

Great Teacher Award  
February 10, 2010

*Good evening/Buenas Noches. Que placer estar aqui con Uds.* What a privilege it is for me to introduce this year's recipient of the Great Teacher award.

For almost forty years, SALT—the Society of American Law Teachers—has primarily been identified by its commitment to the educational mission of the academy. We are teachers and proudly so. We respect the enterprise, skills, travails, and treasured moments of teaching. We honor the masters among us. This evening we elevate Francisco Valdes into our pantheon of The Greats. In the banquet program you will find statements from Frank's recent students praising him and his teaching, in and out of the classroom.

But in the spirit of what I have learned from Frank, let us stop for a moment and examine why we are here. In doing so I am drawing on insights from a book by James F. English, "The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value" in which he explores what one critic called the "rise of the prize." He also examines the corresponding infrastructure of Awards: the time and other resources that go into selecting winners, the rituals of celebration, and the emotional cargo of the process. Given SALT's mission and goals and the progressive credentials of its members and its awardees: why do we make these awards? How do they reflect our collective ethos? What cultural value circulates with the Great Teacher Award?

With the SALT Awards we have created and are involved in an economy of prestige, but one, I would posit, that is outside of, and often in opposition to, the economies of prestige of the mainstream academy, the profession, and the larger society. What and who is prized is not necessarily who and what is valued in the mainstream, and that is why SALT Awards, and this award, are so important.

There's no question that we choose to honor Frank because he is a teaching virtuoso—he is brilliant at conducting the classroom symphony. We applaud his accomplishments. But, frankly, that is not enough for Greatness. We ask more of our leaders, they must help us remake the world. Frank is a Great Teacher because he has consistently and insistently used his teaching prowess among students and colleagues to change the environments in which law is taught to advance the Rule of Law, the project of anti-subordination, and the ethic of principled dissent. His has been a life dedicated to leaving the legal academy different than he found it. I don't have time to elaborate the many ways that he has altered the conditions under which we progressive legal scholars, LatCrits, RaceCrits, QueerCrits, FemCrits, in SALT and other organizations do our work, but let me mention a couple— With his inspiration, LatCrit has created and maintained an impressive array of programs and projects to generate knowledge, critique power and the powerful, and motivate new generations

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to use law to improve the material conditions of disenfranchised communities and individuals. Under Frank's leadership, LatCrit, with SALT allies, has recruited, mentored and helped tenure a significant cadre of young professors of color with a nuanced understanding of the power and limitations of Law, as refracted through the lens of Outsider jurisprudence. Many of us have survived the hostility of our home institutions, and even thrived, because we joined the community tended to by Frank. He has spent hundreds of hours lugging refreshments, finding appropriate spaces, creating an ambiance, playing host, welcoming all comers to the LatCrit Hospitality Suite. Day in and day out over almost two decades, Frank has taught us how to sustain long term and long distance relationships. We have learned from him that the LatCrit suite and LatCrit parties are best practices for law teachers. This location of intersectional hospitality has been a safe harbor and for many of us our academic home.

This was SALT's original goal: "to change the environment within law schools to encourage the participation and successful incorporation of newcomers into the legal profession, and to advance teaching methodologies that open law teaching to new ideas." Frank, you have met and surpassed that goal.

Let me re-pose the question I asked earlier: What cultural value circulates with the Great Teacher award? The SALT community extends prestige to you for teaching us, in ways large and small, to accept and act on our obligations to truth and Justice. Frank, I am confident that history will agree with SALT's decision that you are a Great Teacher. You are the Greatest Teacher I have ever had. Te felicito.