

Raza Graduation

June 12, 2016

Speaker: Sandy Vazquez '16

“de sus raíces crezco, de sus raíces florezco”

I read somewhere that home is a process

It takes time

And lots of patience

It takes patience to accept that this home in the making can never be the homeland you want it to be

Because somewhere along the way

Those roots you rep so hard with the sway of your hips and the ease in your dance

They were torn out of the ground

Left the earth to bleed barren

Cry out for her children

Like la llorona she yelled to us across the barbed wire that cut her voice into fragments of tongue until we could no

longer recognize our native language

Those roots were Replanted elsewhere

Replanted in a place that doesn't look like you

It takes time

It takes time to realize that even though this home can never be comfortable

There is comfort in solidarity

Comfort in knowing that home is not just a process for you

Home is a process for most everyone you meet

This process, we wear it on our skin

Taste it in our accents

Feel it in our chests

Home is a process

And as I write this.....

I can recognize my process in the people my heart holds close. La gente que me ha ayudado a triunfar. Mi gente that has helped me survive in this hostile place. My community that has helped, understood, and loved me throughout this process of shedding, unlearning, redefining, and ultimately recreating an identity that I am proud to hold true. As a first generation college student, as a daughter of undocumented immigrants, having a community on this campus gave me the ganas I needed to succeed on this campus. As I stand here today, I recognize my process, my struggle, my faith, and my love in each and every one of the raza students graduating with me today. Today, we are here for ourselves, for our familias—both chosen and by blood—for our barrios, our hoods, our vast number of comunidades, but today, we are here for each other too. We are here to uplift each other the same way we have for the past couple of years whether we found ourselves organizing alongside each other, supporting one another at fundraisers, or simply sharing a study space. Today, I am here because of you all and vice versa. That's the thing about In Lak'Ech. We are each other. We might be the seeds our ancestors buried in the soil but we are also the light, the sustenance we needed to help each other flourish and thrive in an institution we know was not made for us to do so. I am overwhelmed with pride at how many of us are sitting here, willfully, defiantly rooted in soil meant to bury us alive. Las ganas de vivir, de triunfar, de amar, y de luchar han alimentado nuestros logros. Son los sacrificios, las raices de nuestras familias que nos han brindado fuerza suficiente para florecer mas alla de lo que este sistema educativo habia pensado. We are here in spite of the statistics, the adversity, the odds stacked against us. We are here surviving and thriving, ready to continue reaching towards the sun with the strength we inherited from generations of raza before us. Though this piece of paper we are about to receive will open countless doors for opportunities unimaginable without a college degree, to me, this is the reward—knowing that we made it. As a collective, we made it. So, this graduation, this moment is for mi gente porque sin ustedes, nada de esto seria posible. All of y'all up here with me today, cross that stage knowing that our journey has only begun and that this expensive, EXPENSIVE piece of paper gives us the responsibility to plant more seeds, create more access to the privilege of education we have just reaped the benefits of. Now it's up to us to nurture nuestras raices and continue to lay it down the way only raza can. Congratulations Raza Grad class of 2016, we did it!