The Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration presents

A Book Reading and Discussion with Gustavo Arellano

Wednesday, October 7, 2009, 4-6 p.m.
Doheny Memorial Library (DML), Room 233 (Intellectual Commons), University of Southern California

For OC Weekly staff writer Gustavo Arellano, the personal is not only political, but also satirical. In addressing an audience of approximately fifty—primarily students from USC—Arellano focused on the immigrant experience of his parents, as well as his professional achievements, to illustrate that he’s “lived the life of immigrant integration” and “laughter is the best weapon we…have to combat hatred, stereotypes, and racism.”

Arellano, the child of Mexican immigrants—one of whom entered Southern California illegally—said that his popular column “¡Ask a Mexican!” “started as a joke.” In 2004, the editor of the OC Weekly suggested that he write a column ridiculing the misperceptions that White Southern Californians have of Mexicans. “People took it seriously,” Arellano said, “and it took off.”

Now, for Arellano, “¡Ask a Mexican!”—published in book form in 2007—has become a “satirical response to the ‘mainstream media’ portrayal of Latino immigrants.”

“As a child of immigrants, I need to respond to lies, but be funny about it. My job is to expose lies and have fun with them,” Arellano explained.

One of these “lies,” according to Arellano, is that Mexican immigrants as a whole are not assimilating into the U.S., particularly Orange County. Arellano, who grew up in a predominantly Mexican neighborhood in Orange County during the 1980s, offered himself and his siblings as proof that Mexicans are following the same path of “classic assimilation” as previous immigrants.

“Here I am…the oldest of four… I got my Master’s from Chapman, a graduate degree from UCLA – same as one of my siblings. We all speak English. That’s immigrant integration. End of lecture,” Arellano said.

Following his discussion, Arellano signed copies of his books and spoke to students individually.