

On Principle

Thoughts on American Democracy



Hi. My name is Analee Fuentes. I live in Coburg, Oregon, and I've been in Oregon since 1980—oh—'03. I'm an artist and a teacher, and I'm 51 years old.

Well, I grew up in the era of civil rights in the '60's, being very aware of the division in the country of the Vietnam War, watching a president fall from office in a state of disgrace. And feminism was really a part of my own personal experience as I was growing up. I was raised solely by my mother; she raised four girls in poverty. Having that as a context to come from really helped me be more aware of, oh, just social issues and how art and even teaching is a very political act. Many artists that I grew up listening to and that I follow, the core of their work is based in the freedom of expression and the freedom to explore and to try on new things and possibly even to do things that are offensive. I don't think I'm really doing my job as a teacher or an artist if somehow, and although it's not my intention, that I don't raise some hackles somewhere because it's, that's the heart of the arts.

Painting or drawing, making—creating art which is meaningful to me is the best political action I can take. The other one that's very important to me as well, again, is teaching. I think teaching can be an extremely political act. You can instigate critical thinking skills. You can encourage people to, you know, examine themselves and their own beliefs and encourage civic dialogue through this artwork, so it's really a win-win situation when you have people participating in the arts and you have people that care and are invested in their own artwork.

One of the main things that I keep reminding myself year after year, as I sit down at my table and cast my little Oregon vote, is how the women suffragists really worked on this project. I

mean, at the very least, in order to honor our history as women, that is an important part of it for me. So I do it for them as well as my country now. As a Latina I really am curious to see how things play out for us, what kind of progress we make. It's kind of miraculous when you think about things like affirmative action being such a cornerstone of, and for me the real reason I was able to pursue a college degree. And if we're talking about democracy, I think really that diversity is a cornerstone of democracy.

We're trying to get an elementary school named, a new elementary school named after Cesar Chavez, and it was the first school in the state of Oregon to bear his name. And it was phenomenal the resistance at the school board meeting or the reasons that some of these individuals had for not caring—for not voting for this thing. They are much more comfortable and felt much safer voting for oh, other—you know, they can vote for Thomas Jefferson, but for some reason they can't vote, you know, for Cesar Chavez. I think it's a threat and it's also a reminder of diversity and people really have—they just dig their heels in when they feel fearful, which is essentially what I think is the basis of ignorance.

I'm a little bit fearful these days of things like censorship, the Patriot Act, just the secrecy of the administration, seeing women's rights, rights to reproductive issues; I'm fearful. I think we live in a real, a climate right now of real conservatism, and I'm watchful. I'll, you know, I can be moved to activism, I think, if that should come, and I'm just—I'm watchful, I guess, is probably the best word for me, and a little fearful. Yeesh.