



## 2019 LEADERS FOR A NEW CHICAGO AWARDS IMPACT STATEMENTS

### DIRECTORS

Gloria Castillo  
Chair  
Angelique Power  
President and Board Member  
Cathy J. Cohen  
Rita A. Fry  
Stephanie Field Harris  
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Judith S. Block  
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### MONICA COSBY

#### Leader of participatory defense work, Westside Justice Center

“It made people listen to me. I already had a voice, but the award gave me the power to say no to some things and not have it held against me. There’s a power dynamic in every room, and people with the least power have to say yes.”

Cosby has been broadening her work. She recently met with Cook County commissioners about providing housing for women transitioning from incarceration.

### LUIS GUTIERREZ

#### Founder and CEO, Latinos Progresando

“I’ve never seen anything like this. The recognition for nonprofit leaders who are often overlooked by larger awards is humbling and inspiring.”

Luis Gutierrez said the award enabled him to invest in his own future: “One of the stressful things in this work is that you’re giving your life to building a better community and a better city but not getting paid where we can live the life that we want others to live.”

Investing in oneself is something that his organization, Latinos Progresando, continually urges its members to do.

“There is so much talent in our communities,” Gutierrez said. “We try to make sure people are not stopped from doing what they want to do because they don’t have the opportunity. It’s not a lack of knowledge or skill holding back the community, it’s a lack of opportunity to engage in things that lead them to better their lives.”

### HEATHER MILLER

#### Executive director, the American Indian Center

Heather Miller knew three years ago that the American Indian Center would launch a campaign to rename Columbus Day, Indigenous Peoples’ Day. The award brought recognition and put the project into overdrive.

“The campaign got way more traction, got much bigger and got into a different realm that we weren’t expecting so quickly. It forced us to do a lot more work, to get way more prepared and react quickly and forced us to do things we didn’t realize we needed to do.”

Initially, the plan was to push for a Chicago ordinance. Now with a higher profile, the American Indian Center is seeking buy-in from Cook County and the State of Illinois.



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#### **AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN** **Founder and head of development, OTV Open TV**

After receiving the award, Aymar Jean Christian was invited to be a featured speaker in a Chicago Ideas Week discussion about OTV Open TV and influence.

“I spoke about how, through OTV, we were able to expand our understanding of influence to include the power of the local, specifically Chicago, in the global world and the power of influence behind the scenes,” Christian said. “That influence can be invisible. Over the years, OTV has supported diverse writers and directors you may not have known. But then the indie project we supported them in gave them a much bigger platform, such as Netflix, Showtime and NBC.”

Afterward, Chicago Ideas created a video featuring Christian’s leadership and one of OTV’s late-summer events.

#### **TONIKA JOHNSON** **Community activist and visual artist recognized for her Folded Map Project**

“It allowed me to take a leap and be a full-time artist. I could expand the reach of my project, which uses art to amplify issues that are important for our city to address, especially the issue of racial segregation.”

Johnson set several projects in motion. An exhibition March 19, 2020, will include photos and recorded memories of teenagers in places where they have experienced racial profiling and have been made to feel unwelcome. The exhibition will open in the spring at the UIC’s Puja Gallery, 1344 S. Halsted St.

Johnson is turning her Folded Map Project into a book, working on a Folded Map curriculum for schools, and will publish an activity kit.

“I’ve had 400 people write me to say they are interested in segregation in Chicago,” Johnson said. “The kit will get them to engage in a neighborhood they’ve been told not to go to or one they feel uncomfortable in. It will have activities for them to explore.”

#### **VIVEKA RAY-MAZUMDER** **Co-founder and co-founding collective member, Chicago Desi Youth Rising (CDYR)**

While working to strengthen protections for undocumented and immigrant students in Chicago Public Schools, Viveka Ray-Mazumder found a gap.

“There’s a dearth of legal expertise at the intersection of immigrant rights and education,” said the former manager of youth organizing with Asian Americans Advancing Justice. “We had wonderful lawyers volunteering to help us, but few felt confident navigating the murky, overlapping local, state and federal jurisdictions.”



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With the 2019 *Leaders for a New Chicago Award*, Ray-Mazumder had the support they needed to leave the organization they had helped build over eight years and is now applying for law school to help fill the gap they recognized.

“I can now plan for my future in a way that wasn’t possible before because I was wrapped up in the urgency of doing the work,” said Ray-Mazumder. “I’m now on a path to directly engage the people involved in policy work. Who writes the rules matters.”

#### **ANALIA RODRIGUEZ** **Executive director, Latino Union**

“Time and space are a privilege. If people are worrying about what’s for dinner, their childcare needs and paying the rent, they won’t have the time and the space to think about and address issues of race, immigration and gender equity.”

“At Latino Union, we tell our community, ‘Come in. We’ll feed you and your children and provide childcare so your kids can do homework.’ We give them the time and space to focus on the issues that affect them and develop their leadership qualities. That’s when the magic happens.”

Rodriguez said the *Leaders for a New Chicago Award* is doing for her what Latino Union does for her community: “I’m getting a taste of what our members go through and that’s invaluable.”

She said she is excited to take part in the optional leadership development programming that accompanies the *Leaders for a New Chicago Award* and is eager to pay her experiences forward: “The tools I’m learning will stay with me, and I will be sharing them with others through Latino Union. Doors are opening for me, and I’m going to bring others with me.”

#### **SARAH ROSS** **Co-founder and co-director of exhibitions, Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project**

“I work with people who are great scholars and poets in prisons [The organization brings art and educational programming to persons who are incarcerated.] Because folks are locked away from basic resources, they need a lot: They have no computers; they get only two pens a month; and commissary is expensive. That means more work on our end. Then there’s raising money.”

The no-strings-attached *Leaders for a New Chicago Award* gave Ross and the organization a respite from fundraising and a chance to dream even bigger. “Having this support gives us space to imagine a new kind of cultural project and that has been exciting,” Ross said.

“Hundreds of studies and lots of data detail the causes of incarceration,” Ross added. “What we need is the imagination to create real equity. We need creative models to help us imagine a world without prisons.”



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#### **J. GIBRAN VILLALOBOS**

**Assistant Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago**

“In many ways, I echo what [Field Foundation President] Angelique Power had put forth in the statement about the awards,” said Gibran Villalobos, who for years has been drawing attention for his rethinking of the way museums and communities interact. “We were already leaders but never had the validation of being recognized.”

“The work [the 2019 Leaders] do is so tied to our personal lives, a reflection of our individual networks. Receiving the award validates our networks and how our everyday life plays a part in how we do our work.”



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