yudith is dedicated to confronting the petrochemical industries that perpetuate environmental racism and classism in marginalized communities of color, which lead her to be part of a Rights of Nature Tribunal that was held concurrently with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP 21). In collaboration with other Indigenous

South American, African, Native American communities, she was able to contribute to the discussion on the many issues they face because of the fossil fuel industry, as well as other human rights issues that impact their way of life.



**Claudia Ortega-Hogue** is the Managing Director and Founder of Global Communities Houston, LLC. Her goal is to advance Houston's diverse communities through education and awareness.

Claudia has worked in the nonprofit sector for a decade. During her tenure at the National Association of Latino Elected & Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, she served as their Southwest Regional Director of Civic Engagement where she was able to assist thousands of people achieve the American Dream. Claudia was responsible for the development and implementation of its naturalization and voter engagement mobilization programs across the region. She was able to organize and lead citizenship and immigration forums, naturalization workshops, voter education forums, non-partisan get-out-the-vote campaigns, and voter registration drives in the State of Texas, in addition to efforts in Arizona, New Mexico and Oklahoma. Claudia has presented to diverse and international audiences at

numerous trainings and briefings across the country and in Mexico, on issues ranging from U.S. citizenship to the political implications of the Latino vote.



**Monica Villarreal** is a Xicana artist and organizer native to Houston Tejas. Her art explores ethnic identity, gender roles, migrant and environmental issues. She is a recipient of multiple awards in photography and filmmaking, and has participated in installation and performing art productions organized by Voices Breaking Boundaries, Project Row Houses, Houston Arts Alliance, Santa Fe Arts Institute, and Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts.

Monica has a BA in Entrepreneurship from the University of Houston and an MA in Digital Media Studies from the University of Houston-Clear Lake. She wears various hats, as the founder of Creative Women Unite, a local feminist arts collaborative and as a traditional Aztec dancer with Danza Azteca Taxcayolot, a local dance group that practices Mexican indigenous traditions through spirituality and community engaging performances. She has over a decade of experience organizing with local grassroots and nonprofit organizations that focus on sustainable living, environmental justice, and immigration issues.



**Frances E. Valdez** is an activist lawyer who works in Houston, Texas at FValdezLaw PC. Frances is a graduate of The University of Texas School of Law. She began her career as a clinical fellow with the UT Immigration Clinic and was part of the team that fought to end family detention at the T. Don Hutto Detention Facility in Taylor, Texas. Through her work at Neighborhood Centers Inc., Frances worked extensively to develop best practices for providing individuals with naturalization and DACA assistance through free, group processing workshops.

Frances was a founding member of Latino Giving Houston, a giving circle that provides funds for nonprofits in the Greater Houston Area serving the Latino community. Frances is also a member of the National Immigration Project and has been the AILA Citizenship Day Coordinator for the Texas Chapter since 2012.

**Moderator:**



**Christina L. Sisk** is an associate professor in the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Houston. Her areas of interest are U.S. Latina/o Studies, U.S.-Mexico Border Studies, Mexican Literary and Cultural Studies, and Latin American Cinema. She is a triple graduate of Tulane University in New Orleans, LA. As a scholar specialized in migration, she is particularly interested in bridging the gaps between Latin American and U.S. Latina/o Studies. She is the author of *Mexico, Nation in Transit: Contemporary Representations of Mexican Migration to the United States* (University of Arizona Press, Fall 2011). This book explores the topic of migration from a transnational approach that includes analyses of Mexican border film, la literatura de la frontera, Mexican rock music, migrant narratives, Hollywood films made by Mexican directors, and texts written by the immigrant second and third generations. She has published articles in *Latinos Studies*, *Aztlán*, *A Contracorriente*, and *Transmodernity*. Continuing with her interest in migration, she is currently working on a book project on the representations of the criminal alien.