

Dear ASA Membership,

Greetings from Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico. I am so honored to be serving as your newly elected Appalachian Studies Association president. If you don't know me personally, I'm a Mexilachian daughter of small-town southern Ohio. I joined the steering committee in 2018 as co-chair of Y'ALL (Young Appalachian Leaders and Learners). I was a graduate student trying to navigate my way through a doctoral program at Ohio State. I've been involved in ASA ever since and now teach at Duke University as assistant professor of Music and Latino/a Studies. I have made many meaningful professional and personal relationships through ASA over the years and our annual conference has become an experience that grounds me each year. I couldn't be more excited to be serving the organization in this new role.

I'd like to extend a huge thank you to everyone who attended and made this year's conference at Tennessee Tech University in Cookeville such a success. I recognize the intense labor that goes into planning such an event. We are lucky to have such an expansive community of people willing to volunteer their time and talents for our annual conference. I hope you all will continue conversations that were initiated, stay in touch with any new connections made, and continue to learn from each other as scholars, teachers, activists, community leaders, and tradition bearers between now and our next meeting.

I could go on about all the amazing things that are happening among our membership that were evidenced at this year's conference (because they are plentiful!). However, it seems more appropriate to share some transparent reflections on the current moment. We are all living in an impossibly difficult time under an extraordinary set of circumstances. Global forces of climate change, mass migration, and political extremism are shaping our everyday lives in unprecedented ways. Within our country, many of the communities we belong to, advocate for, and cherish are under attack, as are the infrastructures that exist to support them. The work of the arts and humanities is in critical danger, with cuts to national entities like NEH and the Smithsonian being announced every day by our federal administration. I think about the larger scale of history that has led us here, of a nation forged by division, erasure, and racial violence. I think about the difficult truth that in many ways our beloved Appalachian region bears the brunt of this history. I feel anger, fear, and heartbreak.

I know many of us are living days when it all just feels like entirely too much, like even our usual glimmers of hope are slipping away. We've reached a point when we might collectively ask why we carry on, and perhaps more importantly, how. I often return to a simple quote from the late Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa: "Do work that matters, *vale la pena*". *Vale la pena*—it's worth it. We may have distinct "whys", but I believe one of the things that tethers us together as an Appalachian Studies community is that our collective "why" is born out of a deep love of, care for, and connection to the place and people of Appalachia. I also believe our "whys" require a constant recommitment to our work in whatever its current manifestation may be. I invite you to join me in a recommitment to these "whys" that I believe are worth it:

Comunidad vale la pena. Community is worth it.

Celebrated Black Appalachian writer bell hooks wrote that “one of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone”. We must recommit to community. Without community we cannot survive. Without community we cannot thrive. Now is a time to lean on our communities. To cherish moments of shared joy and grief in our communities. Now is not the time to give up on community.

Construir puentes vale la pena. Building bridges is worth it.

Relationships are sites of negotiation, growth, and healing. I believe we can hold people accountable when they are wrong while also practicing grace and understanding. Folks doing work to bridge seemingly disparate communities are doing a critical service to move Appalachian studies forward. The folks who do this work are also often the folks who come from these marginalized communities—immigrant communities, Indigenous communities, communities of color, and LGBTQ+ communities. We must recommit to uplifting this work and listening to these vital voices while also not relying on them to do the entirety of this bridge building work for the larger whole. We can commit to entering into this work together.

La siguiente generación vale la pena. The next generation is worth it.

How we care for each other and our planet now is a reflection of how we care for and love future generations. I fear that sometimes we do not take posterity into account as much as we should. We must recommit to learning from the folks in our Appalachian studies community who work with youth. We must recommit to supporting our K-12 educators and university educators alike in a time of such uncertainty.

I invite you all to join me in heeding these calls for recommitment to our work and to each other as an ASA community. Together we can make it through.

With much amor, solidarity, and conviction,

Sophia M. Enriquez
President, Appalachian Studies Association