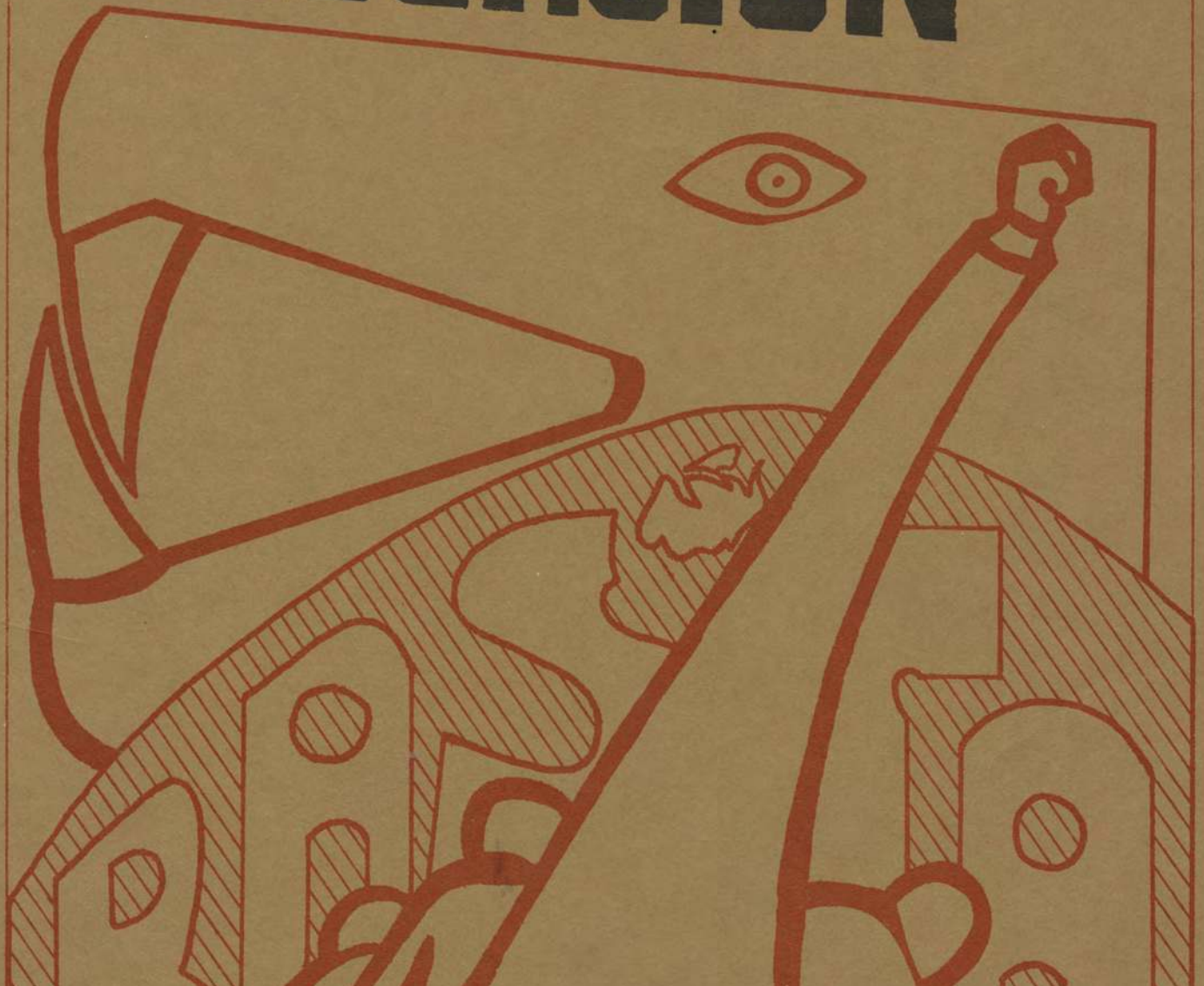


EDUCACION



BUILDING OUR OWN COMMUNITY

50 YEARS OF THE LATINO NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER
FOUNDED BY CHICANO AND AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS IN 1971

FEBRUARY 8 - JUNE 25, 2021

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In 1971, three University of Iowa students (Nancy “Rusty” Barceló, Ruth Pushetonequa, and Antonio Zavala) established what is now the Latino Native American Cultural Center (LNACC) on campus. In 2021, the LNACC is celebrating 50 years of creating community and a home away from home for Latinx and Native American students at the University of Iowa. This exhibition, *Building Our Own Community: 50 Years of the Latino Native American Cultural Center, Founded by Chicano and American Indian Students in 1971*, shares the history of the center in depth. It explores its establishment in the 1970s, campus activism, and the many ways in which the LNACC has supported students over the years.

NOTES FROM THE CURATORS

RACHEL GARZA CARREÓN

When I first arrived at the University of Iowa, many years ago, I had no idea what to expect. I had lived in many different parts of the US and in another country, but never the Midwest. I grew up in the Southside of San Antonio, Texas, in a community that was mainly Mexican American.

I didn't know anything about Iowa and when I thought about where my culture was represented it was always Texas, California, and Chicago. Imagine my surprise and gratefulness when the president of the Latinx Council contacted me within the first week to welcome me to this new and frankly shocking environment.

Through meeting with the group, a new friend would say, "You have to meet so-and-so, they are from Texas too." So, the journey began with me meeting new friends then their friends, who I can now claim are some of the best people I know.

You see, I was lucky. By some weird twist of fate, three of my new friends had been recruited by Rusty Barceló and were finishing up their PhDs and/or working at the university when I arrived here. They told me their stories. They told me about the LNACC over a home-cooked meal. They told me about the protests, the mural, the fiestas, and the powwows in such vivid detail that it made me feel like I had been there.

I eventually met Rusty and it felt like meeting a myth. The stories I heard of the trials and triumphs of Rusty Barceló, Ruth Pushetonequa, and Antonio Zavala seemed like tales from long ago. I thought about the history of the LNACC and couldn't help but be in awe of these three individuals who put it on their shoulders to create a home for not only them but any other Latinx and Native American who happened to come to the UI. They could have easily put their heads down because that's a lot. You're talking about three people in a group who just said, "No, this isn't right. We should do something about it."

It is now 2021 and we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the LNACC. I have researched so much about the LNACC over the years that I feel like it is a part of my history too. I decided that I wanted to do this exhibition because everyone should know this history.

I asked Christopher Ortega to join me on this journey because he was new to the university like I was all those years ago. It has been a pleasure to share these stories with a friend and colleague who has as much of an interest in sharing this information as I do.

I want people to understand that the LNACC is not just a physical building. It stands for something because of its history. To me, it is a landmark. I am proud of this exhibition and hope to someday develop additional methods of telling the many stories that we didn't have room to tell. Until then, welcome to our casa. Thank you for coming, and I hope when you leave you will understand why the LNACC is a home to so many people.

CHRISTOPHER ORTEGA

The spark that led to my working on this exhibit was a tiny 3-word phrase hidden inside of a faded yellow flyer. In that flyer, the students from the then-new Chicano Indian American Cultural Center list what people can expect to see from them throughout the semester. At the end of that list, standing proud and bold, are the words “risa y desmadre.”

The first word of the phrase is easy to translate. “Risa” is laughter. The second word, though, is where the fun of the phrase is. There are many ways to translate it, and most of them aren’t very polite. It’s an idiosyncratic slang word, pointing directly at a certain place, a certain time, a certain type of irreverent joie de vivre.

The fact that the Center chose to introduce itself to campus with this phrase, speaking straight to los que saben, was an eye-opener for me. It made me want to learn more about the Center and its students, and so my involvement with this exhibit began in earnest.

As Rachel and I started to gradually uncover the story of the LNACC, I grew increasingly impressed with the scope of what the founders accomplished. Three strangers bonded over their shared sense of unbelonging and decided to do something about it. With their own hands, they carved out a space where they and those that followed them could feel free to be themselves and be sure that others would understand them. It’s a laudable achievement, and its power reverberates to this day.

My biggest goals for this exhibit are two-fold: to give its viewers the opportunity to better understand these students’ experiences at the university and thereby appreciate the necessity of spaces like the LNACC, and to also celebrate the history and impact of the LNACC here in this community. It’s a storied history, and I hope that by sharing it with everyone I can inspire people to start looking for other such stories both here and wherever else they go.

On the cover: Nahuatzen vol. 2 no. 1, 1973. Latino Native American Cultural Center Records, University Archives.

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