



IN MEMORIAM

Lionel Cantú, Jr.
Professor of Sociology
Santa Cruz
1965 — 2002

Lionel Cantú, assistant professor of sociology at the University of California- Santa Cruz, died unexpectedly in Santa Cruz on Sunday, May 26, 2002. The cause of his death was cardiac arrest, following hospitalization for a ruptured lower intestine. In his three short years at UCSC, he became loved so much by so many that his memorial service (in the largest church in Santa Cruz) was “standing room only.” Family, friends and colleagues shared their memories of a young, passionate sociologist who made lasting contributions to sexuality studies, to immigration studies, and to our lives.

Born in San Antonio, Cantú spent his childhood years in Texas. In 1991, he earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and Spanish from the University of Texas- San Antonio. In 1998, he was named University of California- Irvine’s Lauds & Laurels Outstanding Graduate Student. Between 1993 and 1999, he co- chaired the University of California, Irvine’s Lesbian and Gay Faculty/ Staff Network, and he was instrumental in founding the Lilac Collective, a speaker series on sexuality studies. In 1999, he earned his doctorate in social science at UCI with emphases in social relations and feminist studies. The same year, he joined the faculty at UCSC. He also received a University of California President’s Doctoral Fellowship and spent the 1999-2000 year as a University of California, Davis postdoctoral researcher, studying the commodification and globalization of American gay culture.

Among sociologists, Professor Cantú is widely regarded as opening up a new area of research: the impact of sexuality on migration. His dissertation, *Border Crossings: Mexican Men and the Sexuality of Migration*, focused on Mexican men who have sex with men, and how sexual identity changes in different cultural contexts. His other interests included race and ethnicity, and Latinos in the United States.

Prior to his death, Professor Cantú had already generated an impressive list of publications, including “De Ambiente: Queer Tourism and the Shifting Boundaries of Mexican Male Sexualities,” an article in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*; “The Peripheralization of Rural America: A Case Study of Latino Migrants in America’s Heartland,” an article in the journal, *Sociological Perspectives*; and “Responses to Persons with AIDS: Fear of Contagion or Stigma?” an article in the journal, *Applied Social Psychology*. He also contributed entries on “Anti- gay Initiatives and Propositions (U.S. Law)” and “Immigration, U.S.” to *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia* (Garland, 2000).

At the time of his death, Professor Cantú was revising his dissertation for publication and was collaborating with Eithne Lubheid on an edited anthology, *Queer Moves: Sexuality, Migration, and the Contested Boundaries of U.S. Citizenship*, about the queer migrants in the United States and how they have transformed notions of queerness, racialization, migration, and citizenship. He and Patricia Zavella had just submitted a proposal to the National Institutes of Health for a four- year, cross- border study on HIV risk among Mexican migrants. They planned to assess the risks among migrants in the Silicon Valley and Monterey Bay areas, as well as in the regions around Cuernavaca and Guadalajara in Mexico.

Following his death, an interdisciplinary collective of students and faculty formed the Lionel Cantú Working Group, to ensure that the exciting projects he had in progress did not die with him. With Ramon Torrecilha’s help, Nancy Naples and Patricia Zavella secured a grant from the Social Sciences Research Council to fund

these projects. Eithne Lubheid and Alexandra Stern completed revision of Cantú's paper, "Well- Founded Fear," to be published in the volume, *Queer Moves*. With Salvador Vidal- Ortiz, Nancy Naples also completed revision of Cantú's doctoral dissertation, to be published posthumously as a book. Sarita Gaytan coordinated the first and second- year memorials on the anniversary of his death, secured housing for his extensive library at UCSC's Women's Center, and worked with Deborah Abbot to rename UCSC's GLBTI Resource Center as the Lionel Cantú Gay, Lesbian, Queer, Transgender, and Intersex Center. Moreover, donations from far and wide helped Olga Nájara- Ramírez, Patricia Zavella and Craig Reinerman establish the Lionel Cantú Memorial Award, which provides funding for UCSC graduate students doing research in the areas of immigration studies, transnational/ cross- border studies, Latino/ Latina sociology, gender and sexuality, or gay men and masculinity.

Cantú is survived by his life partner, Hernando Molinares, of San Diego; parents Rosario and Lionel Cantú, of San Antonio; sisters Rose Louise and Rachel Diane Cantú, both of San Antonio; and a brother, Charles Cantú, of San Antonio. Cantú is also survived by what Craig Reinerman called "Lionel's Gift," in the week following his death:

People who do not ordinarily go around hugging each other were going around hugging each other. People who do not ordinarily check in with each other about how they're doing or how they're feeling were doing just that. People who never ordinarily hold each other, holding each other.

It seems a bit strange to say that so tragic a loss to our community actually helps to create and sustain that community. But surely this, too, was one of Lionel's gifts...

Candace West