



VISITING
SCHOLAR
PROGRAM

Natalia Molina



Distinguished Professor in the Department of
American Studies and Ethnicity
University of Southern California

Public Lecture Offerings

A Place at the Nayarit: How a Mexican Restaurant in Los Angeles Nourished Its Community

In 1951, Doña Natalia Barraza opened the Nayarit, a Mexican restaurant in Echo Park, Los Angeles. The Nayarit quickly became a local landmark, popular with both Hollywood stars and restaurant workers from across the city and beloved for its fresh, traditionally prepared Mexican food. As Doña Natalia's granddaughter, the historian Natalia Molina, explains, it was also an urban anchor, a gathering space where ethnic Mexican workers and customers connected with their *patria chica* (their "small country"). This talk, based on Molina's book *A Place at the Nayarit*, traces the community Doña Natalia helped nurture. After immigrating alone from Mexico to L.A., she adopted two children, ran a successful business, and sponsored, housed, and employed dozens of other immigrants, encouraging them to lay claim to a city long characterized by anti-Latinx racism. Molina tells the stories of these restaurant workers as they move from the kitchen and the front of the house across borders and through the decades. Their stories illuminate the many facets of the immigrant experience, including complex networks of family and community, cross-currents of gender and sexuality, the pressures of racism and segregation, and the small but essential pleasures of daily life. This stirring exploration of how racialized minorities create a sense of belonging will resonate with anyone who has felt like an outsider, and had a special place where they felt like an insider.

What We Miss When We Talk About Race

So often when we talk about race, we fail to see how one racial moment connects to others either in the present moment or historically. Though we are increasingly conscious of race and more willing to talk about racial issues, we often do not understand how it operates structurally, or how it came to be historically embedded in our institutions. We are not trained to see the long reach of past racism. And so we miss the ways that racism pervades institutions and surfaces repeatedly in different forms and different contexts shaping everything from how and where we live, work, learn, and play, to how and whether we can accrue assets, manage our health, and sustain a good quality of life. This talk brings together racial issues (anti-blackness, immigration, the trope of a nation of immigrants and our undocumented population, anti-Asian racism and Latinx histories) that are usually studied separately, examining how they inform one another.

Why Pandemics Activate Xenophobia

As the coronavirus spread across the globe, we witnessed the rise of xenophobia, much of it aimed at Asian and Asian Americans, but also Jewish, Latinx, African American, and even LGBTQ populations. I argue that such a virulent response shows the re-activation of entrenched "racial scripts," which once unleashed on one marginalized group can be easily applied to others.

Tell Your Story

When trying to paint a picture of a community, historians rely on documents, using their training to scour official records and the personal papers of people and institutions deemed important enough to have their papers deposited in an archive. How then does one tell the story of a place and a people that have little or no presence in archives—what we might call the "underdocumented"? Where do we find their traces outside official archives? How can we use an archive to tell a story it was not designed to tell? In this talk, Professor Molina shares the strategies that she and other historians have used to tell the stories of the underdocumented.

Classroom Discussion Topics

1. **You're first gen! You made it here! Now what?** When you're first-gen, you have fewer people to turn to when navigating the university and beyond. How do you know which choice is right? Who do you turn to for help? What if your academic path doesn't line up with your family or community's expectations? In our discussion I will share all the ways in which I learned to ask for help; let my curiosity guide me; leaped and hoped the net would appear; and (if it didn't), found ways to start over again.
2. **Q and A with Professor Molina:** Prof. Molina will visit a classroom where the professor has assigned her work and discuss it (them) with the students.
3. **Book Club: *A Place at the Nayarit: How a Mexican Restaurant in Los Angeles Nourished its Community*.** Prof. Molina will visit a classroom and discuss *A Place at the Nayarit* with students. Topics could include community history; family history; oral histories; intersections of ethnic studies, LGBTQ and urban studies; how to tell your neighborhood and/or family history using Storymaps, GIS mapping, and/or walking tours.