

A Student's Reflection on the Fireside Chat with Justices Sotomayor, Guerrero, and Murguia Moderated by Justice Evans

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ABOVE: PEOPLE SWARM OUTSIDE THORNE HALL AT OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE, PHOTO COURTESY OF BEATRIZ P. FLORES

On February 6, 2026, I attended the California Unity Bar fireside chat featuring Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, California Supreme Court Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero, and U.S. Court of Appeals for Ninth Circuit Chief Judge Mary Murguia, moderated by California Supreme Court Associate Justice Kelli Evans.

As an Indigenous, Latina prospective law student, hearing the wisdom of these four women both grounded and galvanized me. As I listened to women who resembled grandmother, aunts, and cousins, I felt

them beckoning me through an open doorway – one that Justice Evans described as no longer merely held open, but taken completely off its hinges by the women sitting before me. As I raptly took in every word they said, from finding purpose, fostering relationships, and redefining norms, I realized that their paths, their struggles, and their experiences had transformed my idea of “the law” from an abstract ambition of wanting to be an attorney to believing that I can go out into the world and do better.



ABOVE: UNITY BAR MEMBERS EXCITEDLY AWAIT JUSTICES TO TAKE THE STAGE
PHOTO COURTESY OF JESSIE MORRIS

For students such as myself, the panel offered guidance on an issue that seems to affect all students eager to begin their careers, that is, the culture of constant acceleration. To this, Justice Murguia advised students that “it’s better to have a compass than a watch,” urging young people to prioritize purpose over speed. Justice Sotomayor echoed this sentiment, reminding students that there is no one path to success and that exploration – especially of the unknown – is not a detour, but a necessary part of education. This advice was particularly important to us students to hear as we enter into a profession that often seems to reward certainty over curiosity.

Another theme that resonated deeply throughout the conversation was the centrality of relationships. Justice Murguia underscored that what ultimately sustains a legal career is not the titles or outcomes, but the people one encounters along the way, including colleagues, and especially opposing counsel. She noted that during

RIGHT: JUSTICE KELLI EVANS (CENTER)
SPEAKING WITH UNITY BAR INTERNS,
PHOTO COURTESY OF BEATRIZ P. FLORES

the judicial vetting process, evaluators are often less interested in how friends describe them and more in how adversaries describe them. The emphasis placed upon relationships reminds students to lead with integrity, respect, and humanity – all of which are essential to legal accomplishment. The jurists underscored that the relationships formed in law school and early practice shape not only careers, but the daily experience of showing up to work with purpose and fulfillment.

The jurists also spoke candidly of the immense pressure, self doubts, and scrutiny that accompany leadership. Justice Guerrero discussed the weight of responsibility inherent in her role and emphasized the importance of preparation, perseverance, and drawing strength from family and community. She, and Justices Sotomayor and Murguia spoke of the pressure unique to being “the first” in their positions. Their openness revealed that pressure is not as an individual burden, but a shared weight, one that reminds them and pushes them to serve justly. Their honesty was incredibly important to hear as it challenges the notion that success in law





ABOVE: BROTHERS JAMES BLANCARTE MABA MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR (LEFT) AND JESSE BLANCARTE MABA PREDSIDENT ELECT (RIGHT), FLANK JUSTICE GUERRERO (CENTER) AT FIRESIDE RECEPTION, PHOTO COURTESY OF BEATRIZ P. FLORES

is paved without fear and uncertainty. These powerful women acknowledged their fears, and instead highlighted resilience, vulnerability, and community as essential components of professional strength.

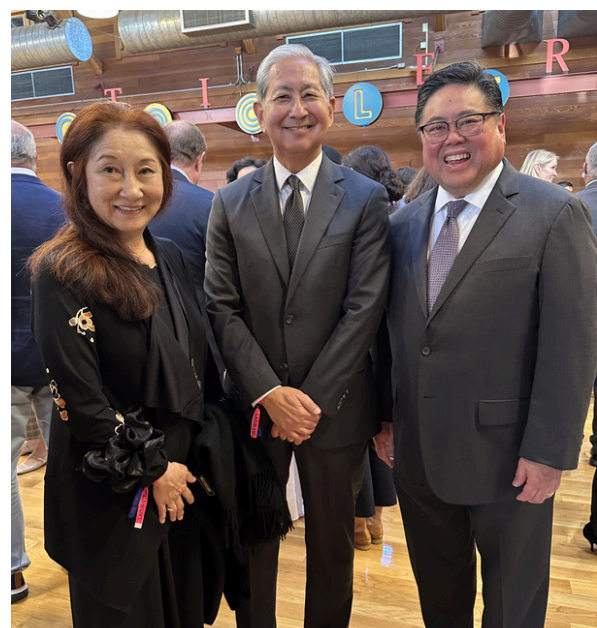
When asked whether Latina women must, to some degree, assimilate into the dominant culture to be successful in the field of law, Justice Sotomayor reframed the question by changing the language itself, making an important, deliberate distinction. She rejected the word assimilation and offered infiltration and integration instead – a powerful shift that reshaped the question, reminding us that our culture, our values, and our backgrounds are important and valuable. Justice Sotomayor’s call to infiltrate and integrate rather than assimilate, will serve as a guide for me and my fellow students as we begin our journeys in the legal profession. We as students of color, as women, and as immigrants, must enter

these spaces boldly, without shrinking ourselves or abandoning our identities. Infiltration and integration means showing up fully and unapologetically, bringing our lived experiences, cultures, and varied perspectives with us. Justice Sotomayor’s final words are seared into my mind, as they affirmed that success does not require similitude rather, it demands courage – the courage to take up space and redefine it from within.

The fireside chat did more than showcase extraordinary jurists; it illuminated a pathway forward for diverse students like me. I left the event with the understanding that the law is not a distant institution reserved for a privileged few, but a living, evolving space that we are equally capable of shaping. The guidance imbued by Justices Sotomayor, Guerrero, Murguia, and Evans affirmed that belonging in this profession is not conditional. It is claimed. And, with a compass in hand, community at my side, and courage at the forefront, I am ready to stride through that door.



BELOW: FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, HARUMI HATA LACUB CO-CHAIR, JABA PRESIDENT GARY TOKUMORI, AND HON. MIKE MADOKORO



THANK YOU TO EVERYONE THAT SENT IN PHOTOS OF THIS EXTRAORDINARY EVENT. ALTHOUGH PHOTOS WITH AND OF JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR WERE PROHIBITED TO INCLUDE, THE SMILES UPON THE FACES OF ALL IN ATTENDANCE SPEAK VOLUMES TO THE GREAT IMPACT OF HER WORDS AND PRESENCE. PHOTOS OF ATTENDEES BELOW COURTESY OF BEATRIZ P. FLORES AND JESSIE MORRIS



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