

# Houston History

VOLUME 9 • NUMBER 1 • FALL 2011

# HOUSTON: NUESTRA HISTORIA



UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**  
CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY



## Letter from Guest Editor Natalie Garza

Two years ago I began conducting interviews for the University of Houston's Oral History of Houston project under the Center for Public History. Ernesto Valdés, the director of the project at the time, asked me to interview people in Magnolia Park, a historic neighborhood on the verge of celebrating its centennial anniversary and populated in large part by Mexican Americans. I am not a native Houstonian, and my only knowledge of Mexican American history in the city came from Arnoldo De León's book, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt*. These interviews served as my introduction to the Mexican American experience in Houston and contributed immeasurably to my personal and educational growth.

Houston is not traditionally associated with a great history of Mexican and Mexican American political activism or deep cultural traditions. However, this history offers a fascinating and inspiring demonstration of the longtime presence of Mexican Americans in Houston; well established cultural traditions that include music, festivals, art, and food; struggles against injustice; differences in approaches between grassroots and well-connected political sectors; and community leadership. The efforts of Mexican Americans continue, and the culture is constantly evolving with the influx of new migrants from throughout Mexico and now various countries in Latin America. It became evident to me while conducting interviews of people in the Mexican American community that the omission of Houston in Mexican American history and the omission of Mexican Americans in Houston history is a disservice to our knowledge base and to the realities of our society.

Many of the interviews I conducted gravitated towards issues of politics in some form or another, and I heard some stories repeated from person to person without prompting them. For example, the Joe Campos Torres case came up repeatedly in interviews. People almost without exception also made note of Ben Reyes with a combined sense of what could have been and a respect for what was accomplished. The major "firsts" achieved by Mexican Americans in Houston politics stood out as another commonality of these recollections: the first Mexican American elected in a citywide campaign (Leonel Castillo, Controller), the first Mexican American Justice of the Peace (Judge Armando Rodriguez), and the first Mexican American police officer (Raul C. Martinez).

The story behind Raul Martinez's entrance into the police academy begins with the exclusion of Mexican Americans from law enforcement based on claims that they did not meet the height requirements. So when community leaders identified a couple of tall Mexicans interested in joining the academy, they pressured city officials to allow them to apply. Raul C. Martinez was one of these young men and stood over six feet tall. This story forms part of the collective memory of Mexican Americans in Houston. It is a story of discrimination and exclusion, but also a source of pride in breaking barriers through cooperative work and deliberateness poured into achieving each of these firsts. The city recently witnessed another first, the election of the first Mexican American Sheriff in Harris County, Adrian Garcia in 2008.

Doing interviews is an incredibly personal and rewarding experience. Through the process, people invite you into their lives and share intimate stories that strung together define their lives

and their roles in society. As a result of the connections made during interviews, people often invited me to events so that I could truly understand the community they described. This is how I came to sit in on a sing-a-long of Mexican classics led by Judge Armando Rodriguez for Mexican and Mexican American seniors at a community center. I also had the privilege of attending an opening brunch for *Fiestas Patrias*, which I discovered included a who's who of Mexican American community leaders and consequently an event where politicians introduced themselves to gain support of Mexican Americans. One summer I received an invitation to Christmas in July at Ripley House that included my first glimpse of Pancho Claus. I went on tours of Ripley House and the Denver Harbor Clinic, gaining an appreciation for the various services offered to the community. As a result of the oral history interviews, I learned about Macario Ramirez's altars created for *Dia de los Muertos* in his store on 19th Street. It is also how I found myself attending two days of bingo with the *abuelitos* group at Our Lady of Guadalupe and a follow-up invitation to have Carmen Ramirez's *nopalitos* at the church breakfast the following Sunday. Together these events along with the personal narratives collected in the interviews create the story of my Mexican American experience in Houston.

During that first summer of doing interviews, Ernesto and I often sat to debrief, which for him involved reminiscing and contextualizing the story. Ernie, as he was known by his friends, was a long-time activist who both witnessed and participated in much of the history I collected. For me, these conversations provided an opportunity to reflect with appreciation on the accomplishments of Houston's Mexican American community past and present and to discuss the complexities of culture, identity, and political maneuvering. Ernesto died in 2010. For him, this issue was a long time coming—as it is for the community reflected in its pages.

**COVER PHOTO:** *Vaquero* by Luis Jimenez, a native Texan and internationally renowned Mexican American sculptor, is located in Moody Park on Fulton. Commissioned by the Art in Public Space Program, the city qualified for matching federal funds if it located the fiberglass sculpture in an area slated for urban redevelopment. After the riots in Moody Park in 1978, this location qualified for the funding by the National Endowment for the Arts and the City of Houston. Installed in 1981, *Vaquero* stirred up controversy over its color scheme and its image. Some argued that it depicted a negative stereotype, while others felt it represented Mexican Americans' contributions to early Texas. It also became a symbolic battleground for political opponents. To assuage the statue's critics, Jimenez came to Houston to assure its residents that *Vaquero* represents a proud heritage of Mexican Americans who made up a third of all cowboys. Likewise, the pose symbolizes the conquering hero on horseback as depicted in statues for centuries.

Jimenez studied at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Texas at El Paso. He taught art and sculpture at the University of Arizona and the University of Houston, where another of his works, *Fiesta Dancers*, will be installed near the intersection of Cullen and Wheeler. He died tragically in 2006 when a section of the sculpture, *Blue Mustang*, created for the Denver airport, fell on him in his studio.

Today, the recently restored *Vaquero* is appreciated for its artistic beauty and its representation of Mexican American heritage in Houston and Texas. A copy of the statue also stands outside the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Photo by Natalie Garza.

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VOLUME 9 • NUMBER 1      FALL 2011

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*Houston History* is published three times a year by the Center for Public History in the History Department at the University of Houston. We welcome manuscripts, interviews, and photographic essays on the history and culture of the Houston region, broadly defined, as well as ideas for topical issues. All correspondence should be sent to:

*Houston History*  
University of Houston  
Center for Public History  
547 Agnes Arnold Hall  
Houston, TX 77204-3007  
(713-743-3123), or emailed to:  
[HoustonHistory@uh.edu](mailto:HoustonHistory@uh.edu).

**POSTMASTER** send address changes to:

University of Houston  
Center for Public History  
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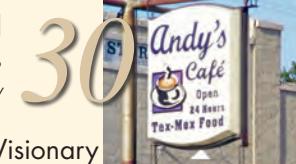
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*Children from the Santa Teresita catechetical center in the Heights, accompanied by catequistas from Our Lady of Guadalupe, Bernadina Gonzales, Porfiria Gonzales (sisters), and Petra Sanchez, circa 1935.*

Photo courtesy of Petra Guillen.

# LA COLONIA MEXICANA: A HISTORY OF MEXICAN AMERICANS IN HOUSTON

By Jesus Jesse Esparza

In 1836, newcomers from the United States along with their Tejano (Texas Mexicans) allies, took up arms against the Mexican government and successfully seceded from that nation.<sup>1</sup> Following the Battle of San Jacinto, which ended the Texas Revolution, Texans (Anglo Texans) ordered Mexican prisoners to clean the swampland on which Houston would be built. Afterwards, most were sent home, but many stayed, creating the starting point of early Mexican settlement in the Houston region.<sup>2</sup>

## COMMUNITY GROWTH & FORMATION, 1900-1930

Between 1836 and 1900, Mexicanos lived on the outskirts of Houston, coming into town mostly to find work. By 1900, they began to settle permanently within the city, occupying a region southeast of downtown called the Second Ward (Segundo Barrio), which quickly became the unofficial hub of their cultural and social life. After the turn of the twentieth century, approximately 1,000 Mexican Americans lived in Houston. Showing tenacity and creativity, they formed a viable community with networks of businesses, organizations, and religious and cultural institutions. By 1910, an estimated 2,000 people of Mexican extraction lived throughout the city.<sup>3</sup>

One of the earliest Mexican American neighborhoods to emerge in Second Ward was *El Alacrán* (the scorpion). Another was Magnolia Park, although it grew farther east along the Houston Ship Channel. North of downtown in the Fifth Ward, Mexican Americans established a residential zone, and about 100 Mexican American families settled in the Heights area. Most of the early Mexican American neighborhoods were poor areas without paved streets, running water, gas, or electric services. These amenities were gradually added after the areas experienced permanent settlement and growth.<sup>4</sup>

Mexican Americans worked in most industries and established a variety of businesses, laying the foundation for a bustling Mexican American economy. Traditionally, they worked as tailors, clerks, cooks, and boot makers, like Feliciano Medel, who helped make Houston a capital of western boot making. Many worked in the oil refineries, on railroad shipyards, or on crews building the Houston Ship Channel.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, a number of Mexican-American-owned businesses emerged throughout the city. Businessmen and businesses included Jose Gomez's sign painting company, Eciquia Castro's café, Francisco Hernandez of the Alamo



Residents of the *El Alacrán* barrio, known originally as Schrimpf's Field, dealt with dilapidated housing conditions following the departure of the area's early German residents.

Photo courtesy of Ripley House, Neighborhood Centers, Inc.

Furniture Company, Jose and Socorro Sarbia of Hispano Americana Book Store, Melesio Gomez of La Consentida café, and La Preferencia Barbershop of Magnolia Park. Mexican Americans also owned and operated various printing shops and produced some of the earliest Spanish language newspapers in town, including *El Anunciador*, *La Tribuna*, *El Tecolote*, and *La Gaceta Mexicana*. Mexican Americans also managed drugstores, restaurants, bakeries, schools, barbershops, ice cream parlors, dry good stores,

*Rusk Settlement House and School provided educational opportunities for Mexican American children in the neighborhood.*

Photo courtesy of Ripley House, Neighborhood Centers, Inc.

and gas stations. They worked in white-collar jobs as bankers, courthouse aids, postal men, lawyers, actors, singers, and as teachers like John Mercado, who taught Spanish at Houston High School.<sup>6</sup>

Mexican Americans established a variety of social, cultural, religious, and political organizations to provide support to the budding communities. El Campo Laurel, considered the first Mexican American organization in town, was established in 1908 and offered services ranging from recreation to insurance. Other self-help organizations included Mutualista Benito Juarez of Magnolia Park and Pasadena's Mutualista Miguel Hidalgo. One of the most influential and business savvy organizations to form during this period was Club Femenino Chapultepec, which was founded by women in 1931 to secure jobs for Mexican Americans in Houston's slowed but steady business sector.<sup>7</sup> All of these early clubs played an important role, at times offering the only protection for a people with few public resources.

Constructed in 1911 in Second Ward, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church is considered the first Mexican American church in Houston and the first religious institution to offer services in Spanish. It provided food and shelter and ran one of the earliest schools for Mexican American children. In the 1920s, the Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church opened and with this second church, Mexican Americans now had multiple institutions to serve their spiritual and personal needs. Established in 1907, the Rusk Settlement House provided food and shelter, helped people apply for residency or citizenship, and provided



kindergarten classes to Mexican American children.<sup>8</sup> The Catholic churches along with the Rusk Settlement House became cornerstones of the Mexican American communities and served as their most identifiable landmarks.

A vibrant Mexican American culture thrived from Houston's earliest days. Mexicanos celebrated holidays (Mexican and American), birthdays, religious ceremonies, and music festivals. Lively musical groups, traveling shows, clubs, and theaters like El Teatro Azteca, one of the earliest Mexican American theaters and the first Spanish language theater in the city, sustained Mexican American culture. Adding to that were clubs and lounges like El Salon Juarez and Teatro, La Cruz Azul Mexicana Theater, and Spanish-speaking vaudeville groups like Los Hermanos Areu.<sup>9</sup> Always a cause celeb and booming form of entertainment were *fiestas patrias* (cultural celebrations) like *diez y seis de septiembre* (the date of Mexico's independence from Spain) put on by cultural clubs such as La Asemblea Mexicana.

Mexican Americans also brought new musical traditions to Houston. Lydia Mendoza, a native Houstonian out of the Heights, gained national attention for her musical talents during the twenties and thirties. Big band orchestras were also popular, especially groups such as La Orquesta Tipica Torres, Los Rancheros Orchestra, and Alonso y sus Rancheros.<sup>10</sup>

Ripe throughout the area were sports clubs and teams made up of Mexican Americans, including El Club Deportivo Azteca, the Houston Soccer Team, and the Mexican Inn Baseball Team. Sports teams like organizations and cultural clubs created solidarity, fostered pride, and helped the different Mexican American communities stabilize and grow.<sup>11</sup>

#### THE DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II, 1930-1945

The 1930s greatly affected the lives of Houston's 14,500 Mexican Americans. Although the city escaped many of the problems experienced elsewhere, attitudes regarding a people believed to be at the root of the Depression ran strong throughout Houston. City officials accused Mexican Americans of draining the economy and began raiding their communities to deport them. Mexican Americans became victims of aggressive discriminatory policies, including segregation and disenfranchisement. Organizations, cultural centers, and entertainment locales either went out of business or were forced to close. Moreover, many federal programs designed to end the Depression were denied to Mexicanos—even those with evidence of citizenship. Those who stayed suffered from an entrenched poverty. So horrific was the economic status of these families that children often dropped out of school to find work, sometimes shining shoes or delivering newspapers to supplement their parents' income.<sup>12</sup>

To help the community cope with the Depression, individuals, groups, and institutions like Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and the Sociedad Mutualista Obrera Mexicana engaged in relief services. In 1932, Bartoleme Casa formed El Club Pro-Repatriacion to try to help his countrymen return to Mexico voluntarily and even purchased a truck to drive people there. Other organizations like the Latin American Club (LAC) tried to dispel anti-Mexican sentiment by convincing whites that Mexican



La Gaceta Mexicana was one of the earliest Mexican American newspapers in the city.

Photo courtesy of Dr. Dorothy Caram.

Americans were interested in assimilating into their culture, in hopes that anti-Mexican feelings along with arrests, roundups, and deportations would cease. Also important in helping Mexican Americans cope were *salones* and dance halls which became spaces for people to escape life's harsh realities. Patrons packed establishments like El Salon Juarez, Bonita Gardens Dance Hall, Club Recreativo Tenochtitlan, and El Salon Hidalgo.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps what protected Mexican Americans the most, though, was an intense socio-political maturation that had been developing since the early 1900s. During this time, Mexican Americans saw the development of a middle class, a shift in identity from temporary Mexican migrant to permanent American of Mexican descent, and a trend among organizations away from mutual aid societies toward civil rights activist groups. Considered a defining moment in the campaign for civil rights, in 1929 Mexican Americans formed the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), one of the earliest national organizations to challenge discrimination against them.<sup>14</sup> LULAC, like other groups, assisted families during the Depression.

With the Depression slowing, families stabilized as forced deportations declined. Moreover, Mexican Americans began finding jobs again and opening businesses, like Melchor Cantu's Rio Rico Grocery and Market or Felix's Restaurant, named after founder Felix Tijerina. Responding to Houston officials' refusal to allow Mexicans

to be buried in cemeteries within the city limits, Felix H. Morales and his wife, Angelina, established the Morales Funeral Home to provide community members with this important service.<sup>15</sup>

What really improved conditions for Mexican Americans, however, was the outbreak of war in Europe. As the United States drew closer to joining the war, scapegoating of Mexican Americans became a non-issue as many of them served in all branches of the military. The city's first war casualty was a Mexican American, Joe Padilla, a Navy recruit killed in the South Pacific. Some 300,000 Mexican Americans enlisted. After the war, they won the most Medals of Honor of any ethno-racial group. For Mexican American Houstonians, no other World War II soldier generated more pride than Sergeant Macario Garcia, who received the Medal of Honor in 1945. Other Houston soldiers included Leon Eguia; the Zepeda brothers, Roberto, Daniel, Elias, and Isaac; Saragosa Garcia; Felicitas Cerda; Alfred Hernandez; Ernest Eguia; and Robert Ramon to name a few. Mexican American women played their part by forming groups like the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and worked in warehouses, factories, mills, canneries, and service industries to sustain the economy and contribute to the war effort.<sup>16</sup>

### POST-WAR HOUSTON, 1945-1960

Following World War II, the city witnessed an economic boom. Technological advances and the need for petrochemicals during the war allowed Houston to become a global trader. This boom attracted more Mexican Americans and resulted in an explosion of new businesses like Felix Morales' KLVL, Houston's first Spanish language radio station. The Mexican American community also saw an expanding middle class and the ability to fight discrimination through new civil rights groups such as the LULAC Council #60, its women's auxiliary Ladies LULAC Council #22, and the American G.I. Forum, a group composed exclusively of Mexican American veterans.<sup>17</sup>

These organizations confronted inequity in different ways. LULAC, for example, launched the "Little Schools of the 400" program, which instructed children in 400 basic English words to prevent them from struggling in first or second grades. The G.I. Forum, on the other hand, promoted higher education through the G.I. Bill, which provided opportunities for returning servicemen and women. These and other organizations also attacked segregation and forced integration of Houston's schools, parks, public facilities, and city agencies like the Houston Police Department, which swore in Raul C. Martinez as its first Mexican American uniformed officer.<sup>18</sup> Although far from being fully integrated into American society, Mexican Americans made significant inroads and fervently pushed the envelope during the post-war period—a precursor to the heightened activism the community would witness in the coming decades.

### CIVIL RIGHTS HOUSTON, 1960-1980

By the 1960s, Mexican Americans were engaging in more forceful activism as they underwent a militant transformation that asked them to abandon self-identifying terms like Latin or Mexican American, and to adopt instead terms



John F. Kennedy at the Rice Hotel on November 21, 1963, the day before he died. He was invited by LULAC to meet with members of the Mexican American community, which had an active Viva Kennedy Club to re-elect the president. Lyndon B. Johnson is behind Kennedy, and to the right of Johnson is Raul Martinez, Houston's first Mexican American police officer.

Photo courtesy of Benny Martinez.

like Chicano. For them, Chicano was something new, bold, and more confrontational toward securing change. Although viewed as a young people's crusade, the Chicano Movement included anyone willing to effect positive change for Mexican Americans. Women also espoused emboldened attitudes. In 1971, they hosted *La Conferencia de Mujeres por la Raza*, the first conference of its kind where Chicanas called for their liberation and demanded equal treatment from both the larger society and Mexican American men.<sup>19</sup>

One of the city's most militant activist groups was the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), which spearheaded numerous boycotts using confrontational tactics against the school districts, police brutality, and



Businessman and community activist, Felix Tijerina, accepts a check for the School of 400 from an unknown benefactor.

Photo courtesy of Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

the Vietnam War. Another militant organization was the Mexican American Education Council (MAEC), which took on HISD in 1971 and encouraged parents to strike in response to a proposed court-ordered plan that desegregated the district by merging only brown and black students, effectively exempting white schools. This particular boycott united numerous Mexican American organizations, including MAYO and LULAC with help from the Houston Catholic Church and a cadre of community activists unaffiliated with any group.<sup>20</sup>

After the turn of the twentieth century, Mexican Americans fought for access to schools and admittance into institutions of higher learning. In the late 1920s, for example, they helped Estella Gomez enroll in the all-white Sam Houston High School. In 1929, she became the first Mexican American to graduate from Houston's public schools. Francisco Chairez was the first Houston Mexican American to graduate from college, attaining his degree from Rice Institute in 1928. By the seventies, Mexican Americans formed their own schools, like Hispanic International University founded in 1970. In 1979, they established the George I. Sanchez School, an alternative school dedicated to ensuring Mexican American youth excelled in school and graduated.<sup>21</sup> Early on, Mexican Americans made education a top priority and effectively used a variety of methods to make it available to their children.

During this period, the Mexican American middle class expanded and became a serious economic and political force. Partly responsible for the growth was Operation SER/Jobs for Progress launched in 1965 to increase Mexican American employment. More than simply providing jobs, this program also increased the purchasing power of Mexican Americans and allowed them to become significant donors to political campaigns. They actively campaigned for Henry B. Gonzales and John F. Kennedy, among others. One of the most influential political groups in the city was the Houston Civic Action Committee (CAC), which organized the Viva Kennedy Clubs and came to play a major role in the election of JFK. Changing its name to

the Political Association of Spanish-speaking Organizations (PASO), this group continued to politicize Mexican Americans. In 1968, PASO opened a voter registration headquarters in Houston and was so successful in registering Mexican Americans that they successfully elected Ben T. Reyes as a state representative, Leonel Castillo as city controller, and Armando Rodriguez as municipal judge. By 1974, Mexican Americans formed their own political party, La Raza Unida Party (LRUP). As the eighties approached, political activism continued steadily forward as evidenced by the creation of the Harris County Hispanic Caucus and the Mexican American Hispanic Advisory Council that sought to address the political problems faced by Houston's Mexican Americans.<sup>22</sup>

A protest against the Houston Police Department for their wrongful beating and death of war veteran Joe Campos Torres in 1977 rallied local Chicanos like never before. From the trial that ensued, officers involved in the incident were sentenced to serve one year in prison for felony misdemeanor and ten years for violating Torres's constitutional rights; however, the judge suspended those sentences and gave the officers five years' probation. This angered Mexican Americans and set the stage for massive boycotts. Under the leadership of Houston's People United to Fight Police Brutality, people protested outside HPD headquarters. When their demands fell on deaf ears, they took to the streets. One year later the community, still angered by the lack of justice, partook in a community insurrection at Moody Park, where they overturned police vehicles, destroyed property, and shouted slogans like "Get the Pigs!" and "Justice for Joe Torres!"<sup>23</sup>

Many of the organizations of earlier decades, however, still fought to secure Mexican American rights. LULAC and the American G.I. Forum along with new organizations like Ripley House, founded in 1970 by Felix Fraga, fought against discrimination, poverty, and injustice. To keep the community abreast of daily news and to help popularize Chicanismo (Mexican American nationalism), Chicanos used various newspapers like *Papel Chicano* founded in 1970

by Johnny Almendarez, Carlos Calbillo, and Leo Tanguma, to name a few. Headquartered in Magnolia Park, the paper took a militant stance reporting on grassroots activism, protests, and demonstrations, as well as criticizing politicians they felt failed to serve the people.<sup>24</sup> By the 1980s, Mexican Americans were becoming a part of the mainstream as many now lived outside the old Mexican American barrios and no longer used radical methods to bring about change.



Following the beating and death of war veteran Joe Campos Torres at the hands of police and the subsequent suspended sentence handed down, Mexican Americans took to the streets to demonstrate against police brutality.

Photo courtesy of Jesus Cantu Medel.



This is one segment of the Canal Street mural that was created by Leo Tanguma. Approximately 240 feet in length, the mural is Houston's best-known example of Chicano / Latino / Mexicano public art and an important statement about the struggles faced by Mexican Americans.

Photo by Natalie Garza.

### A NEW CITY, 1980-2000

At the close of the twentieth century, Mexican American communities continued to flourish and impact the city in profound ways. Mexican Americans still engaged in political activism, ran businesses, and finally broke into Houston's news media scene with reporter Elma Barrera and anchor Sylvan Rodriguez. Houston also saw an influx in Latino newcomers who brought specialized skills to the city from various Spanish-speaking countries.<sup>25</sup>

Political activism flourished as community members successfully campaigned and elected their own to important positions, like Judge Sylvia Garcia, head of Houston's municipal courts, and Augustina Reyes, a trustee for HISD. Unlike previous years, Mexican Americans during these decades had more candidates from which to choose. In 1988, for example, Al Luna ran against Raul Martinez for state representative, and John Castillo opposed Victor Treviño for constable of Precinct 6.<sup>26</sup>

Houston saw an explosion of Mexican American art. The mural on Canal Street in Second Ward, although an extension of the artistic expressions of the seventies, is perhaps the best-known example of public art. Approximately 240 feet long, this mural serves as a source of pride and is considered an important artistic statement of Mexican American struggles. Another popular example of Mexican American public art is the sculpture *Vaquero* by Luis Jimenez, located in Moody Park.<sup>27</sup>

Theatrical companies like Teatro Con Ganas and organizations like Talento Bilingüe de Houston kept cultural expressions thriving as did music festivals; folkloric associations like the Guatemalan Folkloric Association or the Ballet Folklorico Bellas Artes de Houston, and contemporary musical groups like Grupo Valentino. Other things

that kept cultural expressions alive were clubs such as Latin Attractions, a Northside low riding organization, and trail riders groups like Los Vaqueros, which participated in the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.<sup>28</sup> These kinds of cultural groups have maintained a presence in Houston since Mexican Americans first established them here and show no signs of slowing down.

The natural birth rates of Mexican Americans and the influx of Spanish-speaking newcomers from Latin American countries contributed to Houston's ranking second among U.S. cities in the number of Latino residents. By the mid-1980s, 500,000 Latinos called the metropolitan area home. Countless arrivals from Latin America are undocumented, and as a result many live in Houston's poorest sections where they endure a lack of running water, scarce food, exhausting work hours, and zero health benefits. Service organizations dedicated to improving their way of life have since emerged throughout the city, such as Casa Juan Diego, a grassroots social service agency for Central American refugees; the Chicano Family of Magnolia Park, which provides services for undocumented workers; and health facilities like Clinica Azteca and Casa de Amigos Health Clinic. In the mid-1980s, things improved slightly because many of the undocumented qualified for protection under an amnesty bill, but for most, extreme poverty remained the norm.<sup>29</sup>

### HOUSTON IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY, 2000-2011

At present, Houston is the fourth largest city in the country and is home to approximately one million Latinos. Since 2000, it has become the most popular destination for Latino immigration in Texas. Although most newcomers still arrive from Mexico, many also now come from other Latin American countries. With this increase in population, the

recent battle over redistricting the city is the most pressing political issue for Mexican Americans and Latinos. They have challenged the plan proposed by Republican legislators, arguing that it dilutes the Latino vote and violates the federal Voting Rights Act.<sup>30</sup> Latino immigrants have transformed the social geography of Houston, as many have not followed the residential patterns of Mexican Americans but have settled in areas along Loop 610, near Bellaire and Chimney Rock, as well as in Spring Branch, Alief, and Aldine.

Perhaps the greatest contribution these new Americans have made to Houston is to establish and maintain a robust Latin American business sector. Throughout the city, large numbers of Latino-owned businesses can be found—from banks like *Banco Popular*, to *carnicerias* and *taquerias*, like Mondongos, to multi-million dollar businesses such as La Espiga De Oro Tortilla Factory.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, other business leaders, seeing the potentially lucrative Latino market, launched enterprises to cater to its needs, including Fiesta Mart, El Mercado, and Plaza of the Americas. They have partnered with Latinos to introduce a professional futbol (soccer) team, the Houston Dynamo. The Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce recently emerged as a major powerhouse with more than 4,000 member businesses.<sup>32</sup> From small mom-and-pop businesses like Taqueria El Jalisco to major global corporations such as Goya, these businesses keep Houston's economy thriving.

Guadalupana dancers perform in the Fiestas Patrias parade, 2011.



The debate over immigration has always been controversial, but following September 11, 2001, securing the borders took on a different meaning as xenophobia, nativism, and fear coupled with national security dictated the conversation. A strong anti-immigrant sentiment has gained momentum since that time.

Many Americans have come to support punitive laws like SB 1070 to reduce the number of Latino immigrants who they believe drain the economy. But immigrants generate millions for the U.S. economy and contribute millions more to their homelands by way of remittances. They work hard, sometimes multiple jobs. Daniel Galvan, for example, has gone back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. since 1952 working as a field laborer, baker, custodian, and kitchen helper.<sup>33</sup> Immigrants love their families, respect the law (at least the fair ones), have a sense of community, and sacrifice everything so their kids and grandkids can live a better life. They go to church, pay their taxes, donate to the needy, and apply for legal residency and/or citizenship. They are politically conscious, socially moral, business savvy, and patriotic to the United States. In spite of the controversy that surrounds them, Latino immigrants, like Mexican Americans, move forward, positively impacting the city in profound ways. ☩

**Jesus Jesse Esparza** is a visiting assistant professor of history at Texas Southern University.

Photo by Natalie Garza.

# *Trailblazers in Houston's East End: The Impact of Ripley House and the Settlement Association on Houston's Hispanic Population*

*By Thomas McWhorter*



*At an annual rate of \$600, the Houston Settlement Association secured the Settegast Home in 1909, serving as a landmark of the community, and offering recreation and entertainment.*

All photos courtesy of Ripley House, Neighborhood Centers, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

The turn of the twentieth century marked a period of accelerated population growth for Houston, and Houston's Second Ward followed suit. The people who moved to Houston came from a wide array of countries and from other states. Many of these people settled into the aging housing stock located in the Second Ward. The more well-to-do and better established families began to migrate away from the city center and toward the newly developed street car suburbs south and west of town like Montrose, the South End, and the Heights, named for their locations on early street car routes.<sup>1</sup>

The influx of new Houstonians came during the city's infancy, and few, if any, social welfare programs existed. In February 1907, a group of twelve influential and civic-minded Houston women met at the home of James A. Baker under the leadership of his wife, Alice Graham Baker (grandmother to future Secretary of State James A. Baker III).<sup>2</sup> They wanted to form a "Settlement Association" based on the national settlement house movement. The U.S. movement was modeled after London's Toynbee Hall, es-

tablished in East London in 1884 by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett. Located in one of the poorest, most crime ridden, and underserved areas in London, Toynbee Hall sought to "bring the most privileged—the future elite—to live in the poorest area of London, a privilege for which they had to pay." The experience gained would, in turn, help to educate the country's future leaders about the need for social change.<sup>3</sup> This same notion of public service inspired those twelve Houston women more than one hundred years ago.

During the late 1880s and 1890s, other major American cities witnessed the successful implementation of settlement houses, including Hull House in Chicago, South End House in Boston, and the Neighborhood Guild in New York's Lower East Side. Using these models, and to a certain extent following the model of Toynbee Hall, the Houston Settlement Association engaged and involved Houston's social elite in one of the city's most underserved neighborhoods. The Settlement Association aimed to extend "educational, industrial, social, and friendly aid to all those within our reach."<sup>4</sup>

The organizers believed that the citizens they served should also take an active role in working towards their own betterment. This resulted in the formation of the Second Ward Citizen's Club and the Second Ward Women's Club. These clubs sought to uplift the neighborhood both morally and physically, and to raise money to help support the work of the Settlement Association.<sup>5</sup>

In 1908, the Settlement Association began operating the Rusk Settlement in a small cottage formerly used as a kindergarten by the Women's Club. By 1909, the programs as well as the number of people served by the Settlement Association had outgrown the small building. To expand its operations, it rented the former Settegast Home, located at Gable and Maple Streets in the old Frost Town area. The rambling, old two-story structure would house the workers on the second floor and provide rooms for club meetings, pool tables, and a dispensary with a full-time nurse on the first floor. The original Rusk Settlement building was moved onto the same property as the former Settegast Home and both facilities came to share the grounds with the new Rusk public school, operated by the school board.<sup>6</sup> During the early years of the Rusk Settlement, a large number of the area residents came from Russia, Ireland, Germany, and twelve other countries in addition to the native-born African American and Anglo population. In the 1910 census, only fifty people from the Second Ward listed Mexico as their birthplace, but this soon changed.<sup>7</sup>



In the early twentieth century, Houston's Second Ward was a melting pot of immigrants. Here, Hispanic and Anglo American children pose with their Easter baskets on the steps of Rusk Settlement House in the 1920s.

The year 1910 marked the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, a decade-long power struggle that engulfed much of Mexico. The revolutionaries sought to overthrow long-time Mexican leader Porfirio Díaz, who had supported the wealthy ruling elite and put in place onerous land ownership policies. This caused already poor conditions to worsen for Mexico's vast lower class. The political, economic, and social situation deteriorated as different factions struggled for control and used private armies to wage war. Eventually, the situation led to general civil war and the exodus of many Mexican people.<sup>8</sup>

With this extreme strife in their homeland, many Mexicans looked to the United States for escape. Houston presented an attractive alternative, having recently become the region's premier center for commerce following the 1900 hurricane in Galveston. The combination of a new deep-water port, expanding railroads, and discovery of oil in southeast Texas provided new job opportunities unrivaled in other American cities. As a result, Houston attracted large numbers of Mexican immigrants who settled in Houston's East End, especially in the Second Ward, in the area surrounding the Rusk Settlement and in the Frost Town area.

By the early 1920s, the area surrounding the Rusk Settlement had a significant Hispanic presence. The old Frost Town neighborhood nearby became known as, "*E/ Barrio El Alacrán*," or "the Scorpion Neighborhood."<sup>9</sup>



*Participants in a U.S. Citizenship class conducted in Spanish meet at Rusk Settlement. Neighborhood Centers, Inc.'s Felix Fraga is proud his parents were in attendance. His mother is seated second from the left and his father is standing fourth on the right.*

One of the most underserved neighborhoods in the city, El Barrio El Alacrán's housing stock was so deteriorated and its infrastructure so poor, that many considered it one of the most blighted areas of Houston.<sup>10</sup>

A 1919 report of the Settlement Association noted the rise in the Hispanic population of the area. The board of the Rusk Settlement determined that classes in English literacy for both adults and children represented one of the most crucial services it needed to offer. The Settlement Association also set about the creation of a job placement program and expanded its daycare services. The most intriguing facet of the Settlement's work at this time was the many hundreds of "Consultations" logged in the official Rusk Settlement records, which appear to be early examples of casework in Houston.<sup>11</sup>

Rusk Settlement served the newly arrived Mexican community in other capacities as well. The Settlement organized groups of "Attendance Officers" to visit the homes of pupils who had ceased attending school. Rusk Settlement formed multiple all-Mexican Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops. It also offered free shower facilities to those pupils and residents who did not have running water or sanitary service in their homes.<sup>12</sup> The lack of such fundamental services demonstrated a common problem in the area at the time. Felix Fraga, a Mexican American area resident and driving force behind Rusk Settlement and Ripley House, remembered, "One time we lived in a tenement house. It was jokingly called Rice Hotel because Rice Hotel was THE prime hotel back then in those days. And that [tenement] didn't have indoor plumbing. We had water for the sink, but no indoor restrooms."<sup>13</sup>

In 1940, a different kind of social welfare center opened up in the East End that served as an early model for com-

munity centers to follow—The Ripley House, built approximately one half mile east of the Rusk Settlement. Houston philanthropists Daniel and Edith Ripley left an endowment to construct a building that would benefit the women and children of Houston. The Ripley Foundation had searched for just the right partnership, which they found in the Settlement Association. As part of the agreement, the Ripley Foundation constructed the new facility, which then became the new headquarters for the Settlement Association. The Rusk Settlement continued to operate, however.<sup>14</sup>

In 1940, older and more established Anglo families inhabited the section of the Second Ward where the new Ripley House would be built, and some did not appreciate the news of the center coming to their neighborhood. Fraga explained, "When they announced in the paper that it [Ripley House] was going to get built, a facility for the underprivileged people of Houston, the people that lived in that neighborhood that were all Anglo protested to say that they were not poor or underprivileged. They came and picketed when the building was being built, but they went ahead and built it."<sup>15</sup>

The Ripley Foundation hired notable Houston Architect Maurice Sullivan to design the new building. In preparation for the commission, he toured existing settlement houses on the East Coast. The programming for the new Ripley House included a diagnostic clinic complete with exam rooms and x-ray machines, game and club rooms, a kindergarten and a nursery school, space dedicated to the arts, an auditorium, and a gymnasium. Ripley House became a state-of-the-art facility with a low-cost membership fee of \$2 per year for the entire family. The building was dedicated in March 1940 to great fanfare and a crowd of 2,500 people.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the facility's state-of-the-art design and generous

endowment, the early years of Ripley House were not easy ones. The first director was replaced after a couple of years by Franklin Harbach who ran Ripley House for approximately forty years. He started out with unexpected challenges—like making the center appear viable to outsiders. Felix Fraga recalled, “One of the things that he had to do in the beginning was to get all the staff to park in front of the building so it would look like it was being used.”<sup>17</sup>

The Ripley Foundation brought Harbach to Houston from New York in 1943. He had served as director of the Henry Street Settlement House in the Lower East Side.<sup>18</sup> According to Fraga, “This Director, Mr. Harbach, he was a guy that could see way ahead and he already noted that the segregation here was real strict. There wasn’t a Hispanic family that could come to Ripley House or that would feel welcome. I guess they figured they would keep Rusk Settlement for Mexican families and Ripley House would be for the Anglos.”<sup>19</sup> Physically, Ripley House was located a short distance from the Rusk Settlement and the surrounding Mexican American community, but symbolically, it was located far away in an all-white part of the neighborhood where Mexican Americans were discouraged from going for any reason.

Harbach knew that integrating Ripley House into the neighborhood would be a difficult task. In 1954, Felix Fraga, having already worked at Rusk Settlement since 1946, was invited to do his social work fieldwork at Ripley House. At that time, Fraga recalled, no other Hispanics attended or worked at Ripley House.

*My having to do fieldwork there, I think, was part of the plan. I remember that I had Anglo kids that I was supposed to supervise on the playground . . . One kid said, “You know I like this man. He can speak Spanish.” I used to just give them a few words in Spanish. Buenos días and gracias and how to count just to make conversation with them. For this kid it was something admirable in a person. . . . In the early ‘50s, Mr. Harbach started this program of bringing workers from South America, social workers. It was good to train the social workers from South America, but also he wanted to show the Anglo people in the Ripley area that Hispanics were also educated people and professional people.*<sup>20</sup>

By the late 1950s and 1960s, the patrons of Ripley House became increasingly Hispanic as the neighborhood around it became predominantly Mexican American. The Rusk Settlement eventually moved to a new building alongside the settlement’s daycare facilities located at St. Charles Street and Canal in 1951; but the impact of the Rusk Settlement on the immediate neighborhood and the city had begun to diminish. Many of the families that had attended Rusk Settlement moved farther east to the Houston Ship Channel area and to Magnolia Park. New settlement houses were established such as Hester House in Fifth Ward, Clayton Homes in the old Alacrán neighborhood, and the South Houston, Pasadena, and La Porte Settlement Houses.<sup>21</sup> The eventual demise of the Rusk Settlement was a testament to the success of the Houston Settlement Association’s mission as it had spread the word and the services to many areas of Houston.



*The gift from Daniel and Edith Ripley establishing Ripley House continues to serve the Second Ward community. Likewise, Felix Fraga's legacy continues at Neighborhood Centers through his son Bolivar "Bo" Fraga, who is the Ripley House Community Developer.*

Photo courtesy of Bolivar Fraga.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Ripley House became the hub for many important social issues. Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, passed by Congress as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, was a social welfare program intended to improve the lives of the impoverished through healthcare and education. In Houston, Ripley House became one of its primary organizational centers. The War on Poverty included the Head Start program to address the problems associated with early childhood development among economically disadvantaged children. Ripley House accommodated a Head Start program for the East End community.

In the early 1970s, Ripley House found itself again at the center of another important social issue. The mandatory



*Today, hundreds of residents from Houston's East End walk through the doors of Ripley House Neighborhood Center where they can access education, financial, wellness, and community-engagement opportunities.*



*More than 1,000 Neighborhood Centers' staff members connect with 250,000 men, women, and children in the Texas Gulf Coast through events and services provided to neighbors in their communities. The annual holiday celebration is one of the most cherished and long-held traditions.*



*Ripley House Neighborhood Center keeps Houston's East End a place rich with cultural connections and often presents art exhibits and visual-arts performances like this Folklórico dance performed by some of the children at Ripley House Neighborhood Center.*

integration of public schools in Houston caused tensions between the Mexican American community and the Houston School District. HISD had made little progress over the preceding years to integrate by its mandatory deadline in 1970. As a last minute effort, school officials counted Hispanics as Anglo to meet the federal requirements for integration. This resulted in the busing of Hispanic school children to predominantly African American schools. Many angry Hispanics boycotted Houston public schools and used

Ripley House as a staging ground for their protests. Ripley was again used for public meetings during the infamous Joe Campos Torres murder case in 1977.

Today, Ripley House carries on the tradition and intent of the original Houston Settlement Association from a new state-of-the-art facility constructed on the Ripley House grounds in 2001. Neighborhood Centers, Inc., the successor to the Houston Settlement Association, operates a wide array of programs at its various locations throughout Houston. These include a credit union for the segment of society that does not or cannot form a traditional relationship with a bank, and the fostering of entrepreneurship through small business development. The organization continues to offer immigration and citizenship assistance, family health and education services, as well as youth and seniors programs. The center collaborates with other organizations like Houston Volunteer Lawyers, Mental Health Mental Retardation Authority, the City of Houston Anti-Gang Office, and Texas Children's Pediatrics Associates to name a few.<sup>22</sup> Above all, Ripley House remains a steadfast neighborhood partner in the heart of Houston's East End, fulfilling its vision to help individuals and communities live up to their full potential. ☾

**Thomas McWhorter** is a native Houstonian and fifth-generation Harris County resident. He has had a lifelong passion for history, which began at age nine with his membership in the Houston Archaeological Society. His professional background is in archaeology and historic preservation where he has worked in both the public and private sectors. He is currently a senior historic planner in the City of Houston's Office of Historic Preservation.

# The “Mother Church” of Mexican Catholicism in Houston *By Natalie Garza*



*The shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe is located in the courtyard of the church and school grounds. It depicts the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego atop Mount Tepeyac in Mexico.*

Photo by Natalie Garza.

## Church Institutional History

On August 18, 1912, a priest celebrated the first mass at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Houston's Second Ward on the second floor of a two-story wood-frame structure located on the corner of what was then Marsh and Runnels Streets. Three weeks later, on September 8, 1912, the school at Our Lady of Guadalupe opened on the first floor of the same building. These events marked the beginning of the Catholic Church's mission to the Spanish-speaking community of Houston. Bishop Nicholas Gallagher of the Galveston diocese entrusted the Oblates of Mary Immaculate with the task of ministering to the Mexican and Mexican American community in Houston because priests from this order were "known to have the spirit and the tradition of working in the most difficult mis-

sions."<sup>1</sup> Upon their arrival in 1911, the Oblates first settled in the Magnolia Park neighborhood where they formed a church named Immaculate Conception. This Church served as the home base for the Oblates, but was not a Mexican national church.

Ethnic Mexicans who chose to attend mass at Immaculate Conception faced the same discrimination confronted at every other Anglo Catholic Church in the city at the time. Mexicans were either forced to sit in the back pews of the church or refused entry with signs warning, "Mexicans prohibited."<sup>2</sup> Parishioner of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Carmen Ramirez was one of eight children who grew up in the Sixth Ward on Sawyer Street near St. Joseph's Catholic Church. Her family walked to Our Lady of Guadalupe every Sunday because as she recalled,

*In the past San Jose [St. Joseph's] didn't welcome Mexicans ... me and the other girls from the neighborhood would go to church [during the week] and they would ask, 'Why don't you go to your church?', a Mexican church ... We sat in the very back along with a black gentleman ... And one time, my mother wanted to put my brother in school [at St. Joseph's] but they didn't allow Mexicans in the school either. The nun closed the door on my mom ... They didn't want Mexicans in the school, nor did they want us at mass. And look now, it's very different, isn't it?<sup>2</sup>*

The institutional Church responded to this segregation by setting up Mexican national churches “so as not to offend Anglos accustomed to separation of the races.”<sup>4</sup> For this reason, as the Oblate priests organized the church and school at Immaculate Conception, four miles away in the Second Ward they were simultaneously establishing the church and school of Our Lady of Guadalupe to serve the ethnic Mexican population.

For most of the nineteenth century, the Mexican population in Houston remained very small. In 1910, only about two thousand ethnic Mexicans lived in Houston, but the population grew quickly following the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920).<sup>5</sup> The first concentrated settlement of ethnic Mexicans in Houston was in “el Segundo” barrio or Second Ward. Subsequent populations of Mexicans began to settle where employment opportunities became available in Magnolia Park, the Northside (Fifth Ward), the Sixth and First Wards.<sup>6</sup> For this burgeoning community, Our Lady of Guadalupe served as the only Catholic Church that welcomed Mexicans, tolerating their cultural traditions of Catholicism.<sup>7</sup> Many Mexicans traveled long distances to attend mass in the Second Ward church. Life-long parishioner, Petra Guillen left Mexico with her mother and grandmother when she was ten months old to join an uncle already living in Baytown. She remembered when her family traveled by ferry to attend mass at Our Lady of Guadalupe, until they moved to the Second Ward because her grandmother wanted to be closer to the church.<sup>8</sup> Many others walked from the various wards, and some rode the streetcar.

In 1919, the congregation of Our Lady of Guadalupe got its first Spanish speaking priest, Father Esteban de Anta from Spain. He was among the initial group of Oblates of Mary Immaculate to organize missionary work in Houston and served as the third pastor of the parish. In this position, he ministered to the broader ethnic Mexican community in

*Sister Mary Benitia Vermeersch, C.D.P., by the monument dedicated to her in 1938 when she left Houston after 23 years of service. In the background is Providence Home, Catechist home.*

Photo courtesy of Petra Guillen.

Houston. The Catholic Church did not have enough Spanish speaking personnel to minister to the growing population of Mexicans in Houston. During the 1920s, Mexican priests and nuns fled to the United States to escape religious persecution, but they often went to well established Mexican American cities like San Antonio.<sup>9</sup> Father Esteban had two tools that contributed to the growth of the Catholic Church within Houston’s ethnic Mexican community: the Mexican people and Sister Benitia Vermeersch.

### **History of Our Lady of Guadalupe School**

Sister Benitia was a member of the Congregation of Divine Providence, which ran the school at Our Lady of Guadalupe. She was assigned to the school in 1915 because of her ability to speak Spanish and her knowledge of Mexican culture. A native of Belgium, Sister Benitia migrated with her parents and two brothers to the United States when she was still a child. After both parents died as a result of an accident in 1893, she was eventually placed in St. Peter and St. Joseph’s orphanage in San Antonio, Texas. As a teenager, Sister Benitia accompanied the sisters who ran the orphanage on missionary trips to Saltillo, Mexico, where she gained knowledge of and appreciation for Mexican culture.<sup>10</sup> Upon her return, at the age of eighteen, Sister Benitia joined the Congregation of Divine Providence. Over the course of her twenty-three years of service to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and School, Sister Benitia became very important to the parish community who dedicated a monument to her when she was transferred to San Antonio. The text of the dedication reads, “Magnificat Anima mea Dominum. She hath opened her hand to the needy and stretched out her hands to the poor, and hath not eaten her bread idle. Lovingly dedicated to Sister Mary Benitia, C.D.P., by the grateful Mexican people of Houston, Texas, May 22, 1938.”<sup>11</sup>

As a teacher and principal, Sister Benitia saw it as her duty to personally encourage Mexican American families to send their children to Our Lady of Guadalupe School. Under her leadership, attendance at the school increased from 85 students to 428 by 1935.<sup>12</sup> In addition to her personal interaction with the families, Sister Benitia understood the financial hardships within the community. She was known to seek assistance from prominent citizens and businesses in Houston to provide food and funding to the church and school. Through Sister Benitia’s solicitation, the school became more than just a place to learn; it became a resource for the entire family. Students often took home a loaf of bread for their younger siblings, mothers of school children served bread and coffee to the needy, and men of the parish plowed land surrounding the





*Catequistas with Sister Mary Helen. Petra Guillen is located in the front row, third from the right. Florencia Lopez is located in the second row, fourth from the right. Florencia became a nun and third grade teacher at Our Lady of Guadalupe School and many generations of students passed through her class. Sister Flo was also known to run the kitchen on Sundays, selling tacos to benefit the school.*

Photo courtesy of Charlie Lopez.

school for garden allotments to families in need.<sup>13</sup> In the early years, Our Lady of Guadalupe School did not charge. When instituted, the tuition rate was minimal at \$0.25 to \$0.50 per pupil during the 1934-35 school year. Parents contributed to the financial support of Our Lady of Guadalupe School through fundraisers such as tamale sales, bazaars, and beauty queen contests.<sup>14</sup> This type of school fundraising remains an important financial resource.

Students at the school learned geography, English, history, arithmetic, and religion. The sisters had a reputation for strictness. Some aspects of Mexican American youth culture were derided at the school, “Children with haircuts like that of ‘pachucos’ will be sent home and will not be re-admitted until they cut their hair.”<sup>15</sup> Former student Vincent Santiago was born in Magnolia Park to a Tejano father and a Mexican mother. His mother’s migration resembled that of many who eventually settled in Houston. She first resided in a well-established Mexican American city (Laredo) then joining a relative who secured employment in Houston, in this case at Southern Pacific Railroad. Santiago explained, “Well, Sisters of the Divine Providence were very concerned about us because we were young and they knew way back in the 1940s [that] jobs were hard to get. They encouraged us

to go to high school, learn as much as we could or not to get in trouble ... to keep on going [on] the right track and that is what I have done.” English was the language of instruction at school and Spanish was prohibited on school grounds. Santiago recalled, “The Sisters of Divine Providence said, ‘When you are in school, speak English. When you are out of school, speak Spanish.’ Simple, very simple.”<sup>16</sup>

### Catechists of Divine Providence

Sister Benitia did not stop her mission of educating Mexican American youth within the confines of Our Lady of Guadalupe School. Rather, she believed in the need to bring religious education to the broader Mexican community of Houston as part of the larger catechetical movement of the Catholic Church. She recruited young Mexican American women of Our Lady of Guadalupe parish to travel throughout the city and teach catechism to Mexican children attending public school. Originally called the Society of Saint Teresa (1928), the group became the Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence in 1932.

These young women called themselves catequistas and conducted themselves according to a set of rules that resembled the structure of any religious order. They attended

mass daily, studied the Bible, meditated, and abstained from “worldly amusements.”<sup>17</sup> When they went out to teach, the catequistas wore a uniform that was recognized throughout Houston, a black dress with a pleated skirt and white collar and cuffs.<sup>18</sup> Despite this structure, catequistas developed an independence and respect within the community. Petra Guillen came from a household that was very strict. Her mother did not allow her to go outside of the neighborhood.<sup>19</sup> As a catequista, however, she traveled on a streetcar to various parts of the city, visiting family homes in heavily concentrated Mexican American communities. A small room, a backyard, or a porch served as centers where as many as fifteen to twenty public school children gathered to prepare for the sacraments and receive religious instruction from a catequista.<sup>20</sup> These classes were taught in Spanish, demonstrating a desire of the church leadership to spread Catholic teachings without concern for cultural assimilation of ethnic Mexicans. During the first three years, the catequistas prepared over 600 children for First Holy Communion. On Sunday mornings, Mexican American children from throughout Houston walked to Our Lady of Guadalupe accompanied by their teacher. On occasion, a truck owner helped transport children who traveled farther.<sup>21</sup>

In 1935, a local benefactor funded Providence Home to serve as boarding for the intern catechists. Six young women immediately moved in and lived a modest life that included prayers, daily mass, religious studies, and chores, when they were not out teaching. Carmen Ramirez recalled how the sisters did not waste anything, and Petra Guillen remembered that weekly chores were assigned on a rotating basis. By 1935, the group had forty-one members teaching in fifteen centers to over 1,000 children.<sup>22</sup> Many of these women remained devoted and active participants in the Catholic Church throughout their life, and some catequistas became nuns. The legacy of these women was the establishment of an independent order of sisters; the Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence was founded and comprised primarily of ethnic Mexicans and serves as the first of its kind in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

## Mexican American Community

Church perception of Mexican Catholics is at times condescending with religious leaders criticizing ethnic Mexicans both for their cultural traditions of Catholicism and for their lack of participation in church activities. As late as



*Procession for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Dec. 12, 1998.*  
Photo courtesy of Paul Gloria.



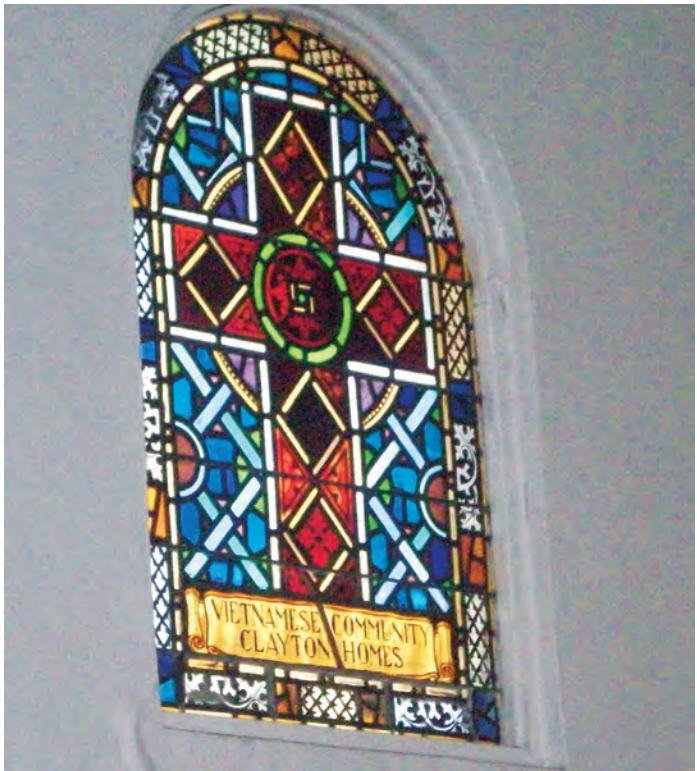
*Passion of the Christ on the church grounds of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Good Friday, April 14, 1995.*

Photo courtesy of Paul Gloria.

1984, a parish report noted that “There seem to have been too many sacraments administered without the proper preparation over the years,” a statement reflecting the belief that Mexican Catholics place less importance on the rituals of the institutional church. This same report decried the lack of leadership taken on by the people, noting that Our Lady of Guadalupe was not viewed as “their” church.<sup>24</sup> The history of Mexican Catholicism in Houston proves that this generalization ignores the unique cultural practices that are at the heart of the many ways in which ethnic Mexicans take ownership of and responsibility in the church and by extension their community.

In response to demand, the Oblates established missions in various Mexican neighborhoods throughout Houston. One of these early missions was located in Magnolia Park at the home of Emilio Aranda on the corner of 71st and Navigation Streets. The first floor served as a store. On the second floor, in the family residence, the congregation celebrated mass and the sacraments, taught catechism, and prayed the rosary. In 1926, a new two-story building became the place of worship with the help of funds raised by the community. From the beginning, the Mexican people were integral in the founding of Immaculate Heart of Mary as the first church to develop out of Our Lady of Guadalupe.<sup>25</sup>

The catequistas facilitated the establishment of other Mexican national churches in Houston. For example, St. Stephen’s (named after the patron saint of Father Esteban) developed out of a catechetical center in the Sixth Ward. Carmen Ramirez recalled, “Well there were a few families that got together and Father Esteban [from] Our Lady of Guadalupe ... used to go over there and have sermons in the



*This window was dedicated by the Vietnamese Community/Clayton Homes. In the 1970s, Our Lady of Guadalupe became the home church to Vietnamese refugees fleeing the war.*

Photo by Natalie Garza.

evening and have rosaries out in the yards and all that. We started getting money together and we built a church. We are the founders of Saint Stephen's.”<sup>26</sup> Other parishes developed from catechetical centers, such as Our Lady of Sorrows in the Fifth Ward. Some churches, like St. Patrick’s and St. Joseph’s, were entrusted to the Oblates as the population of ethnic Mexicans grew in the community and parishes. In this way, the activism of ethnic Mexicans in the church encouraged the growth of Our Lady of Guadalupe as the “Mother Church” to Mexican American Catholics throughout Houston.

There is a great deal of pride in the work Mexican Americans put into building a church community. Vincent Santiago explained “... whenever we have a bazaar we all

unite and participate to help our church raise money to pay for whatever we need for the church. Like I said before, we are the church.”<sup>27</sup> Petra Guillen made it clear to her husband when they got married and were later looking for a house that she did not want him to take her away from Guadalupe. When he later contemplated a move to Dallas to follow his job, she reminded him, “Well, you promised you wouldn’t take me from Guadalupe. You can go if you want to, but I’m staying.” When he argued a church dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe existed in Dallas, she responded: “But it’s not my Guadalupe.”<sup>28</sup> Petra Guillen’s response indicates that the importance of the church to her and others went beyond its dedication to the patron of Mexico, but also encompassed its members’ connection to the cultural space.

Many parishioners have a cultural connection to the Church, as evidenced by their membership at two parishes, the one they live near and Our Lady of Guadalupe. “They are still coming from all over. They come from Pearland and Magnolia sometimes, from Conroe sometimes. You know they used to live here, and they just want to come.”<sup>29</sup> Carmen Ramirez, who became active at St. Stephen’s after its establishment, remained connected to Our Lady of Guadalupe, “I give \$5 a week in my envelope every week. Even when I was ... living in Sixth Ward I used to love to come over here. I was from Saint Stephen’s, but I loved the Guadalupe so I kept coming to Guadalupe all the time.”<sup>30</sup>

The persistence of Mexican cultural Catholicism remains wrapped up in a history of exclusion from the mainstream church, characterized by practices not readily accepted, like *quinceañeras*, *altarcitos*, *posadas*, and *guadalupanas*.<sup>31</sup> The latter involves the veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which culminates on her feast day on December 12th. On this day, the Church stays open late into the evening and the community celebrates with mariachi, food, and dancing. “When Our Lady of Guadalupe’s feast falls on a Sunday, there may be as many as 5,000 people in attendance in the Church.”<sup>32</sup> On the feast day in 1991, Our Lady of Guadalupe celebrated the dedication and recognition of the space as a State Historical Landmark.

If Our Lady of Guadalupe serves as both an important religious and cultural space for Mexican Catholics, it also holds political importance. In his history of Mexican



*The Society of Nocturnal Adoration, organized by Father Esteban De Anta, was comprised of men who prayed overnight in the church, circa 1938.*

Photo courtesy of Petra Guillen.

Catholicism in Houston, Roberto Treviño argued that in the early years, individual church leaders worked to improve the material lives of parishioners, but by the 1940s, the institutional church adopted methods of effecting social change.<sup>33</sup> This started with Father Esteban and Sister Benitia, but subsequent priests continued to speak out. Father Anthony Russo criticized the deportation of families who had lived in the U.S. a long time. He also expressed concern for the impact of renewal and development in the area, accepting that old houses should be torn down, but questioned what would happen to the people in the neighborhoods. Father Rick DiLeo also became involved on issues of immigration through Casa Juan Diego, a Catholic Worker Movement Center, which reaches out to immigrants, refugees, and the poor. He started out leading the community in prayer and their Eucharist celebrations and became impressed with the group's views on social justice.<sup>34</sup>

The parishioners of Our Lady of Guadalupe were equally active in fighting for improved social conditions for their community. During the 1970 school boycotts, Vincent Santiago said, "Oh yes, I participated, I marched with the sign. This is not right . . . This is not justice. We are citizens. We fought for the United States in the armed forces. We are entitled to all of this."<sup>35</sup> Petra Guillen stated, "I was an activist. Actually, I used to be with TMO . . . the Metropolitan Organization and we help the Mexicano. We went to fight for their rights when they were not paying them enough for cleaning the offices and things like that."<sup>36</sup> The Metropolitan Organization was created in 1980 as a political advocate for the socially disadvantaged and remains particularly outspoken on issues of immigra-

tion rights. It incorporates a conglomeration of religious institutions, and the Catholic Church supports individual parish membership in the TMO. Santiago and Guillen both demonstrated a political consciousness that integrated their moral beliefs with experiences of injustice. These efforts followed in the tradition of those Mexican Americans who demanded equal access to Catholicism in a way that fit their cultural needs.

### Conclusion

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate served Our Lady of Guadalupe until 1973, when the priests of the Sacred Heart arrived. Then, in the 1980s, the church became a territorial parish based on geographic boundaries, but it remains heavily Mexican American and Latino based. The school continues to educate children of the neighborhood, even after many Catholic schools have shut down due to low enrollment. Former catequistas Petra Guillen and Carmen Ramirez remain active at Our Lady of Guadalupe, as does Vincent Santiago. Along with the new immigrants that continue to move into the Second Ward, they signify the continued growth of Our Lady of Guadalupe. As stated in a 1996 parish directory, "Its [Our Lady of Guadalupe's] members compose 5th generation descendants of those who came to Houston in 1911 and those who came last week."<sup>37</sup> In 2012, Our Lady of Guadalupe will celebrate its centennial anniversary as the "Mother Church" of Mexican Catholicism in Houston. ☽

**Natalie Garza** is a Ph.D. candidate in Latin American history at the University of Houston and director of the University of Houston Oral History Project.

*Fiesta Guadalupana, December 12, 2001.*

Photo courtesy of Mary Silva.



# *Lydia Mendoza: Houstonian and First Woman of Tejano Music*

By Aimee L'Heureux



*Lydia Mendoza, shown at age fifteen, always had a deep love for music. She often got reprimanded as a small child for taking her mother's guitar without asking.*

All photos courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

**L**ydia Mendoza was born in Houston Heights on May 21, 1916, to parents who had fled the Mexican Revolution. Rising to fame in the 1930s in the Southwest United States, Mendoza became known as the Queen of Tejano and the first icon of Mexican American pop culture. Despite her popularity at the time, discrimination against Mexicans remained strong. Many motels and restaurants posted signs warning “no dogs or Mexicans allowed.” The Mendoza family overcame these challenges often staying in Catholic churches and taking their own cooking equipment on the road with them. Despite the challenges she faced, Lydia gained widespread fame, earning the nicknames *La Alondra de la Frontera* (the Meadowlark of the Border) and *La Cancionera de los Pobres* (the Songstress of the Poor).<sup>1</sup> “For older Mexicanos,” one scholar claims, Lydia Mendoza brings back “vivid memories of a musical artist and of their own youth, of the struggle to grow up Mexican in the United States, of having to fight just to be served a cup of coffee in a downtown Texas café.”<sup>2</sup>

Like other Mexicanos during the early 1900s in the lower Rio Grande Valley, Lydia’s parents felt comfortable in the borderlands. Many settlements were originally Mexican, and many people in the region spoke Spanish. Lydia’s father, Francisco, worked as a mechanic on both

sides of the border and took his family with him. Often taking extreme measures to cross the border, Francisco is said to have impersonated a woman, a priest, and even Capitán José David Contreras Torres in Pancho Villa’s army to get back and forth.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Mendoza children—Beatriz, Lydia, Francisca (Panchita), María, Juanita, Manuel, and Andrés—were born at the end points of travel in either Monterrey or Houston.

In 1920, Lydia and her family entered the United States through Laredo. Four years of age at the time, Lydia remembers being taken behind the immigration station and washed with gasoline. “They told us that we were infected with lice . . . It wasn’t just me; there were several other children, all Mexicans.” The gasoline got in her eyes and made her ill. Thankfully, Lydia only had to experience this one time. “Afterwards they stopped doing it,” she remembered.<sup>4</sup>

Lydia’s mother, Leonor, devoted her time to educating her children. Lydia recalls, “My father never sent my sisters and I to school. He used to say, ‘Why send girls to school if all they do is get married and move away?’”<sup>5</sup> Both parents played guitar and enjoyed singing. This love for music rubbed off on Lydia who took up the guitar at age seven. At age ten, Lydia played the mandolin, Leonor

## *“Mal Hombre”*

Era yo una chiquilla todavía  
cuando tú casualmente me encontraste  
y merced a tus artes de mundano  
de mi honra el perfume te llevaste.

Luego hiciste conmigo lo que todos  
los que son como tú con las mujeres,  
por lo tanto no extrañes que yo ahora  
en tu cara te diga lo que eres.

Mal hombre,  
tan ruin es tu alma que no tiene nombre,  
eres un canalla, eres un malvado,  
eres un mal hombre.

A mi triste destino abandonada  
entablé fiera lucha con la vida,  
ella recia y cruel me toturaba;  
yo más débil al fin caí vencida.

Tú supiste a tiempo mi derrota,  
mi espantoso calvario conociste,  
te dieron algunos: “¡Ve a salvarla!”  
Y probando quien eres, te reíste.

Mal hombre, [refrain]  
Poco tiempo después, en el arroyo,  
entre sombras, mi vida defendía;  
y una noche con otra tú pasaste,  
que al mirarme sentí que te decía:

“¿Quién es esa mujer? ¿Tú la conoces?”  
“¡Ya la ves!” respondiste, “una cualquiera.”  
Y al oír de tus labios tal ultraje,  
demostrabas también lo que tú eras.

Mal hombre, [refrain]

## *“Evil Man”*

I was but a young girl  
when, by chance, you found me  
and with your worldly charm  
you crushed the flower of my innocence.

Then you treated me like all men  
of your kind treat women,  
so don't be surprised now if I  
tell you to your face what you really are.

Evil man,  
your soul is so vile it has no name,  
you are despicable, you are evil,  
you are an evil man.

Abandoned to a sad fate,  
my life became a fierce struggle  
suffering the harshness and cruelty of the world;  
I was weak and was defeated.

In time you learned of my downfall,  
how my life had become a road to hell,  
some people told you: “Go save her!”  
And proving who you really are, you just laughed.

Evil man, [refrain]  
A short time later, in the gutter,  
amidst shadows, I was fighting for my life;  
one night you passed by with another woman,  
and upon seeing me, I heard her say:

“Who is that woman? Do you know her?”  
“You can see for yourself!” you replied, “she's a nobody.”  
When I heard that insult fall from your lips,  
you proved once again what you really are.

Evil man, [refrain]



*When Lydia Mendoza married Juan Alvarado on March 3, 1935, the family continued to perform without her. This photo, taken in 1935, reflects Lydia's absence. Shown from the upper left to right: Panchita (Francisca), Leonor, and María; and seated on the floor: Juanita and Manuel.*

played the guitar, Francesca, the triangle, and Francisco accompanied on the tambourine. As the family grew in number and skill, the parents reassigned instruments. When Lydia turned twelve years old, she began playing the violin, giving her younger sister María the opportunity to play the mandolin. At that point, the Mendoza family became migrant singers.<sup>6</sup>

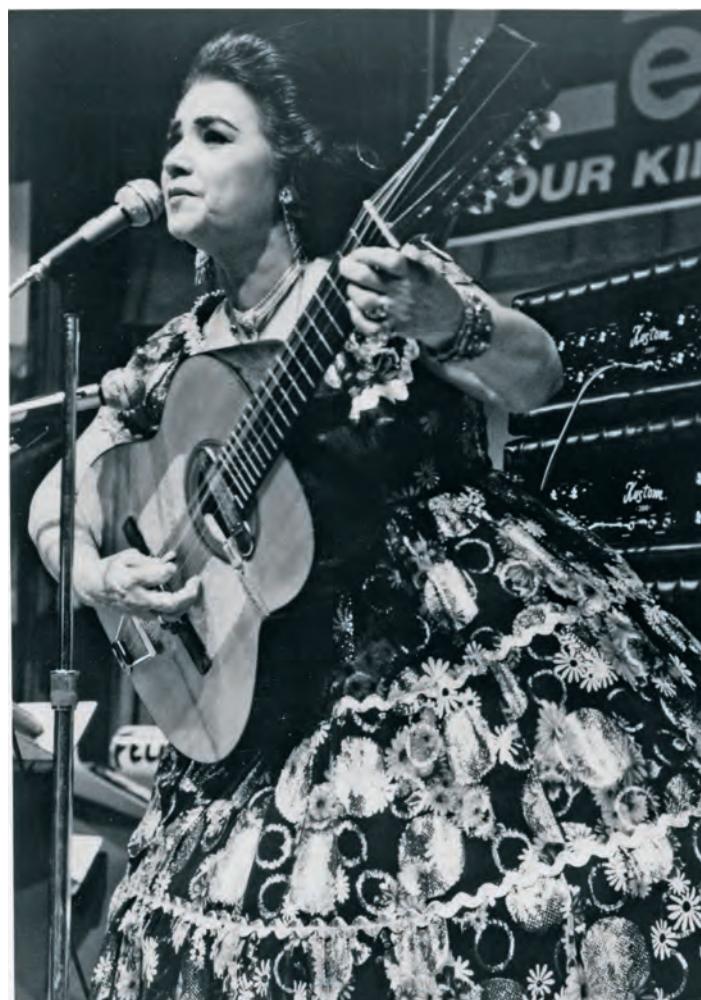
During the Great Depression, government agencies encouraged the repatriation of supposedly undocumented Mexicans. Faced with growing discrimination against Mexicans in Texas, many workers headed north in search of jobs. The Mendoza family followed this migration and settled in Michigan, where they sang to small Mexican audiences in restaurants, barber shops, and homes. When the family moved back to Houston, they stayed in a house on Avenue L in Magnolia Park in the East End. Residents of Magnolia Park served as an important source of labor for the Bayou City, while enjoying a distinct Mexican cultural and social life. Welcoming the Mendoza singers, working class audiences in Magnolia Park were entertained at Mexican barbershops, bakeries, restaurants, evening salones, and popular family meeting places like El Salón Juárez and El Salón Hidalgo.<sup>7</sup>

At age seventeen, Lydia got her big break in San Antonio. She and her family were performing at the Plaza del Zacate, when Manuel J. Cortez, a part-time radio announcer heard her solo. He invited Lydia to take part in an amateur

contest on his radio program, "La Voz Latina."<sup>8</sup> In 1934, she recorded her first solo single, the tango "Mal Hombre," which quickly became her signature song. "Lydia sang in the vernacular, which means in the peoples' way of singing, not the [way of] highly trained or theatrical performers," according to Chris Strachwitz, owner of Arhoolie Records. Lydia Mendoza released two albums on Strachwitz's label. Mendoza differed from many musicians of the time because she performed solo with only a guitar, and Mexican female solo performers were a rarity.<sup>9</sup>

Lydia retired from her musical career in the 1940s to raise her three daughters. In 1947, she decided to begin touring again. It surprised her to find packed venues. She then returned to recording, usually backed by a Mexican orchestra—creating a richer Tejano sound that appealed to America's Spanish speaking population. In 1950, she debuted in Mexico, playing to 20,000 people a night. She then began touring more regularly and recorded in Mexico, Cuba, and Columbia.

Lydia's pioneering recordings were re-issued in the 1970s, introducing her to a younger audience and leading to her employment as a music teacher at California State University, Fresno. Les Blank's 1976 documentary about border music, *Chulas Fronteras*, which focused on Texas Mexican culture, featured Lydia Mendoza singing and cooking.<sup>10</sup> Chris Strachwitz co-produced *Chulas Fronteras*,



*Show in a promotional photo, Lydia appeared in the 1976 documentary film Chulas Fronteras about Mexican border music.*



Taken in June 1950, this photo shows Lydia, center, in Chihuahua, Mexico, where she was awarded a key to the city.

in which Mendoza spoke about her approach to song. “It doesn’t matter if it’s a corrido, a waltz, a bolero, a polka or whatever,” stated Lydia. “When I sing that song, I live that song.”<sup>11</sup>

Lydia Mendoza went on to sing at President Jimmy Carter’s inauguration in 1977 and became the first Texan to receive a National Endowment for the Arts Heritage Fellowship at the inaugural awards ceremony in 1982. In 1999, she received the National Medal of Arts at a ceremony at the White House—sharing the stage with Aretha

Franklin, Norman Lear, Michael Graves, and George Segal.<sup>12</sup> Lydia Mendoza died on December 20, 2007, bringing to an end a musical career that spanned eight decades. Even though Lydia is no longer with us, her music lives on in the memories of her fans, perhaps even more so for those from the Bayou City. ☾

Aimee L’Heureux is a Ph.D. student in history at the University of Houston and associate editor of *Houston History*.

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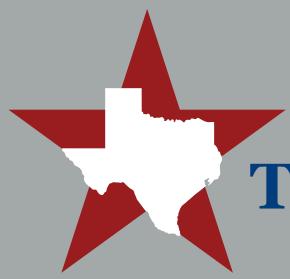
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# The Chicano Movement in Houston and Texas: A Personal Memory

by Carlos Calbillo c/s

**The four major themes of “Chicanismo” are generally considered to be: (1) the power of the creative earth and labor upon it; (2) political transformation through collective efforts; (3) strong familial ties extending back into Mesoamerican pre-history; and (4) spiritually-influenced creative artistic imagination as reflected in the visual ARTS.**

Well, what a long and strange trip it was, or should I say, has been. Carlos Guerra is gone, Lupe Youngblood is gone, Poncho Ruiz, El Tigre, Ernie Valdés. And Mateo Vega, if not gone, is certainly missing in action or something like that. These names are some of the brothers; there were also sisters that I worked with in the movement beginning in, for me, April 1968.

The Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s was essentially a grassroots community insurrection and rebellion against a stifling racism and oppression that strangled the Latino and Black communities of Houston and Texas in that time, and a determination to fight and defeat it. We sought to bring the Mexican American out of second-class citizenship and out of the societal marginalization that we found ourselves in at the time throughout Texas.

Like many social movements throughout the world then and since, this movement began with the youth of the afflicted community. These energetic shock troopers, tired of the oppression found throughout Texas and the nation, threw themselves into this task in an attempt to rehab the karma of the surrounding Anglo American majority society and to achieve full citizenship for our people.

We began by registering our people to vote in the large cities and even in rural communities throughout Texas. This kind of community empowerment met with retaliation from the police and Texas Rangers in the streets and in the fields. Many of us spent time in county jails or city lockups, charged with mostly minor offenses, which would keep us off of the streets, and silenced, in Houston and beyond. Police departments throughout Texas began surveillance activities, and the FBI began to maintain dossiers on many of us.

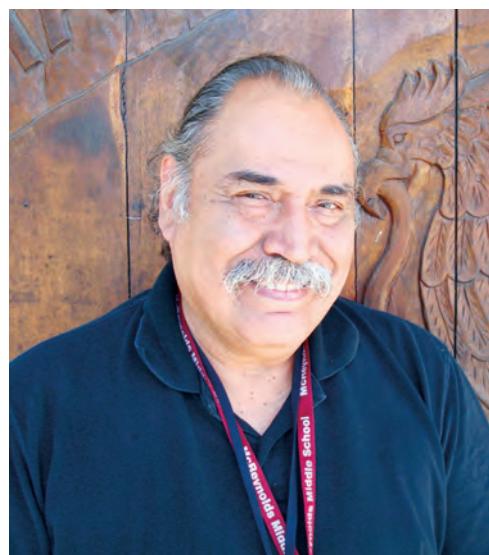
My interest in working in my community and in the movement began in April 1968 when, one week after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a solidarity march was held from Third Ward to downtown Houston. I participated in this march as a young student, and although there were the obligatory African American

and white ministers, priests, a rabbi or two in attendance, I became curious to see if I could find any Latinos in the large crowd. To my surprise, I found only one, other than me.

I walked up to him after the march and introduced myself to Leonel J. Castillo. He would eventually become the first Latino in Houston elected to city-wide office as city controller. Subsequently, he became the first Latino commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, appointed by President Jimmy Carter.

He invited me to his small office in the East End, where he worked as a social worker and counselor in some government funded program. He introduced me to a world that I found fascinating. PASO, the Political Association of Spanish-speaking Organizations, was a sort of umbrella group that worked in community organizing and voter registration and education. I began to walk on weekends in the East End of Houston, and with other members of this group, registered Mexican Americans to vote and held rallies to educate our people on the importance of voting and basic civic involvement.

Through my long association with Leonel, I began to get more and more involved in Latino community politics, both as a campaign worker and in other, more “clandestine” activities with MAYO, the Mexican American Youth Organization.



Carlos Calbillo.

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I began my journey, if that is what it may be called, in a very different time in Texas, a time that we may want to recall and try to understand.

The Mexican American Youth Organization, or MAYO, was an upstart, headstrong group of young and militant Mexican Americans who appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, to challenge both the white racist establishment of Texas as well as the conservative Hispanic mentality of many Mexican Americans who had entered the middle class and, somehow, had come to believe that this developing paradigm, at least for them, was the future of *La Raza*.<sup>1</sup>

Our fathers had returned after

Photos courtesy of author.



Surveillance photo taken by the Texas Department of Public Safety of MAYO and Raza Unida leaders in Garner State Park, 1970.

Photo courtesy of author.

defeating Hitler and the Japanese, only to find that “Mexicans” were still second class citizens in the land they had fought to save, and which, once ours, had been stolen from us.

However, the great fight against fascism had taught them important concepts such as sacrifice and perseverance.

Some of these discharged soldiers, once back home, turned to a new war of liberation, not of Europe or of the Pacific, but of La Raza in Texas and in the Southwest. Many, if not most, also began a quest towards middle-class economic stability and respectability. With the GI Bill fueling a renewed political and social activism, it seemed to many in Texas’s Mexican American community that we would be witnessing the dawning of a new age. In some parts of Texas, there appeared to be a new opportunity and a developing pragmatism in race relations.

But we youth activists wondered if this was all for real. Most of Texas during that era was still locked in the colonial model that we, the young chicanada, had begun to study in college or in the streets. By studying Marx, Lenin (both Vladimir and John), Che Guevara, and Frantz Fanon, (and of course, Tomás Paine), we understood that the oppressor would allow some progress for some of our people, as long as their basic model, their newer, and more modern Texas neo-colonialism, was not challenged or threatened. Since the time that we had lost at San Jacinto, and for most of the late 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, it seemed that the status quo in Texas was safe and unassailable.

The 1960s of course were a different time, and we as thinking young people were influenced and bombarded by the dominant American culture—the music, the militan-

cy; revolution was in the air. And of course the fashion—we wore bell bottoms, paisley shirts, and desert boots with our serapes and brown berets; we were young and crazy, some of us actually idealistic, trying to find a new way in the reality that was Texas of the times.

This society we perceived as intolerably oppressive, and it definitely seemed to us “enlightened” youth to be designed to keep brown and black people down. So we took up “arms” against it, much to the horror of our parents and other “gente decente,” such as LULAC and their ilk.

Houston MAYO cadres were urban and “hippy-ish”; many of us either didn’t speak Spanish or did so haltingly. When I began to attend MAYO actions in the small communities across South Texas (small compared to Houston) and discovered that some of the MAYO hermanos/hermanas spoke mostly Spanish, perhaps out of nationalistic zeal, I and many of the Houston MAYOs became uncomfortable around this.

One time we traveled to Robstown, Texas, to support a rally protesting the school system, which was designed not to educate our people, but to serve as an institutional bludgeon to keep the “Meskins” down and ignorant. Robstown was a perfect example of a small Texas town where the population was overwhelmingly Mexican American, yet the economics and politics were tightly controlled by the gringo establishment. This is perhaps why the town had produced some of the most militant and strategy-minded MAYO activists, such as Carlos Guerra, later a columnist for the *San Antonio Express-News*, and Lupe Youngblood, another incredible, young and charismatic trouble-maker who played chess against the establishment very well.

The rally was held in front of the MAYO



Army veteran Joe Campos Torres was beaten to death by Houston police in 1977. His death galvanized the Mexican American community in protests to fight for reforms.  
Photo courtesy of Benny Martinez, LULAC.

headquarters in a down and out barrio, and about 100 community people, parents, and students were there, very angry, carrying protest signs in English and Spanish. Robstown MAYO chieftain Mateo Vega delivered a fiery bilingual speech and rant. The Robstown police, represented by several big white guys in coats, ties, sunglasses, and wearing large pistols prominently on their belts, walked around taking our pictures and generally acting like racist thugs out of central casting.

Carlos Guerra was present at the rally, and afterwards we all met to debrief. I will never forget that, unlike some linguistic ideologues in MAYO who considered those of us from Houston to be culturally *pendejos*, Guerra was a *firme vato* who looked upon us, his urban *hermanitos*, not with scorn or disgust but with a loving bemusement and an open attitude of inclusion.

Carlos of course, like many of us, was completely tri-lingual and spoke not only English perfectly but also a beautiful Texas Spanish and a stunning *pachuco cåló*.

From the beginning, Carlos and the other top leadership understood the need to unite and not to fight, something that we in the current political arena and climate sometimes appear to forget.

Another incident I remember with my friend “Charlie War” as some of us jokingly called him, was when MAYO and La Raza Unida Party had finally succeeded in taking over Crystal City and surrounding towns, and even entire counties. Jose Angel Gutierrez called for all chapters to meet and discuss future strategy at Garner State Park. It was a beautiful setting with picnic tables under the great oak trees, and we munched on *barbacoa* and *tripitas* as Jose Angel led us in discussion. We had all noticed several unmarked police vehicles on the periphery, and we could see and even hear their telephoto lenses clicking away.

Eventually, Carlos Guerra and several others, including me, made our way over to a parking lot at Garner where we had parked our junky cars. The lot filled suddenly with uniformed DPS troopers who began to berate, intimidate, and bait us in the way that only they could do. They wrote down the license plate numbers of our cars, which they seemed to

know well. Being new to this kind of political intimidation, I freaked out and began to back off. Carlos Guerra fearlessly went up to these sons of Texas and began educating them on the rights of American citizens to peacefully assemble and our right to meet without fear of governmental interference or of their intimidation.

Several of the officers seemed shocked and taken aback that their “right” to harass us was being challenged by this long-haired hippie who seemed not to fear them or anything else for that matter. They became upset but apparently decided that they had no excuse to arrest Carlos in front of witnesses; they muttered something and left.

Every time we visited Robstown, Carlos and others were there ready to assist us, their urban MAYO brothers and sisters, with a meal or a place to crash.

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Meanwhile, back in Houston, MAYO was introduced to the city by an action fraught with danger. In the spring of 1970, our cadres broke into and occupied the Juan Marcos Presbyterian Church in the Northside as a protest against the lack of community centers to serve the many needs of Houston’s Mexican American community. This church sat vacant on Fulton Street for many years, while the Presbyterian Synod rejected requests to turn it over to the community for a social services center.

The now-occupied church was initially surrounded by Houston police, then SWAT officers, as the rumors spread that the youth inside were armed with small arms weapons and that we had set up defensive barricaded positions on the church roof, entrances, and windows. A standoff began with the police that was extremely stressful. Cooler heads among the city’s political leadership prevented a situation, which might have led to bloodshed, and eventually the Presbyterian leadership of Houston, through their synod organization, went to court against MAYO and got the youth “evicted” from the property.

MAYO had begun a series of protests outside of the city’s major Presbyterian churches, marching and picketing outside their Sunday morning services. This led in some cases to church services being cancelled at the larger churches. It

also caused the police and the conservative Hispanic community to consider methods to neutralize and isolate us from the greater community, as we were seen as irrational militants and revolutionaries. MAYO forged alliances with the New Black Panther Party and Students for a Democratic Society, among others, and we began to work closely on issues of common interest.

In 1970, I took over the reins of *Papel Chicano*, which was a seminal effort to publish a newspaper



On August 15, 1971, a crowd estimated at 2,000-5,000 people attended an MAEC rally in Moody Park calling on residents to support a strike against HISD's school integration proposal.

Photo courtesy of Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Litterst-Dixon Collection.



As reported in Space City News, "Pictured are the MAYO nine, from left to right: Hector Almendarez, Poncho Ruiz, Jose Campos, Carlos Calbillo, Santos Hernandez, Antonio Lopez, Greg Salazar, Walter Birdwell and Yolanda Garza Birdwell. As we went to press, we learned that seven were found guilty of disorderly conduct, Oct. 12 in corporation court. Receiving a \$200 fine were Greg, Yolanda and Pancho. Carlos, Hector and Walter were fined \$50 each and Jose was stuck for \$25. Lawyer Mel Friedman is considering an appeal."

Photo courtesy of Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Litterst-Dixon Collection.

that would present a new and independent perspective on news in our community, since we had no trust or faith in the conservatively run news media in the city. Houston MAYO members were well represented at the Denver, Colorado, Crusade for Justice Convention that year held by Chicano militant Rudolfo "Corky" Gonzalez.

In the spring of 1970, I had left Houston to travel to California to work with efforts there in community organization, representing MAYO. I helped organize the first Chicano Moratorium Against the War in Vietnam in Los Angeles, which led to a series of marches and rallies, cumulating in the "riot" in August of 1970, in which many persons were injured and arrested, and which resulted in the alleged murder of pioneer *Los Angeles Times* reporter Ruben Salazar by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

I worked on the campaign of Oscar Zeta Acosta, a local attorney who ran for Sheriff of Los Angeles County. Although he lost badly, the Chicano community used his candidacy as a means of educating others on police/community relations. I met his good friend, gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson, who nicknamed me "Laszlo" because I reminded him of a character by that name in one of his books. I was taken to Delano, California, by local union organizer Sam Kushner, and he introduced me to Cesar Chavez. The United Farm Workers were engaged in a bitter and violent strike against the lettuce growers, especially in the Coachella Valley of Southern California, and I joined this effort for a time.

Returning to Houston, I organized the Houston Chicano Moratorium against the War in Vietnam, and a march of about 1,000 persons took place in the historic barrio of Magnolia Park. The march snaked through the barrio and ended with a rally at Hidalgo Park, with various speakers including Leonel J. Castillo who delivered the keynote.

Most of the Mexican American community at that

time, as now, was extremely patriotic to the point of near-jingoism. During World War II, and in subsequent conflicts, especially the American government misadventure in Southeast Asia, more Medals of Honor and other accolades for bravery in combat were awarded to Chicano soldiers proportionately than to any other racial group. So it took some educational outreach to get Houston's Mexican American community to begin questioning our country's role in Vietnam and to speak out against it.

On the crucial educational front, Houston ISD began integrating the school district. The HISD school board, under the leadership of the supposedly liberal Citizens for Good Schools, instituted a phase-in integration plan, which called for a grade a year to be integrated beginning in 1970 with the first grade. Local African American leaders believed the pace was too slow, and William Lawson, a youth minister, asked Wheatley High School students to boycott school. Five days later, only ten percent of the mostly Black Wheatley students attended classes.

In 1970, a federal judge asked the district to speed the integration process. Some in the Latino community felt Latinos were being discriminated against when their children were paired with only African American campuses as part of the desegregation plan. Many took their children out of the schools and put them in "huelga," or protest schools, until a ruling in 1973 satisfied the demands, mostly, of the Latino community.

At first the district used forced busing, but later switched to a voluntary magnet school program. This had the effect of operationally keeping one-race schools in place, as is the current situation in Houston.

The Mexican American Educational Council was begun by community groups in an attempt to negotiate a resolution to all of this. Pitched battles between Black and Latino parents began to occur at some affected schools, especially at McReynolds Middle School in Denver Harbor, which was

one of the first to be “integrated” by busing Black students into the mostly Mexican American barrio and not bringing mostly Anglo schools into the desegregation mix.

On September 14, 1970, during an extremely contentious night school board meeting, a so-called “mini-riot” broke out in the HISD board room. Several MAYO members were beaten by police in the melee and MAYO members, including me, were arrested. The “MAYO 9” were charged with serious felonies, including conspiracy to riot. The community rallied, and we were released on bond. Through the work of pro bono attorneys, the charges were eventually dropped.

Through my increasing community work as an un-paid volunteer, I met many influential Mexican American community leaders, attorneys, judges, etc. In 1973, Judge Alfred J. Hernandez ordered me to go to KPRC-TV, the Houston NBC affiliate, to apply for a job. At the time, he was critical of the local TV and media outlets for having so few Mexican Americans working in their stations. Due to affirmative action, and through the tenacious pressure upon the station by Judge Hernandez, I was hired at Channel 2.

In June 1973, I walked into KPRC, a TV station owned by the politically connected Hobby family and the largest production house in the South at the time. I marveled at the huge studios where most of the local and regional commercial production was humming along. Even though the only thing I knew about TV was how to turn it on and change channels, I began my filmmaking and television career by hanging out and absorbing everything I saw.

This on-the-job training soon led me to the film production department where I produced documentary films that Channel 2 began to broadcast. With producer Tony Bruni, we developed and expanded *Reflejos Del Barrio*, a seminal local Latino community affairs program. By networking with other young Latinos in the local media, and there were only a few, we met John Quiñones, a local radio reporter who wanted to break into TV, but no one would give him a chance. Tony and I hired John, at no salary, to become the reporter and host of *Reflejos*, and his career took off from there. We gave other people their first “job” in TV,

including Mike Barajas, Evangelina Vigil-Piñon, and attorney Jose Rojo. We produced documentary films on Freddy Fender, Lydia Mendoza, Mance Libscomb, Ry Cooder, Flaco Jimenez, and ZZ Top; our scope was varied and eclectic.

In May of 1977, an incident occurred that triggered much community activity and protest. Joe Campos Torres, a young



*Attorney Ernesto "Ernie" Valdés assisted Chicano activists by providing pro bono legal services.*

Photo courtesy of Patty Lane.

army veteran from the Vietnam era, got into an altercation in an East End bar, and he was beaten and subdued by several Houston police officers who then handcuffed him and took him to jail. When they arrived on Riesner Street, the jail refused to take Torres because of injuries received in his beating and directed the officers to take him to Ben Taub Hospital. Instead, they took Torres to “the hole,” an empty lot leading to a ridge above Buffalo Bayou where he was beaten until dead and thrown into the bayou.

This incident galvanized the Latino community, especially of the East End. There were months of protest marches, picketing the police station, mass rallies, and marches. The anger at this egregious act united diverse groups in efforts to reform the police department and to establish good community relations above all. At KPRC-TV, I wrote and produced *The Case of Joe Campos Torres* with John Quiñones, now an ABC correspondent and reporter.

Then, in May of 1978, at a Cinco de Mayo celebration, a community-wide insurrection was triggered by an arrest at Moody Park in the Northside. This led to two days of riot police intervention and scores of arrests. This was considered by many to be an attack upon the community by the Houston police, so it was followed by more town hall meetings, protest rallies, hearings, and marches. Most of the Latino leadership, while condemning the violence on all sides, recognized that the community had been seething over the Torres incident for over a year, and it only took a spark to ignite the resulting conflagration.

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As we enter a new century in Houston and elsewhere, the Chicano movement, although still very much alive, has changed direction. More and more of the old cadres have resolved to work within the system. Most scholars and activists consider that the Chicano movement has achieved much in current American society, and nowhere is this more evident than in education.

Departments of Chicano and Mexican American Studies at the high school and university levels are now common throughout the Southwest, and certainly in Houston. Many of the old militants gravitated into academia, becoming professors and mentoring new generations of activist youth—who are graduating in greater numbers and with an understanding of the movement and Chicanismo.

Certainly the Mexican American community of the United States, soon to be the majority population of this country, will need educated leadership in the years to come. The future of the Latino community, especially in Houston, is bright, although there remain many challenges. In education, our chicanitos will not only have to compete locally, but in an increasingly global economy and world.

It is a great time to be a Latino, with a foot in two countries and cultures, and with a new understanding of competition in the world and in our American reality, with a thought towards the many challenges ahead. ☺

**Carlos Calbillo** is a filmmaking instructor and filmmaker living and working in his hometown of Houston. He is currently working on a documentary film on emerging Latino political power in Houston and Texas. He can be reached at laszlmurdock@hotmail.com.

# House Special: Mexican Food & Houston Politics

By Mikaela Garza Selle

From their beginnings, restaurants have served as more than just places to eat; people use restaurants as social centers and community landmarks. This is especially true in ethnic neighborhoods, where minority entrepreneurs have historically used their establishments to engage in civic activism.

Doneraki Authentic Mexican Restaurant, Merida Mexican Café, Villa Arcos Taquitos, and Andy's Café are long-standing Houston institutions whose political involvement remains as well-known as their house specialties. From hosting campaign stops to providing a place to catch up on local political news, these four establishments played important roles in Houston's political scene.<sup>1</sup>

The discussion of food and politics in Houston would be incomplete without due recognition of Felix Tijerina. Tijerina (1905 – 1965), Houston civic leader and original owner of Felix Mexican Restaurant, became “the most recognized Mexican American business success story in Houston.” Most importantly, Tijerina and others of his generation began a level of civic activism that influenced events from the 1920s to the mid-1960s, using restaurants to strengthen their connection to the Mexican American community. Felix's became the unofficial gathering place for many groups and clubs from the 1930s forward.<sup>2</sup>

When Doneraki, Merida, Villa Arcos, and Andy's opened for business, the political scene in Houston looked and felt different. In 1966, the Houston Mexican American community won its first victory to a major political position—Magnolia Park's Lauro Cruz won the State Representative District 23, position. In 1969, a record number of Mexican Americans ran for office. By 1975, three elected Mexican American officials served in major positions.<sup>3</sup>

Along with the rise of Mexican Americans in more powerful positions in Houston came a national change in at-

titudes toward Mexican food. Books published in the 1970s defined Tex-Mex food as a purely American regional cuisine and highlighted the growing interest in ethnically diverse foods among Americans.<sup>4</sup> Houston's economic boom in the late 1970s and early 1980s brought an influx of Mexican immigrant laborers who demanded Hispanic businesses. A rise in immigrant and minority entrepreneurs catered to this previously untapped Hispanic market.<sup>5</sup>

Within this environment of change Doneraki, Merida, Villa Arcos, and Andy's were established. I sat down with the owners and managers of these eateries, and they shared their stories with me.

## Doneraki Authentic Mexican Restaurant

As a young man, Cesar Rodríguez moved with his mother and one of his brothers to Houston's Northside from Mexico in 1972.

Rodríguez held three jobs that first year. At the end of

the year, he received a \$600 refund check from the IRS, and with it, he opened his first restaurant on 76th and Avenue E. He remembers doing just about everything to get people to go inside his restaurant, including standing outside making noise with pots and pans and shouting for customers to try his tacos. Within one year he expanded and opened a location on Fulton in a former gas station.

Rodríguez wanted to work for himself, and he knew that a restaurant with authentic Mexican food would do well. Places like Felix Mexican Restaurant and Molina Mexican Restaurant (first established in 1941) served Tex-Mex food. Rodríguez explains, “I don't like to serve enchiladas in that way: chili con carne, because we don't eat that in Mexico.” He thought the community was ready for authentic food, and Doneraki provided it. He named the restaurant after Don Erakio, the creator of tacos al carbón, a style Rodríguez says he himself brought to Houston.

The food, however, is only half of Doneraki's story.



Doneraki used this poster to promote the opening of the Gulfgate Mall location, an investment that made Rodríguez very proud.

Photo courtesy of Cesar Rodríguez.

Rodríguez's entrepreneurial spirit complimented his genuine interest in the Latina/o community. The long list of prominent political players that frequent the restaurant on Fulton and the number of campaign fundraisers and community meetings held at Doneraki over the years reflect the restaurant's history as a political stomping ground. This political history and investment in the community goes back to Doneraki's earliest years.

Rodríguez described the first few years of business in the Northside in the 1970s. Directly across from Moody Park, Doneraki on Fulton was and remains in the center of one of Houston's Mexican barrios. "We [had] a lot of oppression in that area. It's hard to do my business because there [were] a lot of problems in that time . . . I remember they came to my place to steal my jukebox money. Two times a week they broke my windows." Rodríguez approached the young men who targeted Doneraki and personally invited them to his restaurant; ". . . in the future they were the people that protected Doneraki. They never stole anything [again]."

Just a few years later in 1978, the area witnessed the Moody Park riot, a reaction to the murder of Joe Campos Torres by Houston police a year earlier. He recalls the chaos and the flames from burning businesses. "Everybody knew me . . . the people said 'No don't do anything to Doneraki because he helps us every time!'"

Rodríguez was a fixture in the community and Doneraki became a gathering place for Mexican American leaders. The restaurant's first major role in politics began when it headquartered Ben Reyes's campaign for Houston City Council in 1979. Reyes served as the first Mexican American member of the city council. Many consider Reyes the god-father of Mexican American politics from the 1970s to the 1990s. In 1991, Frumencio Reyes, a leading political activist and founder of the Harris County Tejano Democrats, described Doneraki as his "second home," a sentiment shared by many, due to the frequent meetings held at the restaurant. Rodríguez explains that when politicians run for office, ". . . they come to the barrio . . . this is the heart. There is a lot of power here."<sup>6</sup>

*Cesar Rodríguez's family has always been a part of the three local restaurants. Here Rodriguez stands with his brother Jorge at the original location on 76<sup>th</sup> and Avenue E.*

Photo courtesy of Cesar Rodríguez.



Rafael Acosta, third from right, at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the inauguration of the Merida location on NASA Road. Acosta is the son of Merida's founders and the current owner.

Photo courtesy of Rafael Acosta.

## Merida Mexican Café

Merida Mexican Café opened in 1972 on Navigation Boulevard. Rafael and Olga Acosta started with just eight tables, plastic chairs borrowed from friends, and tortilla chips donated by Ninfa Laurenzo's tortilla factory across the street. The original staff included the Acostas, one waitress, one busboy, and the Acosta children. Their only son, also named Rafael, has owned Merida since 1977, and he recalls:

*My mother was an American citizen. But my father was not, and neither were my sisters or I. When they applied to come here, they were told that my mother could come in, but . . . the rest of the family had to stay in Mexico. My mother had a lot of guts. She wrote a letter to Eisenhower in 1953 or '54 . . . and in about four to six weeks she got an official response from the White House that said 'Go to the embassy and show them this letter' [stating the whole family can come to the U.S.] Now who was to think that a Republican president would care about a Hispanic family in Mexico?*

When the family arrived in Houston after receiving the letter, Rafael Acosta opened the Acosta Refrigeration Shop where Merida now stands. The business struggled. He did not charge if he knew the family could not afford it, sometimes working a full day without pay. Rafael recalls, "People would help my dad, just like he helped them, because word got around. . . . I used to come and answer the phone and hear 'This is Mr. Morales from KLVL [the first Spanish language radio station in Houston]. Tell Mr. Acosta he needs to come right away something is wrong with the air conditioner.' So my father would go out and see that somebody had cut the wires. It was Mr. Morales cutting the wires so my father would have something to do. He would pay him one hundred dollars."

Rafael Acosta worked in AC repair until an injury prevented him from running the shop. He and his wife decided to open a restaurant. "In the 1970s, you had national chains or semi-national chains: Monterrey House, El Chico's, and El Torito. . . . [Felix] Tijerina was part of

these chains. For some reason there was a . . . rift between Mexican restaurants and Tex-Mex restaurants. . . . I like both." Even though Rafael's family would complain about going to the chains, he recalled "I'd go once a month . . . the classic enchiladas with chili con carne. I had to get my fix. Once a month we'd go to Felix's restaurant too."

The Acostas wanted to offer regional food from the Yucatan, or Mayan cuisine. "We brought in a new style of Mexican food. Doneraki's and Ninfa's, for example, [had] the carnes asadas and tacos al carbón. Merida's the *cochinita pibil* . . . Yucatan food . . . when we sold black beans . . . people would say, 'What are those things? Horrible! Take them away!' So we would give them platters of black beans for free. After about three years, most of the enchiladas were ordered with black beans." Rafael explained, "We had to educate the Anglo community to trust us. . . . But they were a little fearful . . . first off just coming into the neighborhood . . . We had to say, 'Hey, it's not as bad as you think it is in Hispanic neighborhoods.'"

Merida's location just blocks away from downtown Houston has served the restaurant well. Their customer base boasts a long list of judges, lawyers, and other downtown employees. "I remember they used to call . . . my restaurant a Brown & Root subsidiary because at lunch everyone from Brown & Root was here." The restaurant takes pride in its long list of repeat customers. "The good thing is that the same people . . . have been with us for years. . . . I'm talking twenty years. . . . We've been fortunate."

Merida's is also known as a "political restaurant." City politicians such as former Councilmember Gracie Saenz and Texas Representative Carol Alvarado have held their fundraisers at Merida. Former Houston Mayors Bob Lanier and Bill White also frequented the restaurant. "We have Republicans, Democrats, we even have Independents come here, and we treat them all alike. . . . One day we had the Democratic candidate for city council, and the very next day we had the Republican candidate for the same office."

Rafael believes that a business must lend itself to the Houston community to have a role in local politics. His restaurant does this by opening its doors to political functions and events. Merida is frequently used as a neutral location where important negotiations and decisions are made, and every election year, Merida hosts fifteen to twenty fundraisers. "For some reason . . . and I'm not saying that it's true, but the feeling is if you want to get in touch with the Hispanic community, you gotta have your fundraiser here."

Rafael explains that it is popular belief that a fundraiser at Merida is a good investment. "We do it because we feel that the Houston community is entitled . . . to hear their message and let the people decide. If this is what it means for us, for people to get to know their candidates, then I think it's a good idea. It doesn't hurt that they stay and have

dinner afterwards, and they like the food. But we do it with the intent of letting those people carry their message and let the people decide who the best candidate is."<sup>7</sup>



*Campaign fundraiser for Robert Eckels, seeking position as county judge, at Merida's second Fulton location.*

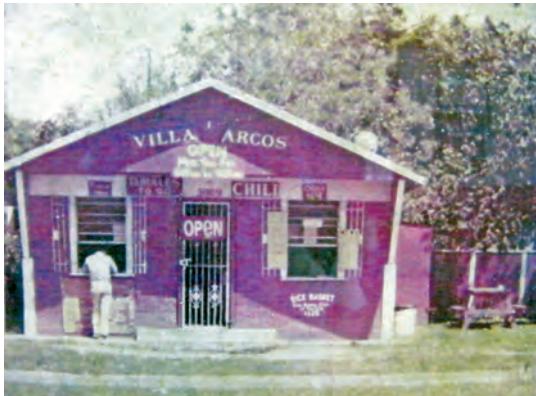
Photo courtesy of Rafael Acosta.

## Villa Arcos Taquitos

Velia Arcos Rodríguez Durán opened Villa Arcos Taquitos in 1977 in an effort to provide for her family. Her eldest child and current owner, Yolanda Black Navarro, believes that her mother's story resembles that of many Latina restaurant owners. "If you look at the history of Latina restaurateurs . . . they did it because of the need to survive. It's what they needed to do if they lost their husbands . . . People of every ethnicity really enjoy Mexican food, and so there's a time when you say, 'well I know how to do this . . . that's what I do best.'"

Velia, as she was known, was born in San Antonio in 1922 and moved to Houston at the age of seventeen. She raised her six children in the Second Ward and was an active member of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. Working in a number of restaurants and bakeries in Houston before opening her own place, Velia started the restaurant with \$1,000. She cooked, and a woman called Doña María made tortillas. In those years, Villa Arcos was a take-out place. With no actual entry into the tiny wood-frame building, customers ordered and received their food at a window. The original menu included ten varieties of tacos, the "villa burrito," and a few combination plates. At the time, Velia opened at 5:00 a.m. and closed at 3:00 p.m., hours that suited truck drivers passing through the area. By word of mouth, Villa Arcos survived.

After thirty-four years, the restaurant still sits on Navigation Boulevard. Though larger than the origi-



At the original Villa Arcos, customers ordered at a window.

Photo courtesy of Villa Arcos.

nal, it remains in a wood-frame building of less than one thousand square feet without air conditioning. There is no wait staff, customers pay cash, and they fill their own glasses of water. Navarro explains that people keep coming back for the food, the price, and the atmosphere.

Villa Arcos now has an entrance and eight tables, providing space for approximately forty people. A gravel parking lot was added behind the restaurant and an enclosed patio in the front. The customers are different too. Villa Arcos now attracts a much more diverse clientele that ranges in ethnicity, class, and age—a reflection of nearby downtown. The most significant change, however, came with Velia's passing in 1990. Navarro took over and added an element to the restaurant it had not seen before: politics.

The long list of repeat customers, which includes Houston City Councilmember Melissa Noriega, former Harris County Commissioner Sylvia Garcia, former Mayor Bill White, and many state representatives, reflects the restaurant's current status as a regular hot spot for community leaders. Politicians frequent Villa Arcos to catch up on the news, with the understanding that Navarro (a social and political activist) will provide the update, and if not, they are sure to run into other constituents and politicians. Villa Arcos has hosted a number of fundraisers and campaign stops.

Since the late 1990s, Navarro has worked as owner, manager, and cashier. Many in the community say Navarro is Villa Arcos. While she admits her presence behind the cash register makes Villa Arcos different from other restaurants, her goal is simple: to maintain the same dedication that her mother, Velia, put into it over thirty years ago.<sup>8</sup>

## Andy's Café

In 1977, Sadie and Jesse Morales opened Andy's Café in the Heights. They named their restaurant after their youngest child, who was three at the time. Anthony Espinoza, the founders' grandson, explains that "[Sadie's] from Texas so she's Mexican American, but really she is Texican. . . . She really knew southern or Texas-style cooking: chicken fried steak, fried chicken. . . . and that's why we're not authentically Mexican, we're completely Tex-Mex."

Espinoza says the restaurant relies heavily on repeat and long-time customers. "It's all about the food. People have come back for all these years because basically grandma's recipes are the same. We haven't fiddled with the menu too



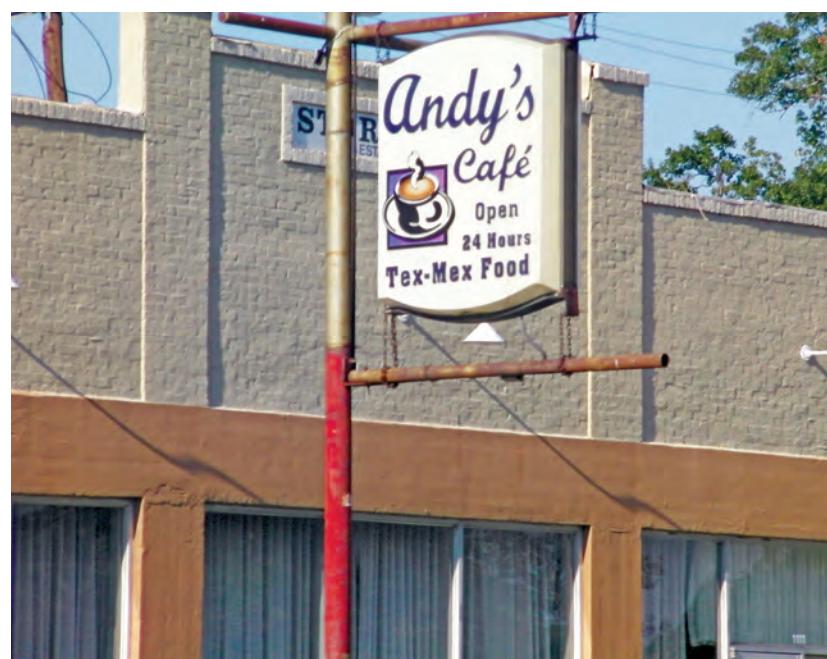
Now the restaurant can seat approximately forty patrons.

Photo courtesy of Nicolas Garza Selley.

much at all. . . . Felix Tijerina's son comes once a week. He always says 'This is the only place that I'll eat enchiladas because they're this close to my dad's.' . . . That's the only reason we've made it is because people like that."

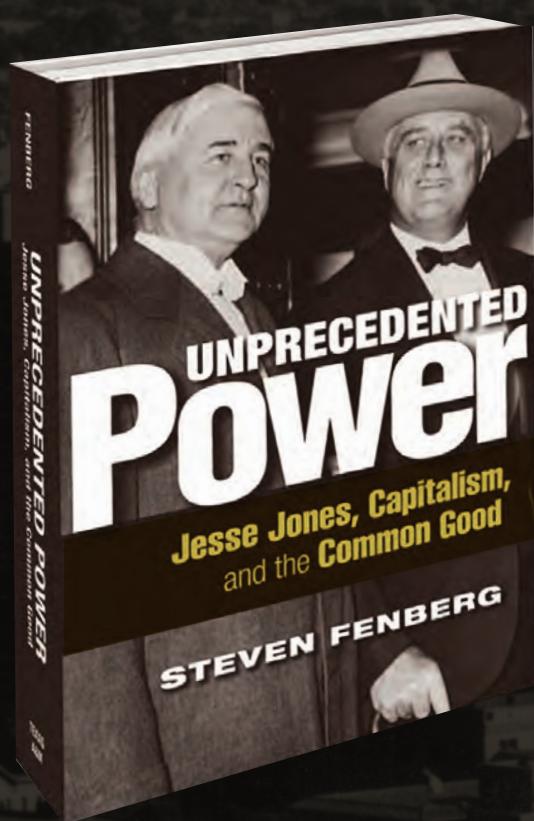
Andy's Café was not the Morales's first attempt at running a family business. Previous ventures included a bar, dance hall, gas station, and a few small restaurants. Opening Andy's, in a building that formerly housed a small Greek diner, the Morales family finally realized success. "There was a niche . . . nobody in the neighborhood was open really late. He [Jesse] said 'Well let's stay open as late as the bar and that way we'll make some more money.' . . . Before you know, it we were 24-7, and we were one of the first."

During those first few years of business, Sadie ran the kitchen while Jesse worked the front of the restaurant. With eleven children, they had plenty of help as wait-staff and dishwashers. Sadie is now retired but still monitors the restaurant; no major decisions are made without her approval. Jesse passed away nearly ten years ago, and today three of



Open twenty-four hours a day, Andy's Café serves a diverse crowd. It is a frequent hot spot for kids when school lets out, families at the end of the day, and musicians late at night.

Photo courtesy of Mikaela Garza Selley.



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by Steven Fenberg

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their sons and one grandson manage the restaurant. The person working the cash register at Andy's is almost always a family member; in this way, Andy's has tried to maintain a "mom and pop" atmosphere.

Nearby Fitzgerald's, a well-known music venue and Houston landmark, generates a significant customer base. "We were always in cahoots with them . . . The musician community helped Andy's make it through those early years." Andy's would advertise in the venue's publication, *Fitz Herald* (no longer in existence), and the opening acts would end the night at Andy's. The two establishments continue to keep close ties.

In addition to serving famous musicians, Andy's remains a frequent venue for political functions. The restaurant has served members of the Mexican American political community including Rick Noriega, the late Joe Moreno, both former state representatives; Jessica Farrar, a current state representative; Melissa Noriega, Sylvia Garcia, and others. Andy's restaurant has hosted many of their political fundraisers and campaigns, and openly supports people in office.

*It's probably mainly because of Joe Moreno . . . who brought a lot of [politicians] in the past fifteen years . . . We always try to help them out, keep the price low, or we donate. We try to help the community . . . from small time charity work, like with churches . . . and little leagues, up to people who hold state office. Also we're kind of close to downtown and the courthouses, and at one time or another, they've all come through here: Adrian*

*Garcia [Harris County Sheriff], Sylvia Garcia, Gracie Saenz . . . My grandparents never pushed for the restaurant to serve the community in this way. It just happened. . . . It was kind of organic . . . While we are no Doneraki's, I guess Andy's is a sort of vessel for political groups. We just help.<sup>9</sup>*

## Conclusion

All of the interviewees explain the political aspect of their restaurants in the same way, saying "it just happened." Their histories tell a different story. A common theme in the history of political and community organizing among ethnic minorities is the use of alternative spaces to carry out this activism. However, not all Mexican restaurants host political fundraisers, and politicians do not seek out all Mexican eateries for this purpose. Although the owners and founders of Doneraki, Merida, Villa Arcos, and Andy's did not intentionally create a political atmosphere, their receptiveness to their community needs have made them more than mere on-lookers to a unique process in the Mexican restaurant business. By serving as the venue to reach the ethnic Mexican community, these long-standing institutions have affected Houston politics and continue to do so.<sup>10</sup>

Mikaela Garza Selley is working toward a master's degree in public history at the University of Houston with a concentration in twentieth century United States history. Her research interests include ethnic and minority communities and Houston history.



### Going Back to Galveston

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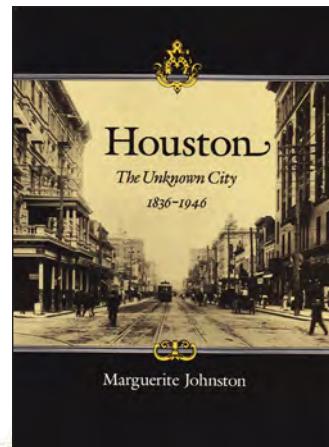
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# Tatcho Mindiola, Jr.: A Visionary at the University of Houston

By Debbie Z. Harwell

Sometimes life takes us on an unexpected journey. Tatcho Mindiola, Jr., director of the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) and associate professor of sociology at the University of Houston, started out studying to be a businessman. Fortunately for the many students whose lives he has impacted, his own life took a different turn.<sup>1</sup>

Mindiola was born and raised in Houston. His father, Tatcho Mindiola, Sr., worked as a baker, while his mother, Hortencia Rocha Mindiola, cared for their six children.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1940s, they became one of the first Mexican American families to move to Sunset Heights, a part of the Heights on North Main Street between 28th and 29th Streets. There Mindiola developed an awareness of the separation between whites and blacks—both geographically and socially. At the Polish beer and dance hall, a partition separated patrons by race. At his uncle's café on Center Street and at the Catholic church the family attended, blacks and whites sat on opposite sides of the facility. At these locations, Mexicans would be seated in the white section, but at other times they too experienced exclusion as Mindiola discovered growing up and attending Houston public schools. He remembered:

Being non-black [was my early awareness of brown versus black versus white]. My dad adhered to the LULAC philosophy at that time, and so we were not Mexican Americans, we were Latin Americans, and he used to tell us . . . "Don't let anybody think that they are better than you because you are Latin American."<sup>3</sup>

Mindiola, who went to Alamo Elementary and Hamilton Junior High School, recalled that during his junior high years, "the reality of who I was began to sink in." Mindiola's father taught the children important life lessons from the time they were very young and emphasized that they must exercise their right to vote. A self-educated man, Mindiola's father also discussed the racial issues facing Mexican and African Americans and explained to his children that he believed blacks were taking the correct approach by working through the legal system to win their rights and that Mexican Americans had to vote. He was proud of the fact that he always paid his poll tax and voted.

While a student at John H. Reagan High School, which



*Tatcho Mindiola, Jr., and his dad, Tatcho Mindiola, Sr.*  
Photo courtesy of Tatcho Mindiola.

was overwhelmingly Anglo at the time, Mindiola began to realize that sitting in the "white section" in church or a café did not prevent him from being marginalized in much the same way as African Americans. He experienced social discrimination by being excluded from parties, having girls refuse to go out with him because their parents would not approve, or meeting Anglo girls who were willing to date him but had to do so on the sly. He also had physical encounters with the Anglo students who taunted him. "I lost a lot of those fights," he says, "because I was a skinny teenager; but I never gave up, and over time I was left alone because my tormentors came to realize that I wouldn't quit." Some teachers also showed their prejudices. Even though his Anglo classmates often asked him to help them with their work, when Mindiola informed a teacher of his aspirations to go to college, she replied. "Well, you know, your people work behind the scenes." When he applied to the Distributive Education program, which allowed

high school students to work half of the day, he was accepted on the condition that he quit his job at a plumbing company and take a new job as a stock clerk at almost half his current hourly wage to ensure he made less money than his white peers. Mindiola rejected the conditions. Despite these obstacles, he aspired to something beyond these teachers' expectations for Mexican American students.

Not everyone Mindiola met subscribed to these prejudices. One high school teacher, Mr. Manning, had a very positive impact. When Mindiola had gotten into an altercation over racial issues, Manning stopped the fight, grabbed Mindiola, and took him to the principal's office. Mindiola remembered Manning saying, "What's the matter with you? You have a brain! Use it. Become a lawyer. Do something that will help your people." Manning encouraged Mindiola to see something different for his future. He told him several times to ignore the people who called him names or put him down, and to plan to continue his education. Years later, Mindiola had the opportunity to thank Manning for his encouragement.

Upon graduation in 1957, Mindiola began working for Houston Lighting & Power and enrolled in South Texas Junior College at night, but he found he was not ready for college. He decided to join the Army to become eligible

for the G. I. Bill when he returned to school and to figure out what he wanted to do in life. The Army assigned him to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, to the U.S. Army Polar Research Division and sent him to Greenland during the summer months where the Army was conducting experiments to test men's tolerance on the ice cap. He worked primarily doing administrative and clerical work. Many of the men with whom he served had college degrees, and he observed and participated in their discussions, taking an interest in political affairs. This, too, inspired him to continue his education. Scheduled to be discharged in October 1961, Mindiola had been accepted at the University of Houston and arranged for his financial aid. But the building of the Berlin wall caused all discharges to be frozen. Mindiola wrote to Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough explaining his situation and requesting to be released in time to attend classes in January. Mindiola is not sure what Yarborough did, but the future professor received his discharge just days before classes began.

The road to success had its difficulties. Mindiola first worked as a billing clerk at Central Freight Lines at night and later secured a job at East Texas Motor Freight loading and unloading trucks at night while he attended the university. The hours were long and hard. As a result, he often dropped classes, taking five and a half years to graduate with a degree in business. Shortly before graduation, he realized that he really did not aspire to be a businessman, so he analyzed which classes he had made his best grades in, and, more importantly, which ones he enjoyed the most. The list included history, English, and personnel management. With an eye on obtaining a degree in industrial psychology, he enrolled in social science courses as a post-bac student. He took two sociology classes from Dr. Henri Munson who encouraged him to consider a graduate degree in the subject and offered to help him with an assistantship. Accepted to both the psychology and sociology graduate programs, Mindiola said the assistantship tipped the scales towards sociology.

As a graduate student, Mindiola had an entirely different type of school experience. Since he had always worked, he had never taken part in campus life. Walking to campus, eating on campus, being involved in the activities, he said, "changed my world view." He remembers the Students for a Democratic Society, and the Wednesday "sound off" at the University Center where students could step up to the microphone and express their views on anything of interest to them. He got involved in establishing the first Mexican American student organization, the group's formation of an alliance with black students, and its efforts to gain more Mexican American classes and faculty.

During this time, Mindiola noticed what a great job his professors had been on campus all day. From that point on, becoming a professor

became both his goal and his passion. Upon completing his M.A. and making plans to work on his doctorate at Brown University, his father pulled him aside to say he was very proud of his son's accomplishments but wanted to know if Mindiola was continuing with school to avoid work. After hearing assurances that this was what was required to become a professor, his father wished him the best.

I got into graduate school, and I remember feeling surprised that I felt as I did for minority rights. As time went on, and I got active and remained active, it struck me that my experiences in middle school and high school had left me with a degree of anger that informed my political philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

In the classroom, first at UH and then at Brown, the coursework dealt with the important issues that were impacting society, especially race relations. Mindiola supported the civil rights and Black Power movements, and they in turn supported the emergence of Mexican American activism on campus. Following his father's teachings, Mindiola assisted in registering people to vote and tutored high school students. The Mexican American student organization presented its requests for Mexican American Studies the same year African American students presented their "demand" to the university, but the university delayed the request for Mexican American Studies until the African American Studies program was in place. Although he scaled back his activism at Brown, Mindiola worked to recruit minority students to Brown, including those from UH.

Mindiola returned to UH to take a joint appointment—the first at the university—in sociology and Mexican American Studies in 1974. He became director of the program in 1980. In the interim, he faced an uphill legal battle for tenure as a result of the joint appointment, demonstrating that Mexican American Studies was not afforded the same weight as other traditional fields in evaluating his academic accomplishments.<sup>5</sup>

Under Mindiola's direction, the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Houston has flourished. He has successfully raised funds and secured political and local support for CMAS to ensure its growth, and the program is unparalleled in the city of Houston as a result. Mindiola's efforts support faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and high school students. At the same time, he continues to recruit new students and expand CMAS's offerings to turn out the next generation of leaders. ☩



*This July 23, 1960, U.S. Army photograph depicts Specialist Tatcho Mindiola, Jr., at Camp Tuto, Greenland.*

Photo courtesy of Tatcho Mindiola.

# FINDING A WAY: Developing the Center for Mexican American Studies at UH

By Tatcho Mindiola, Jr.

The impetus for the Mexican American Studies Program at the University of Houston came from the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), a student group that began pressuring the University to establish Mexican American Studies in 1970.<sup>1</sup> In the spring of 1971, a committee of faculty and MAYO representatives developed a proposal and the program became a reality in the fall of 1972. The university pledged to create several joint faculty positions between departments and the program with fifty percent of their salaries paid by the departments and fifty percent by the program. Though these joint positions proved to be controversial, they nevertheless laid the foundation for the legitimacy of Mexican American Studies as an area of interdisciplinary study.

*[It has been suggested that] we should change our name to Hispanic Studies to reflect the diversity of the Hispanic community. But first of all, historically speaking, this earth here is Mexican earth, and it is filled with Mexicans' sweat and blood. We are the largest group of all Hispanic groups, especially in Texas. The rich history of the Alamo, San Jacinto battlegrounds, and our relationship with Mexico . . . is very strong and very prominent.<sup>2</sup>*

Initially, it proved challenging to find a permanent director. The university twice turned to graduate students as interim directors and once to an assistant professor because few Mexican Americans held positions as professors either at the university or nationally. Guadalupe Quintanilla, a doctoral student in the department of curriculum and in-

struction in the College of Education, became the program's first director. Serving until 1978, she received \$25,000 for the program from the state legislature with the assistance of then Texas Representative Ben Reyes, largely as a result of MAYO representatives lobbying for the funds. Quintanilla fostered courses in literature, culture, politics, history, and folklore; began recruiting faculty and instructors; established a certificate in Mexican American Studies; and vigorously promoted the program to the public. Margarita Melville, an assistant professor of anthropology, served as the second interim director for one year. Hired in 1975 in a joint appointment, Professor Melville was the first Mexican American professor in anthropology. The program named Victor Nelson Cisneros as its third interim director. Cisneros, a doctoral student in history at UCLA, had come to Texas to gather information for his dissertation.

This succession of interim directors made it possible for the university administration to turn a blind eye to Mexican American Studies and delay its funding. When the search for a permanent director continued to prove unsuccessful, members of the faculty approached me to assume the directorship. The year was 1980.

*Unless you have an administration that's willing to lean on departments and use their authority to hire faculty, then progress is slow. You are always fighting guerrilla wars of some sort, trying to find a way to do it.<sup>3</sup>*

The university hired me in a joint appointment in 1974 as the first Mexican American faculty member in the department of sociology. At the time, I was writing my dissertation



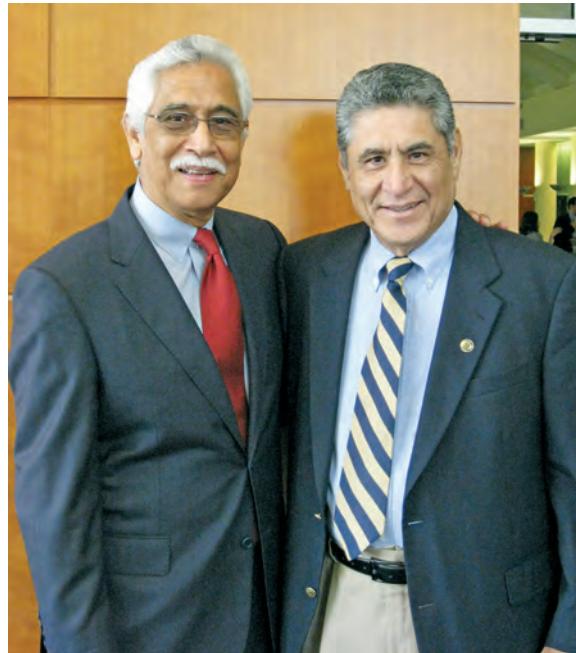
Located in the Cougar Den at the University of Houston, the "Chicano Student Mural," painted by members of MAYO in 1973, represents the history and struggle of Mexican Americans.

to complete my graduate studies at Brown University, where I received my Ph.D. in 1978. As a native Houstonian, my ambitions had always included coming home to teach at the University of Houston and becoming involved in developing Mexican American Studies. When asked to serve as the director, however, I hesitated because I did not feel prepared. I likewise had concerns about gaining tenure, but the faculty's request prevailed primarily because we feared that the program would suffer a severe setback if we failed to name a permanent director.

The program had made gains, but it did little more than sponsor classes because it lacked an adequate budget; without funds, the program could not develop. Indeed, when I became the director, we did not have an operating budget, and I spent a large part of my time seeking funds from the administration to no avail. I quickly learned that the provost and the dean would repeatedly lament, "I don't have any money." Eventually the provost's office added \$20,000 to our budget to recruit students, and we employed UH graduate Lorenzo Cano, our current associate director, to develop the college career days that continue to this day.

*I was cynical that we existed more on paper than in fact because, I learned right away that if you do not have any money, you cannot do anything.<sup>4</sup>*

In 1982, our fortunes began to change. The state legislature created a new state representative district in 1981 that



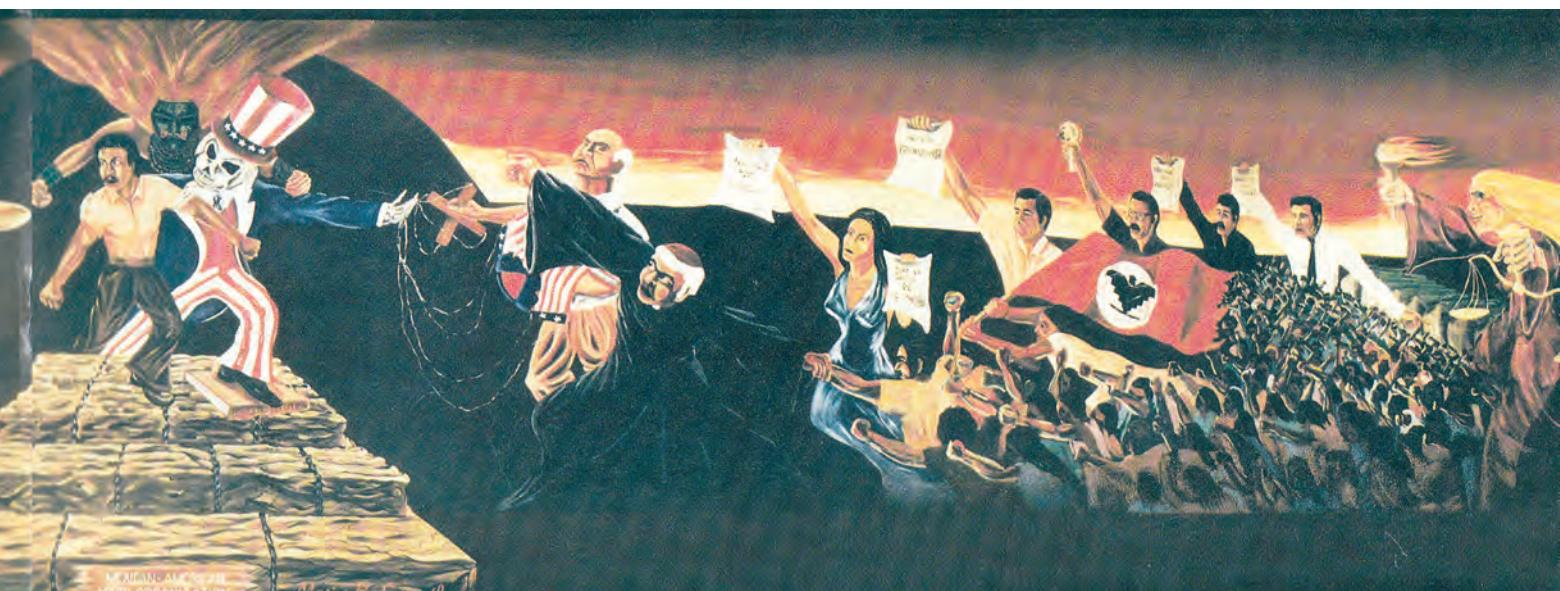
Arnoldo De León (right), the first CMAS Visiting Scholar, pictured with Tatcho Mindiola at a conference hosted by CMAS at the University of Houston in 2010.

All photos courtesy of Tatcho Mindiola, Jr., unless otherwise noted.

covered Houston's Northside barrios. The runoff election featured Roman Martinez, a new comer and protégé of city Councilman Ben Reyes, and Frumencio Reyes, a former protégé of Councilman Reyes and a prominent activist lawyer. The election divided the Mexican American community, and Roman Martinez won by fourteen votes. Trying to secure funding from the state legislature had occurred to me in the past, but I had a political problem. When I returned to Houston in 1974, I became involved with the Raza Unida Party, the first Mexican American political party in U.S. history, and the party elected me as the Harris County chair.<sup>5</sup> The party recruited Maria Jimenez, a University of Houston graduate, to run against Democrat Ben Reyes, the lone Mexican American state representative from Houston. We lost the election handily and Raza

Unida became anathema to Ben Reyes and his allies. This left little chance that I would receive his support in seeking funds.

State Representative-elect Martinez, however, did not play a part in that history, so I took a chance and sought his assistance. During our first meeting, we spent very little time talking about Mexican American educational problems, rather we focused on how the program could make a difference. He mentioned my negative standing with our political leaders, but he nevertheless agreed to help because education, especially at the higher education level, ranked high on his agenda. He suggested that we pursue a



MEXICAN AMERICAN YOUTH ORGANIZATION



Immigration Panel hosted by Mexican American Studies at the University of Houston in the early 1980s. Seated left to right are Professors Jorge Bustamante, Armando Gutierrez, and Tatcho Mindiola.

line item appropriation, which is used for specific purposes like the university's Small Business Center and the Energy Laboratory. He believed that the need for educational programs for our community justified the line item funding. We developed a request and sent it forward to the administration. Even though the university accepted the request, it ranked very low in priority. The line item received little if any support from the administration, and Representative Martinez could not move it forward in the legislature.

In the 1983 legislative session, Representative Martinez gained a seat on the Appropriations Committee. Again we submitted a line item request, and again it received a low priority ranking and no support from the administration. I made several trips to Austin learning about the system and meeting with whomever Representative Martinez suggested. When the university's budget came before the Appropriations Committee, Martinez could not secure the votes for a line item but succeeded in amending the university's budget to allocate \$160,000 from the Continuing Education Program for Mexican American Studies. Continuing Education offers non-credit courses and certificate programs in a wide range of areas for people who seek to improve their skills or simply want to learn about a particular topic.

Representative Martinez called me in the wee hours of the morning shortly after the successful committee vote. He advised that I keep the matter private for it still had to survive several more votes, and he did not want it to receive attention. I felt so elated that I could not fall back asleep. Monitoring the university's budget as it moved through the process produced a great deal of anxiety. I feared that someone within the administration would notice the amendment and seek to stop it, but in the end it passed.

I then met with Dean James Pickering of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, which included Mexican American Studies, and explained that Representative Martinez designated funds for Mexican American Studies and that I was seeking to have the funds transferred to the

program. This took the dean by surprise, and he asked how it came about. I explained that I did not know the details but that I knew that Representative Martinez cared about the issue of higher education for the Mexican American community. The dean said that he would look into the matter, and the next day I received a message saying that he wanted to meet immediately. When I walked into his office, I could tell that he was agitated as he stood behind his desk red-faced and with his tie undone. In an animated fashion he told me that I had made a lot of people angry, and politicized my budget. He doubted that I would get any funding because "my friend" had acted illegally. He also said that I could not have any contact with any legislator without going through the appropriate channels. I replied that I had spent three years trying to obtain funds from the university to develop much needed initiatives but that every request had been denied. I asked him, "Why should we work hard to elect our own to the state legislature if we cannot appeal to them for assistance?" I also explained that Representative Martinez was a friend, that I saw him frequently at functions in our community, and that I had every intention of speaking with him. The dean told me to "watch my step."

*[When I asked for the \$160,000 awarded by the legislature] everybody was angry with me – the dean, the provost, everybody – told me I was politicizing the budget . . . I was respectful and polite in my responses but quite frankly, I did not give a damn. . . . I said, "You know, Provost, how many proposals have I submitted to you and you always tell me you don't have any money? That is not political. But now that I use my representative to help me get some money, that is political. The university is not going to have it both ways."<sup>6</sup>*

Representative Martinez advised that I relay to everyone concerned that the state budget was law and that the university would violate the budget statute. Further, if the university did not provide Mexican American Studies with the funding, it would face legal and political prob-



Tatcho Mindiola, Jose Angel Gutierrez, founder of the Raza Unida Party, and Lorenzo Cano, associate director of CMAS, standing outside of an elementary school circa 1973, in Crystal City, built after the Raza Unida Party took over the school board. Amado Peña painted the mural in the background.



*Mexican American Studies Leadership Conference for the Academic Achievers program, outside of the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, 2001.*  
Photo courtesy of CMAS.

lems. The next day, I informed the dean that they should have the matter reviewed by the university's lawyers and reminded him that the university should seek to remain in Representative Martinez's good graces given that he sat on the Appropriations Committee. The representative informed me the following day that he had spoken with the university lawyers, and they acknowledged that his amendment was proper and legal and they had so informed the university.

The following Friday, I received a message from the Office of the Chancellor Ed Bishop, asking me to meet with him as soon as possible. We met at his office on Sunday morning, his only available time. Gracious and courteous throughout, he said that he had heard a lot about me and Mexican American Studies lately and that he wanted to meet to discuss our funding. He acknowledged Representative Martinez's interest in Mexican American Studies and expressed his appreciation of my cultivating his support. But, he continued, he had a political issue on his hands because Continuing Education became very upset over losing a significant portion of its budget. He also gave me his word that our request for a line item appropriation would rank among the university's top priorities during the next budget cycle. He then asked if the source of my funds made any difference to me and explained that he could transfer an amount equivalent to the amendment from Melrose Thompson Funds to Mexican American Studies and this would allow Continuing Education to keep its funds. He asked for my cooperation and again pledged his

support for our line item. I asked if I could give him an answer the next day to make sure that the arrangement posed no problem with Representative Martinez. The president agreed and asked that I tell Martinez that the president would like to meet the representative to discuss the line item appropriation and get to know him better. After speaking with Representative Martinez, I informed the president that I accepted his proposed arrangement, and the university transferred the money to the program. From that moment on, Mexican American Studies gained respect, however grudgingly it may have been earned.

#### *The battle for resources is never really over.<sup>7</sup>*

A few weeks before the 1985 legislative session began, Representative Martinez and I met with UH President Richard Van Horn, who had been briefed on past events, to discuss the line item. Martinez spoke cordially but firmly. He relayed that he wanted to help the university with its budget but he had to have a commitment that the administration would diligently support our line item request. If the effort failed, the university would, at a minimum, continue to fund Mexican American Studies at the current level if not indeed with an increase. The president appeared demure and repeatedly answered with "of course, of course." Later I heard that the president felt that Representative Martinez was "almost radical" in his conditions.

The university listed our line third in priority behind the Small Business Center and the Energy Lab when the session began. During the session, we took a group of students to



*Fifth Annual Noche Cultural Scholarship Banquet for the Center for Mexican American Studies, Academic Achievers program, October 20, 1999. Students with Tatcho Mindiola (left) and Lorenzo Cano (center).*

Photo courtesy of CMAS.

Austin to help lobby for the line item, but the effort failed again. Before the 1987 session began, we again met with the president and Martinez again repeated his support for the university provided Mexican American Studies received funding if the line item effort failed. Again the line item request ranked third in priority, and again we took students to Austin to lobby. This time Representative Martinez successfully obtained the line item but with a caveat. In 1987, Dr. Manuel Pacheco was named president of the University of Houston Downtown campus, the first Mexican American president in the history of the University of Houston. The downtown campus stood in Representative Martinez's Northside district while the main campus, which housed Mexican American Studies, sat outside of his district to the east. President Pacheco had appealed to the representative for line item support and secured a commitment. Obtaining two line items, however, was not feasible. Thus the downtown campus received the line item with an agreement that it would retain twenty percent of the item's funding and eighty percent would go to Mexican American Studies at the main campus. Initially I felt skeptical about the arrangement, but my doubts dissipated when President Pacheco gave me his assurances that the downtown campus would honor the arrangement.

*The first history of Mexican Americans in Houston was written as a result of our visiting scholars.<sup>8</sup>*

With our increased funding, Mexican American Studies expanded its services. In 1986 with the Melrose Thompson funds, we established the Visiting Scholars Program to generate research about Mexican Americans and other Latinos and to recruit scholars interested in remaining at the University of Houston in a tenured or tenure track position once their one-year residency as a visiting scholar ended. To date, thirty-four scholars have participated in the program, with forty percent of them later employed by the university. In conjunction with the program, we also established the University of Houston series in Mexican American Studies and have published seven monographs. The first, Arnoldo De León's *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: A History of Mexican Americans in Houston*, was the first history of our community in Houston, and our latest, *War Along the Border: The Mexican Revolution and Its Effect upon Tejano Communities* edited by Professor De León is in press and has already won the distinguished Robert A. Calvert Book Award from Texas A&M University Press.

*Our graduation rate with the undergraduates is 77%. The university's is 48%. [CMAS] is a small program, but still we graduated a couple hundred students.<sup>9</sup>*

Mexican American Studies also established the Hispanic Family College Project Austin High School (now the Academic Achievers Program). It seeks to reduce the

dropout rate and prepare students for admission to the University of Houston by mentoring and tutoring a cohort of students as they move through high school and offering them a scholarship if they gain admissions. We are now working with our sixth cohort.

In 1993, we created the Graduate Fellowship Program to increase the number of students who pursue master's and Ph.D. degrees. To date, forty-four fellowships have been awarded, and eighty percent of the students have completed their degrees.

In 1995, our name changed to the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS). In 1996, we established the Academic Achievers Program for undergraduates at the University of Houston to increase the number of Latino students who graduate. These full-time students receive a \$12,000 scholarship that requires them to maintain a minimum 2.7 grade point average, attend mandatory tutoring and skills workshops, and participate in leadership and community service. Their graduation rate is 77% in comparison to 48% for Texas and 60% for the nation. We raise the funds for the scholarships, tutors, and services we offer from the broader community, individuals and corporations alike. The program received the Star Award in 2005 from the Texas Coordinating Higher Education Board for helping close the educational gap between the Latino and majority population. CMAS has also established an endowment and is a source of information for local and national media and sponsors conferences and lectures.

In 1990, I met with Dean Pickering, who had met with Professor Elywn Lee, chair of the Black Leadership Network (BLN) and the interim director of African American Studies, and other members of the network. They expressed concern that the Center for Mexican American Studies was singled out for development by the university while African American Studies had been ignored. The African American Studies program had been inoperative for some time, and Professor Lee had assumed responsibility for reviving it. The lack of resources was an issue. At the dean's request, I met with Dr. Lee and members of BLN and told them how we secured a line item. Several months later, Dean Pickering was appointed provost. He received a request for a line item from African American Studies,



George Diaz, the current and 34th CMAS Visiting Scholar, 2011.

and he wanted to know if we would share our funding with them. "You know how difficult it is to get a line item," he said and added that the university believed increasing ours and splitting it with African American Studies would be easier than seeking a new one. He knew I would be skeptical, and he assured me that the university would launch an all-out effort to significantly increase the line item and that our funding would remain intact if they were unsuccessful.

I indeed felt skeptical. The control of our budget was at stake. Other Mexican American faculty felt the same way. The skepticism was tempered by philosophical and political considerations, however. Kindred feelings were involved. Both communities faced similar issues at the university and were stronger if allied. Also, I had met several African American legislators and considered them friends and supporters and alienating them was not an option. In the end, after speaking with the Mexican American faculty, Dr. Lee, and the provost, we agreed to share the line provided that our budget remained intact if an increase was not forthcoming. Fortunately, the line item was significantly increased, and the budget was split with African American Studies receiving 40% the first biennium, 45% the second, and 50% after that. Both programs benefitted from the arrangement.

*I am calmer now. The Center has a lot more respect. We have landmark accomplishments, and we are now automatically written in as a part of the budget. . . . There are still issues, but we are a lot better off than we used to be.<sup>10</sup>*

The lack of education, especially higher education, in the Mexican American community remains severe. At every level – undergraduate, graduate, and professorial – our ranks are thin. Although progress has been made, we still have a long way to go. It will take a concerted effort for an extended period of time to make notable gains. The Center for Mexican American Studies addresses these issues, and while we have not reached all of our goals, we nevertheless believe that CMAS is one of the premier centers of its type in the United States. We also believe that CMAS is vital to the University of Houston's future. Our significance enhances the university's reputation, as it should given our location, our size, and the history of the Mexican American community in Houston and Texas. Our goals include expanding the services we offer, establishing a major in Mexican American Studies, and obtaining new physical facilities.

*We [CMAS] justify our existence. Personally, I think we make the university look good.<sup>11</sup>*

We have come a long way in our thirty-nine year history and recognize that this would not have occurred without the dedication of the students, former State Representative Roman Martinez, and our determination to find ways to make a difference. ☺

**Tatcho Mindiola, Jr.**, is the director of the Center for Mexican American Studies and an associate professor in sociology at the University of Houston.

# Center of Dreams: Talento Bilingüe de Houston

By Richard Reyes

*"The mission of Talento Bilingüe de Houston is to educate all by preserving, presenting and promoting Latino culture."*

— Talento Bilingüe de Houston

Arnold Mercado, a Puerto Rican from New York, brought his love of theater to Houston and founded what is now known as Talento Bilingüe de Houston (TBH). His first choice for the name of this new Latino Theater was "Teatro Español de Houston." With a Community Engagement and Touring Artists (CETA) government grant, he employed around a dozen young Latino actors from across the state of Texas. According to Mercado, a government site visitor questioned the name because even in 1977 controversy surrounded whether or not the U.S. government should fund "Teatro Español," which would produce contemporary and classic Spanish plays. Without skipping a beat, Mercado immediately changed the name to "Teatro Bilingüe de Houston" and proclaimed it would produce bilingual plays, not yet sure if that meant productions would be performed in English some days and in Spanish on other days, or if the whole play would be performed in Spanglish.

One of TBH's early plays and very successful productions was John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, in which the migrant farmworkers spoke Spanish and the local farmers and townspeople spoke English. Other early Spanish classic productions included Federico García Lorca's, *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* and *El Lugar Donde Mueren Los Mamiferos* by Jorge Díaz. TBH performed both productions totally in Spanish.

Casa de Amigos Community Center in Houston's Northside first housed the theater. Approximately two years later, the Ripley House Community Center in the Second Ward became TBH's new home. Two successive female directors took on the task from 1980 to 1983 following Mercado's departure.

During this time, the theater expanded its Mexican American identity with plays such as Teatro Esperanza's *La Victima*, a ground-breaking play dealing with Mexican-U.S. immigration. Teatro Bilingüe also presented an original play, *Yo, El Pueblo* at the Miller Outdoor Theatre. This play, based on Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales's famous epic poem, "Yo Soy Joaquin," covered the history of the Aztec civilization and the fate of its descendants today.



*Written by Richard Reyes (reclining), From Second Ward to Ben Taub in Thirty Days examines how barrio youth deal with bilingual education, poverty, and community politics.*

All photos courtesy of Richard Reyes.

I joined the theater as an actor in 1981, and in 1983, "inherited" the position of director, (unpaid for the first three years). Finding that the required annual reports for the CETA grant had not been filed prior to this time, I faced the challenge of deciding whether or not to continue Teatro Bilingüe. Without the final reports, government art funders withheld their contributions.

The Community Center grew tired of small audiences and lengthy rehearsals occupying its prime space in the auditorium/theater; however, it did approve two original plays that I wrote for Teatro Bilingüe: *Pancho Claus*, written



*The Latino Youth Theater traveled to performances around Houston in a yellow school bus driven by Richard Reyes and provided by Ripley House.*



Written originally by Richard Reyes in 1981, Pancho Claus celebrates its thirtieth year in 2011. Pancho Claus, center in red, played by Richard Reyes, attends parades, and every year at Christmas, he gives presents to inner-city children.

in 1981; and *From Second Ward to Ben Taub in Thirty Days*, first performed in 1982. *Pancho Claus* was a Chicano twist of *Twas the Night before Christmas*. The main character wears a bright red zoot suit and decides, because there are not very many chimneys in the Second Ward, to break in through the bathroom window to leave presents for the inner city kids. Lines included "... and what to my wondering eyes should appear, but eight low-rider cars all jacked down in the rear" and "mama y papa ya estan en la cama, ... mom in her nightgown . . . ay tu sabes dad don't wear pajamas!" In between its Chicano humor, the play contained messages: Enjoy the gift of your family at Christmas; Respect your elders; Do not judge a book by its cover.

*Pancho Claus*, now celebrating its thirtieth year, has evolved into a play, a ten-piece show band, parades, appearances, and the giving out of thousands of gifts to inner-city children (performed independently of TBH). *From Second Ward to Ben Taub in Thirty Days* is a barrio look at inner-city youth dealing with bilingual education, poverty, and community politics. Both plays enjoyed big audienc-

es, touring, and media attention. Hence, a deal was struck enabling the theater to stay at the Ripley House Community Center and produce three to four adult plays per year.

The next logical step was to form a Latino Youth Theater. Felix Fraga, director of Ripley House, agreed to fund full-time salaries for me and Fred Perez, plus programming costs for a youth theater. This included expenses, an office, and a big, old yellow school bus, which we loaded with sound equipment, sets, props, and costumes. We travelled around Houston with me driving this big old bus and the students performing.

Teatro Bilingüe continued its adult theater with such productions as *Carnaval de La Risa*, *Death of a Salesman* performed in Spanish, and Ray Bradbury's Latino-themed *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*. Original plays dealing with community concerns, co-written by me and the students, made up ninety percent of the youth theater productions. The plays included themes such as AIDS, gangs, Hispanic dropouts, racism, and community politics. With titles such as *No Where to Be*, *Color-Blind*, and *Broadway Cleans Up*,



The many TBH youth productions, like this one in 1990, have served as a creative learning experience for the children and an artistic outreach to the larger community.



*The 1985 cast of Death of a Salesman performed the play in Spanish.*

these youth productions many times included music, dance, and sometimes a live band. And it never hurt to throw in hip-hop and an occasional low-rider bike. During this time, Rutherford "Ruddy" Cravens, executive director of "Shakespeare Outreach" from the University of Houston, was instrumental in providing funding, guidance, teachers, and his personal time to assist the youth theater. In 1983, the youth theater began touring performances across Houston, taking its messages to community centers, libraries, schools, festivals, detention centers, and senior citizen centers.

The next step involved a change of name. Many third-generation Houston youth did not like, and some could not pronounce, Teatro Bilingüe de Houston. In 1984, with a vision of a community cultural arts center with theater, dance, and visual arts, I decided to change the name to "Talento Bilingüe de Houston," shortened even more to TBH—a name the students loved!

Unfortunately or fortunately (depending on which side of the fence you were on), the youth theater soon began to outshine the adult productions in the media and the community. Auditions were held once a year with approximately 200 students auditioning for usually eight to ten vacant spots. The rigorous auditions included dancing, singing, and acting—having the ability to play a musical instrument was even better!

The student company performed in New York City and Washington D.C., at the University of Arkansas, Kentucky State University, and National Latino Theater Conferences in San Antonio and New York, and other places. Some of the youth alumni include State Representative Carol Alvarado, Houston Community College President Abel Davila, Golden Globe and Emmy winner, Rodney "J. J." Alejandro, music producer Michael Barron, and many

members of the international dance crew, Havic-Koro.

Two individuals who played instrumental roles in TBH are Fernando Perez, now with the Houston Children's Museum, and Rick Camargo, who now tours and performs internationally through the sponsorship of the U.S. Embassy. Both gave TBH fifteen to twenty years of service, beginning as children. Board members who helped with the growth of TBH included, Tony Villarreal, Peter Garcia, Yolanda Navarro, Rita Farias, Arturo Deleon, Alex Castillo, Dr. Larry Russell, Phillipa Young, Dr. Dorothy Caram, and community members Felix Fraga, Macario and Chrissie Ramirez, and many more.

In 1995, TBH received a \$980,000 Community Development Grant to build its current home located at Jensen and Navigation next to Guadalupe Park, two blocks from downtown in the Second Ward. The 18,000 square foot facility has a 240-seat theater, professional dance studio, rehearsal room, gallery space, commercial kitchen, and administrative offices. The City of Houston awarded TBH this grant as an "inner-city, gang prevention cultural art facility" based on its legendary work with urban youth.

The facility opened in 1996 with spring, summer, and fall youth visual and performing art classes. TBH offered over thirty different classes per semester at little or no charge to inner-city youth. It offered classes for youth and employment for adult artists/teachers. Summer art camps provided art classes and free movies and free lunches for neighborhood children. Many came from the Clayton Home Project next door and the poverty stricken area known as "little Mexico." Itza Garza, Maria Lozano, and Jesse Lozano invested many years in the TBH summer art camp and many other youth programs.

Many professional artists came to contribute through

performances or workshops including, Comedian George Lopez, Edward James Olmos, Carlos Santana, Selena, Maria Benitez, Teatro Flamingo from Santa Fe, and, yes, even rapper Flava Flav.

From 1993 until 2003, TBH collaborated with the Houston Parks and Recreation Department and funded two full-time employee salaries. TBH had many activities at Guadalupe Plaza, including music festivals, car and bike shows, movies, and holiday parties for Easter, Halloween, and Christmas as well as Thanksgiving dinners. For this reason, TBH painted its Cultural Center to match the southwestern colors of Guadalupe Park. Major collaborations financially and artistically included the Museum of Fine Arts, Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts (MECA), Alley Theater, City of Houston Convention and Entertainment Facilities Department, Southwest Alternative Media Source, Leisure Learning, Houston Symphony, Houston Media Source, Kumba House, Houston Artist Collective, Institute of Hispanic Culture, Houston Ballet, Main Street Theater, University of Houston, Chicano Family Center, *Houston Chronicle* photographer Ben Desoto, Houston Grand Opera, filmmaker Carlos Calbillo, and others.

All of these collaborations were instrumental to TBH's opening its Cultural Center. Though TBH had obtained over a million dollars in construction money and negotiated a thirty-year lease for one dollar a year, it lacked major operating capital. The philosophy was quite literally "build it and they will come" or, as the *Houston Chronicle* put it, a "Center of Dreams." It took all of these big and small organizations, moms' cooking and cleaning, and a poorly paid



First gang prevention program at TBH, "R Gang," took place in 1991.



Rick Camargo is shown here with his low-rider bike in 1994. In order to get youth interested in theater, Reyes occasionally added hip-hop or low-riders in the productions.

staff to open the center and keep it open.

In 2002, with the help of Convention and Entertainment Facilities director Jordy Tollet, TBH received a facilities up-keep contract. The city took over utilities, security, cleaning, maintenance, and landscaping of the property. TBH officially became part of the city entertainment facilities right up there with the George R. Brown Convention Center, Jones Hall, and the Wortham Theater.

In 2003, Nellie Fraga's Ballet Ambassadors received a \$100,000 government grant to build its own dance facility. Through my collaboration with Nellie Fraga and the City of Houston, it was agreed that this money and matching funds would be used to construct a major dance room addition to the TBH Cultural Center. The Ballet would have primary use and accessibility to the dance room, and TBH would have a beautiful new addition to its facility at its disposal.

In 2002, the board of directors adopted a business plan prepared for the Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County (CACHH) that targeted Talento Bilingüe de Houston as the appropriate agency in the City of Houston to develop itself further as a Latino Cultural Arts Center. To the board this meant stopping all youth classes, original youth productions, and in-house adult theater productions as they were structured in the past and allowed organizations to rent the space, including Latino and non-Latino groups. In 2003, since the emphasis on youth programming was dropped, the board decided that, after twenty-two years, my services were no longer required.

In the past eight years, TBH has seen a change in mission, a reduction in budget, and a flurry of several new directors and interim directors. TBH recently welcomed its newest executive director, Cristy Jennings, bringing new hope to Talento Bilingüe de Houston. The dream lives on with a new board, new executive director, a new staff, and new dreams. TBH's many alumni wait in the wings to ensure this icon of Latino arts in Houston endures. ☺

**Richard Reyes** was executive director of Talento Bilingüe de Houston for twenty years and with TBH for twenty-three years. He is now director of the Pancho Claus Art and Education Project, primarily working with at risk teens.

# The Fight for Bilingual Education in Houston: An Insider's Perspective

By Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr.

During the 1990s, conservative forces in the country initiated a campaign to eliminate or replace state and local bilingual education policies with English only ones. Proponents of bilingual education challenged these efforts in policy-making arenas, in the courts, and in the streets.<sup>1</sup> The attempt to replace a strong bilingual education program with an English only one also took place in Houston.

The politics of bilingual education in HISD occurred in the context of extreme distrust between the Latina/o community and the local district. This distrust originated in the late 1960s and continued unabated into the 1990s. In the 1960s, for instance, students, middle-class groups, and grass-roots organizations voiced their concerns about inferior educational opportunities for Mexican American children. Local school officials ignored them. In the 1970s, the local school board further alienated the Mexican American community by misusing the "white" classification of Mexican-origin children to circumvent desegregation mandates and pair them with black children. In the late 1970s, HISD established its magnet school program in mostly white areas although all the Latina/o members of the HISD established advisory committee opposed that plan.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1980s, school-community relations worsened because of the board's unwillingness to address the prob-

lems of the rapidly changing ethnic composition of the district and its impact on the education of Latina/o children. White flight out of the barrios and increased immigration led to the expansion of school segregation and of growing educational inequalities for Latina/o children residing in the East End. School board members ignored these changes and failed to make needed improvements. In the latter part of the 1980s, the board promised to use bond monies to build a new high school on the east side of town, but it failed to do so. The new high school would have relieved overcrowded conditions, especially at Milby and Austin High Schools, both located in the East End.

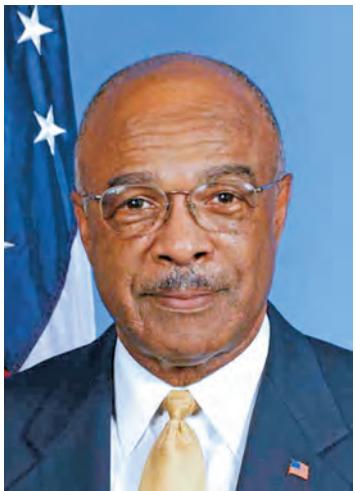
The pattern of profound community distrust of HISD increased in the 1990s when the board surreptitiously selected one of its own members, Rod Paige, an African American, as the next superintendent of HISD without conducting a national search. Many activists felt that if a national search had been done, a Latina or Latino would have emerged as a viable candidate. During the decade, local members also appointed Latina/o individuals to the school board without seeking significant input from the Latina/o community. The 1999 attempt by board members to pass a new Multilingual Education Policy without significant Latina/o input and with English only provisions reinforced this historic pattern of distrust between the community and HISD.

In January 1999, HISD established a Subcommittee of Bilingual Education to review the research and issues surrounding bilingual education policy. The subcommittee completed its report on May 13, 1999, and soon thereafter presented it to the school board.<sup>3</sup> The report concluded that the current department had increased student performance but argued that much more was needed for Spanish-speaking children to learn English and to achieve their full academic potential. Spanish-speaking children in this year comprised 28% (58,321) of the student population. To accomplish this goal, the subcommittee encouraged scrapping the existing policy that utilized both English and native-language instruction and developing a new one designed to teach English as rapidly as possible.<sup>4</sup> The subcommittee report provided a mission



In 1970, Mexican Americans marched to protest HISD's classifying Mexican Americans as "white" and pairing them with black students to satisfy desegregation mandates, allowing predominantly white schools to maintain the status quo.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.



*Rod Paige served as the superintendent of HISD before becoming the Secretary at the U.S. Department of Education. Many in the Latina/Latino community hoped for a national search for a superintendent that might have led to a Latina/Latino candidate for the position.*

Photo courtesy of the Department of Education.

statement, several core beliefs, and six goals for bilingual education.<sup>5</sup>

On Sunday, June 13, Gabriel Vasquez, a moderate Democrat, and Jeff Shadwick, a conservative Republican, announced in an editorial that the board would propose a new policy or blueprint, as they called it, on bilingual education. The elimination of social promotion and the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test exemptions, along with shifting public sentiment, they argued, required a review of HISD's bilingual education program. Vasquez and Shadwick asserted that students with limited English proficiency must become "fluent in English, educated beyond high school and prepared to be effective citizens." They concluded that the proposed policy would accelerate student performance and the learning of English among limited English proficiency (LEP) children. In other words, it would improve bilingual education in HISD.<sup>6</sup>

Eleven state legislators from the Houston area, including Texas Senator Mario Gallegos and Representatives Jessica Farrar, Rick Noriega, and Joe Moreno, vehemently criticized and opposed this particular proposal. On June 14, they sent a joint letter to HISD Superintendent Paige voicing their concerns over its English only directions and tone.<sup>7</sup> That same day, Gallegos also sent a letter to the board asking its members to pull the item from the agenda at the Thursday board meeting. This policy, he noted, was not an improvement of bilingual education, but an effort to replace it with an English only one. "Not only is this action a veiled attempt to promote the 'English Only Movement' the language in your document is a replica of the California initiative 'Proposition 227,'" he stated.<sup>8</sup> Several days later, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) voiced their opposition to the policy and requested that the item be pulled from the agenda.<sup>9</sup>

The legislators' opposition was influenced by an analysis of the proposed policy by Peter Roos from META, or Multicultural Education Training and Advocacy, Inc., an educational organization heavily involved in the anti-bilingual education efforts in California, and by Cynthia Cano, a staff attorney for MALDEF, the Mexican American Legal Defense Education Fund. Roos argued that, as in the California English only movement, the blueprint "down-plays bilingual instruction, while emphasizing the need to

acquire English language 'quickly.'"<sup>10</sup> Cano also argued that the blueprint was "neither multilingual nor bilingual." It was an English only proposal.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this opposition, on June 17, Vasquez and Shadwick introduced the proposal to the board at its monthly meeting and, in breaking from tradition, requested that voting take place on the first reading. Normally, proposed policy changes are presented without any comments on the first reading. They are then presented two more times before board members vote on them. This timetable allows community members an opportunity to comment on the policy. In this particular case, the board wanted to bypass community input and accept this policy on the first reading. Pressure from community groups, however, forced them to postpone the vote until the following month.<sup>12</sup>

The introduction of the proposed policy at the school board meeting enraged the Latina/o community and created unity not seen for many years. It also raised several important issues that guided the Latina/o community's political strategies for the next month. One of these was the exclusion of the community from policymaking. The subcommittee, for instance, developed the policy without any serious input from the two Latinas on the school board and failed to inform them of its progress. The subcommittee also failed to inform or solicit input from Latina/o elected officials about its development of the new policy. This omission on such an important matter was significant considering that the state legislature in general and state legislators in particular were responsible for monitoring bilingual education programs statewide. Appallingly, the decision to develop a new policy was kept secret from the legislators until the legislative session ended. The school board's decision to develop an English only policy without the input of Latina/o legislators was exclusionary and aimed at circumventing established channels for revising school policies through a process of advise and consent. One can only speculate as to why HISD chose this path. But had Latina/o legislators found out about the English only contents of the policy, they would have withdrawn or questioned their support for HISD's legislative agenda in Austin.

Another important issue raised by the community was the rushed nature of the policy-making process. The need to make a quick decision did not provide an adequate opportunity for the community to comment on the plan and to make recommendations for its improvement. In addition to seeking passage of the new policy on the first reading, the school board also decided against having any district-wide meetings. This decision was left up to individual board members or to community groups. The rushed nature of this process and the lack of significant community input raised questions about the motivations for this policy. It also indicated that HISD's stated commitment to strengthen community and parental involvement in the formulation and implementation of school policy was not genuine.

A final concern with the policy was its English only overtones. Latinas/os in the community viewed the English only comments as socially offensive. For some non-Latinas/os, the English only rhetoric embedded in this policy was an innocent way for emphasizing the need to teach English to those who did not speak it fluently.

For Latinas/os in general, and Mexican Americans in particular, it was a symbol of racism, segregationist attitudes, and ethnocentrism. English only rhetoric reminded Mexican Americans of the 1950s, when they were excluded from the public schools, provided a separate and inferior education, force-fed an assimilationist curriculum, culturally demeaned in the classrooms, and punished for speaking Spanish in school. In other words, it suggested a return to the Cold War era of official racism, institutional discrimination, cultural suppression, and structural exclusion.<sup>13</sup>

**English only rhetoric for Mexican Americans, in a sense, was analogous to the waving of the Confederate flag for African Americans.**

During the next several weeks, the school board voiced its desire to negotiate with the Latina/o community, but those leading the struggle refused to meet unless it removed bilingual education from the agenda for the July board meeting. Despite widespread opposition, the school board engaged in secret negotiations with the Latino Educational Policy Council (LEPC), a new group made up of educators and university professors.<sup>14</sup> The larger Latina/o leadership originally opposed this group, but LEPC soon gained its support.

In the following weeks, the LEPC negotiated with the local school board members, especially Vasquez and Shadwick, and made some important headway in modifying some of the most offensive aspects of the proposed policy. Several significant changes were made. First, the new proposal eliminated much of the English only overtones of the policy. Second, an additive or enriching type of bilingual education was encouraged for all students.

This policy, however, still contained provisions that were legally suspect, educationally unsound, and socially offensive. For example, goal number three of the policy, pertaining to English reading proficiency as the sole criteria for reclassification, did not comply with state and federal policies. It violated a May 19, 1998, agreement between HISD and the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) concerning ways for improving its bilingual education program. Bilingual education policies and the OCR agreement required multiple criteria such as oral and written language proficiency tests in English and in the child's native language, a standardized English reading test, and other measurements be used to exit children out of bilingual education programs. The new policy did not.

Several pedagogically unsound provisions encouraging the acceleration of English language learning remained. Although these provisions acknowledged that children learned English at their own individual rate, they ignored research indicating that the learning of a second language could not be accelerated.

In the midst of these negotiations, LEPC hosted a com-

munity-based, city-wide forum on the proposed policy—the only public forum held on this issue. At the Wednesday, July 14, 1999, meeting held at the Museum of Fine Arts, HISD and its spokespersons reiterated the rationale and arguments in support of the proposed policy. The LEPC, in turn, reported on its progress but reiterated its objections to several provisions and called for additional changes.<sup>15</sup>

By the end of the week, the Latina/o community and every Latina/o organization in the city unanimously opposed the proposed policy. They showed up in force at the July 22 meeting to voice their objections. Every speaker before the board spoke against the board's policy. While individuals were publicly criticizing the policy, one of the LEPC members continued to secretly negotiate with Gabriel Vasquez, the school board member. Vasquez wanted additional English only statements in the revised policy while the LEPC member wanted less. The negotiations ended when it came time to vote. The board passed the measure seven to two. The two Latinas on the board voted against the policy while the rest voted in favor.<sup>16</sup> The members of the audience booed and yelled at the decision. The meeting quickly adjourned after the vote and the audience members were told to leave.

During the next two days, various Latina/o groups met to discuss their next move. No one really knew what the school board had passed since negotiations remained underway until the last moment. After several inquiries by a variety of Latina/o individuals, LEPC, and other community members, the board provided the final copy of the approved policy. To their surprise, the policy reinforced bilingual education in the schools.

The school administration said that the board had approved the policy that was negotiated by the LEPC, not the original one presented by Vazquez and Shadwick in May. This document was a significant improvement over the one presented at the June board meeting, which was narrowly construed, contradictory, and politically rather than educationally driven. It limited bilingual education to only language learning, emphasized English only for limited English proficient children and bilingual education for English speaking children, and ignored the important role



Milby High School's student body is predominately Mexican American.

Photos courtesy of WhisperToMe, Wiki Media Commons.

that the child's first language played in academic achievement and in learning a second language. The political goals of the conservative movement drove this policy.

The revised policy eliminated some of the more objectionable provisions, but not all of them. Because it was a compromise, the policy contained provisions that were both supported and opposed by the LEPC as well as the Latina/o activist community in general. The approved policy eliminated many of the unsound terms in the original document and toned down the English only references. It also expanded the goals and objectives of bilingual education, and it emphasized the importance of the native language to academic achievement and second language learning.

The new mission statement, for instance, now recognized the importance of academic achievement and bilingual fluency for all children in HISD. The core beliefs also encouraged the development of bilingual skills as well as maximizing student achievement and English language fluency. The policy goals, likewise, acknowledged the issue of compliance with federal and state laws, the need to promote gifted and talented programs for LEP children, and the importance of increasing English language learning within established bilingual education programs, and as part of parental choice. They also acknowledged the importance of a standardized curricula and assessment program for all multilingual programs, the need to increase parental involvement and the number of bilingual teachers, and the need to encourage bilingual fluency for all students.

The policy retained the provision of keeping English reading proficiency as the sole criteria for reclassification and other provisions that were legally suspect, educationally unsound, and socially offensive. It also continued to make reference to English only rhetoric and dismissed decades of research indicating that the most successful instructional practices for teaching language to minority children from poverty environments and segregated schools utilized their native language and culture.<sup>17</sup> Some of the community members, for instance, noted that while most research showed that children learned social English within two to three years, they needed anywhere from four to seven years to



Mexican American students represent a large percentage of the student body at Austin High School.

Photos courtesy of WhisperToMe, Wiki Media Commons.

learn academic English. The mission statement of the new policy by contrast, did not emphasize this. It suggested that English learning could be accelerated.

Continued reference to accelerated English learning was also found in the set of core beliefs. Under the fourth provision, which indicated that English language proficiency was an imperative, the policy stated that "HISD students must learn to read, write and speak English as rapidly as individually possible."<sup>18</sup> In the fifth, which encouraged fluency in two languages, the policy stated that "HISD should encourage its LEP students to retain and improve their non-English language skills, without sacrificing rapid English language acquisition."<sup>19</sup>

Three goals likewise made reference to the English only rhetoric. For instance, under goal three, establishing English reading proficiency as the standard for transition, the policy stated that HISD would "transition students with limited English proficiency into English as soon as they are able to demonstrate proficiency in English reading. Thereafter, all academic instruction will be provided in English." This provision based exiting decisions on narrow criteria. It needed to include not only reading but also writing, comprehension, and speaking that second language.<sup>20</sup> These narrow criteria denied equal access to other content areas because the children were not provided instruction in the core academic subjects while they learned English.<sup>21</sup>

On August 8, 1999, MALDEF, on behalf of Gallegos and other opponents, filed a grievance with the Office for Civil Rights. This grievance aimed to ensure that HISD would comply with all federal and state requirements for bilingual education as they implemented the new policy.

In response, on September 25, HISD stated that it would obey the federal mandate to keep students in bilingual education classes until they showed proficiency in English reading, speaking, writing, and comprehension. Many activists strongly believed that this essentially voided the new policy's goal of establishing English reading as the exit requirement for leaving the bilingual education program. This chapter in the controversy over bilingual education in Houston officially ended with this action.

This particular struggle showed how community members came together on a specific issue dealing with the education of their children. The policy passed by the board in July was not the one they wanted, but it also was not the one submitted in June. This revised policy, while containing some potentially negative provisions, actually strengthened bilingual education in Houston. It emphasized the learning of multiple languages and mandated the establishment of dual language schools throughout the district. This and other aspects of the new policy indicated that contradiction, conflict, and accommodation were integral to the shaping of educational policymaking in Houston. ☀

**Dr. San Miguel** is a scholar of U.S. history who specializes in Mexican American Education. He is the author of several books on Mexican American struggles for education in the U.S. and has a forthcoming book with Texas A&M press titled, *Those Who Dared: Ethnic Mexican Struggles for Education in the Southwest from the 1960s to the Present*.

# News Updates & Books by Barbara Eaves

## HISTORY NOTES



### STROM TAKES IDESON AWARD:

Steven R. Strom's, *Houston Lost and Unbuilt* (University of Texas Press, 2010, \$45) won the 2011 Julia Ideson Award, presented annually by the Friends of the Texas Room to a publication that best documents Houston history and significantly uses the archives of the Texas Room/Houston Metropolitan Research Center. Strom's work displays an

extensive catalogue of twentieth century public and commercial buildings that were lost forever to the "wrecking ball of progress." One judge said, "Mr. Strom's book would have been impossible without the collections of the HMRC – namely the architectural and photographic collections." Many of the images had never been published. Another judge stated, "The book underscores the necessity of maintaining the HMRC as a viable, vibrant repository of Houston's history."

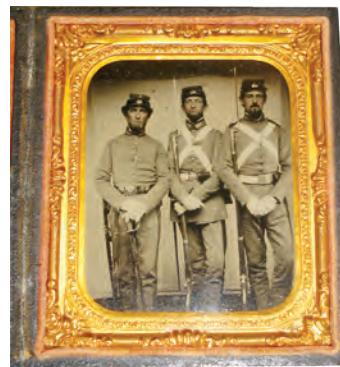
Judges also recognized Wesley G. Phelps's Rice University Ph.D. dissertation, "A Grassroots War on Poverty: Community Action and Urban Politics in Houston, 1964-76," with Honorable Mention. The dissertation traces the War on Poverty in Houston from 1964 to 1976, with sources ranging from public officials, elites, grassroots anti-poverty activists to program administrators, federal volunteers, civil rights activists, and poor people themselves.

Works completed over the past five years are eligible for the 2012 award. Deadline for entries is June 1, 2012. Pick up a flyer in the Texas Room for additional information.



**HOUSTON 175 :** Working with Mayor Annise Parker and her staff, a group of Houston non-profit organizations has joined to celebrate Houston's 175th birthday. The party continues through June 5, 2012, the date of the city's incorporation. Houston 175 has produced a public-participation photography project, "My Houston is Here," a history conference, and ten exhibitions, each investigating Houston's

history in one broad area. Many exhibits opened for the History Crawl in October are still up. For dates and locations, check [www.houston175.org](http://www.houston175.org). A catalogue of all ten shows (\$10) may still be available at Brazos and River Oaks bookstores and at the Visitor's Center in City Hall. The *Houston Chronicle* published *Houston 175* (\$39.95), which is available in most major bookstores. It contains some 300 images from throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the HMRC, the University of Houston Digital Library, the Sloane Collection, the files of the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Houston Post*, and the public.



### HOUSTON MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCE:

"Discovering the Civil War" and a companion exhibit, "The Nau Civil War Collection," opened at the Museum of Natural Science to commemorate the Civil War's 150th anniversary. "Discovering the Civil War" draws on millions of records, both Union and Confederate,

held at the National Archives. The original Emancipation Proclamation signed by Abraham Lincoln will be on display from February 16 through February 21 – only four days, due to the age and fragile condition of this precious document. "The Nau Civil War Collection" comes from Houstonian John L. Nau, Jr.'s, assemblage of Civil War artifacts, which is one of the nation's largest and includes documents, weapons, photos, uniforms and more. Contact [www.hmns.org](http://www.hmns.org) for ticket information.



### SAN JACINTO MUSEUM EXHIBIT:

A signature carved into a sculpture's base, a seal on a document enacting a law, the lines on a map redrawn to reflect a changing world – these marks give insight into the past we celebrate today. "Making a Mark . . . Leaving a Legacy" looks at the tools used to make such marks, the people and institutions that effected these changes, and the symbols used to convey ideas and concepts. Among the more than 300 artifacts displayed in the exhibit at the San Jacinto Museum of History are a wax bust of Sam Houston, created by Mount Rushmore artist Gutzon Borglum, which has just undergone a four-month conservation effort; and Pressler's Map of the State of Texas. Drawn in 1858, this map is displayed with the cartographer's tools and field journal and paired with surveying tools used by George Green, a Battle of San Jacinto veteran, to chart the Texas terrain. Visit [www.sanjacinto-museum.org](http://www.sanjacinto-museum.org).

## TOURS OF HISTORICAL GEMS

**THE HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY:** In just five years, a partnership between the City of Houston and the private sector added a 21,000 square-foot wing to the downtown library, following the original plans of architect Ralph Adams Cram. The partnership preserved the original Julia Ideson Building and restored its public spaces to their earlier grandeur. It will open to the public on December 5.

The new wing provides state-of-the-art, environmentally



sensitive archival storage for the Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC), the largest repository of Houston's history. It houses thousands of rare books, four million historic images, 125,000 drawings by more than 250 architects, and 300 maps of Houston and the Southwest dating from 1561. The 66,000 square-foot, 1926 structure offers a welcoming environment, a public reading space in the Texas Room, an exhibition hall in the old stacks area, and the Tudor Gallery, which is available for private receptions. The opening exhibit will be on display from December 11 through May 12. The opening exhibit, "Theater of Memory, Cabinet of Curiosities: Treasures from the Houston Metropolitan Research Center," will be on display from December 2011 through May 2012.

The Julia Ideson Building contains the city's largest installation of public murals completed under the Works Progress Administration. It was Houston's main library until 1976, when the Jesse H. Jones building opened across the plaza. At that time, the library established the HMRC in the Ideson under Harold M. Hyman, now the William P. Hobby Professor of History, Emeritus, at Rice University.

**THE COURT HOUSE:** The 1910 Harris County Courthouse, now restored to its original splendor, has opened as the home for the First and Fourteenth courts of appeal. You are welcome to visit anytime, but a new docent program will begin at the end of November to explain the history of the building and the courts. Sarah Jackson,

county archivist, will coordinate tours. To set up a group visit, email [tours1910@hctx.net](mailto:tours1910@hctx.net) or call (713) 368-7640. The Houston Bar Association is raising money for six permanent exhibit cases for the 6th floor with rotating exhibits on the appellate court system and restoration.



## SAVE THESE DATES

**DECEMBER 9 & 10:** The Heritage Society's 49th Annual Candlelight Tours are Friday and Saturday, December 9 and 10, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Stroll candlelit paths, tour historic structures, enjoy music and arts and crafts demonstrations, or visit Santa Claus. Tickets are \$10 adults; \$5 seniors and students. Children five and under are free. Make reservations at (713) 655-1912 x 109.

**MARCH 1-3, 2012:** The 116th annual meeting of the Texas State Historical Association featuring a keynote address by Darlene Clark Hine of Northwestern University will be held in Houston on March 1-3, 2012, at the Omni Hotel. See their ad on page 24 or visit [www.onlinetsha.com](http://www.onlinetsha.com).



**MARCH 3, 2012:** The San Jacinto Texas Independence Fun Run will be held on March 3, 2012, with starting time at 7:30 a.m. This race is a 5K certified course that runs inside the San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Park, starting and finishing at the base of the San Jacinto Monument. Enjoy a great post-race party with refreshments and visits to the San Jacinto Museum of History and Battleship Texas. Pre-registration: \$25; race day registration: \$30. Registration form will be on their website [www.sanjacinto-museum.org](http://www.sanjacinto-museum.org) by January 2012. Contact Carolyn Campbell at 281-479-2421.

**APRIL 14, 2012:** The 12th annual Battle of San Jacinto Symposium will be held at The Houston Club in downtown. The theme is "Linking the Present to the Past: The Hows and Whys of Preserving a Great Battlefield." For complete information and to register, visit [www.friendsofsanjacinto.org](http://www.friendsofsanjacinto.org) in January.

## NEWS

**OBEDIENCE SMITH COMMEMORATED:** The recently widowed Obedience Smith arrived in Texas a few months before the Battle of San Jacinto. In 1838, she received 5.26 square miles of land in the heart of present-day Houston. While researching the history of her own neighborhood, Audrey Cook stumbled upon the quaintly named Smith and later wrote about her in *Obedience Smith (1771-1847)*

*Pioneer of Three American Frontiers.* Cook joined forces with the Harris County Historical Commission to obtain a marker in Smith's honor.

At the dedication, Daniel Fort Flowers, Sr., a descendant of Smith's older brother, stated, "A grant of this much land, to a woman, would probably not have been possible in the United States, which was to make tens of thousands of 160-acre grants to settlers – all male." On September 10, 2011, the Winlow Place Civic Club and the HCHC unveiled a marker at Lanier Middle School commemorating this mother of eleven. In addition, Judge Ed Emmett and Harris County commissioners declared the day "Obedience Smith" Day.





**HIDALGO PARK QUIOSCO:** The Magnolia Park Historic Preservation Association and Harris County Historical Commission dedicated an official state historic marker designating the Hidalgo Park Quiosco as a Recorded Historic Texas Landmark. Neighborhood residents raised the money to acquire the land for the park located at

the Turning Basin in the East End. In 1927, the city acquired the park that quickly became a center for neighborhood cultural and civic life. The Quiosco construction began in 1934. It is made of concrete, all hand-textured to give the appearance of tree-trunk columns, stone walls, parquet floors, and a shingled roof.

**THE HERITAGE SOCIETY:** Evelyn H. Boatwright has been elected president of The Heritage Society. This Rhode Island native has lived in Houston since 1963 and developed her passion for Houston's history when she became a THS docent in 1986. She



has chaired the group's collections, trained and recruited docents, and served on education, membership, volunteer, and Candlelight Tour committees. Other new officers are Rodney Nathan, vice president; Marc Melcher, treasurer; Martha Williams, secretary; and Tammy G. Hendrix, a new director.

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## ENDNOTES

### LA COLONIA MEXICANA

- 1 This study applies a variety of terms interchangeably to identify citizens and non-citizens alike. “Mexican American” is used most frequently, but others such as “Mexicano,” “Tejano,” “Chicano,” and “Latino” will also appear to avoid repetition. “Mexicano” is an umbrella term describing the people in general. “Anglo” or “white” refer to the non-Mexican-origin population.
- 2 Tatcho Mindiola, *Black-Brown Relations and Stereotypes* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 7. Many Mexican soldiers became servants for Texans. See Arnoldo De León, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: A History of Mexican-Americans in Houston* (University of Houston Mexican American Studies Program, 1989), 5.
- 3 Thomas McWhorter, “From Das Zweiter to El Segundo: A Brief History of Houston’s Second Ward,” *Houston History* 8, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 41; Thomas H. Kreneck, *Del Pueblo: A Pictorial History of Houston’s Hispanic Community* (Houston: Houston International University, 1989), 41. The 1910 Mexican Revolution drove hundreds of families to the Houston area. See Jaime Puente, “Mexican Americans in Houston: Facing Adversity and Becoming American During the Great Depression, 1929-1939,” 2011; and McWhorter, 42.
- 4 Louis F. Aulbach, “Schrimpf’s Field: A Story of Two German Families,” n.d.; Arturo F. Rosales, “Mexicans in Houston: The Struggle to Survive,” *The Houston Review* 3 (Summer 1981): 231; De León, 24.
- 5 Jesus C. Medel, “Urban Migration of Bespoke Boot Makers: The Case of Feliciano Torres Medel, A Political Boot-maker,” n.d.; Puente, 2-3.
- 6 Mexican American Collection Guide, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library System, Houston, Texas; Rosales, “Mexicans in Houston,” 233; Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 35-36, 38.
- 7 Rosales, 224; Mexican American Collection Guide; Thomas Kreneck, “The Letter From Chapultepec,” *The Houston Review* 3 (Summer 1981): 268.
- 8 Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 61; McWhorter, 42.
- 9 Rosales, 236; Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 65, 68.
- 10 Carlos B. Gil, “Lydia Mendoza: Houstonian and First Lady of Mexican American Song,” *The Houston Review* 3 (Summer 1981): 252; Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 89.
- 11 Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 74, 106; Rosales, 235.
- 12 Rosales, 231; Puente, 9; Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, “Reinventing Houston: Mexican Americans of the World War II Generation,” *The Houston Review* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 11.
- 13 Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 87; Rosales, 239, 241; Gil, 254-56.
- 14 Cynthia E. Orozco, “The Origins of the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Mexicano American Civil Rights Movement in Texas, 1910-1929” (Ph.D. diss. University of California Los Angeles, 1992); Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., “The Struggle Against Separate and Unequal Schools: Middle Class Mexican Americans and the Desegregation Campaign in Texas, 1929-1957,” *History of Education Quarterly* 23 (Fall 1983): 345.
- 15 Rosales, 241; Mexican American Collection Guide.
- 16 Rosales, 243-244; Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 110; Rivas-Rodriguez, 11-13. See also Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, “Reinventing Houston: Mexican Americans of the World War II Generation,” *Houston History* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 11-13.
- 17 Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 115; Mexican American Collection Guide; Rosales, 244.
- 18 Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 256; Rivas-Rodriguez, 12; Mexican American Collection Guide.
- 19 Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 151, 191.
- 20 Mexican American Collection Guide; De León, 186-87. MAEC and parents formed temporary schools, like the Huelga School

(strike school) at the Juan Marcos Presbyterian Church, to provide instruction. Eventually, the courts created committees to monitor the district’s racial desegregation plans. See Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 182-183.

- 21 Mexican American Collection Guide; Rosales, 232; De León, 227; Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 185.
- 22 Rosales, 247; Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 151, 167, 174, 192-193; Mexican American Collection Guide.
- 23 Brian D. Behnken, “We Want Justice!”: Police Murder, Mexican American Community Response, and the Chicano Movement,” in *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, ed. Dan Berger (Rutgers University Press, 2010).
- 24 Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 191; Mexican American Collection Guide.
- 25 Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 220-221; Medel.
- 26 Mindiola, 15; Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 219, 222.
- 27 Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 203.
- 28 Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 230.
- 29 Kreneck, *Del Pueblo*, 213.
- 30 Tony Cantu and Damarys Ocaña, “Cityscape: Houston,” *Poder, Hispanic Magazine* (August/September 2011): 57-58; Jan Swellander Rosin, “The New Latinos and Houston’s Global Pueblo,” *The Houston Review* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 18.
- 31 Rosin, 22, 25.
- 32 Cantu and Ocaña, 60, 62.
- 33 Juan Manuel Galvan, “A Long Road to Houston: An Interview with Daniel Galvan,” *The Houston Review* 3, no. 1, (Fall 2005): 71.

### RIPLEY HOUSE

- 1 Dorothy Knox Howe Houghton, et al, *Houston’s Forgotten Heritage: Landscape, Houses, Interiors, 1824-1914* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 70.
- 2 Betty T. Chapman, “Houston Heritage: Settlement Houses: Havens of Help in Early Houston,” *Houston Business Journal*, December 29, 2000–January 4, 2001.
- 3 “About us,” Toynbee Hall, [www.toynbeehall.org.uk/](http://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/).
- 4 Corinne Tsanoff, “Neighborhood Doorways,” Neighborhood Centers Association of Houston and Harris County, Houston, Texas, 1958.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 United States Census, Harris Co., Texas, 1910.
- 8 Thomas H. Krenek, *Del Pueblo: A Pictorial History of Houston’s Hispanic Community* (Houston, TX: Houston International University, 1989).
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Arturo F. Rosales, “Mexicans in Houston: The Struggle to Survive,” *Houston Review* 3 (Summer 1981): 228; Arnoldo De León, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: A History of Mexican-Americans in Houston* (University of Houston Mexican American Studies Program, 1989), 14.
- 11 Tsanoff, “Neighborhood Doorways.”
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Felix Fraga, interview with author, August 6, 2011.
- 14 Tsanoff, “Neighborhood Doorways.”
- 15 Fraga, interview.
- 16 Tsanoff, “Neighborhood Doorways.”
- 17 Fraga, interview.
- 18 “Our History,” Henry Street Settlement, [www.henrystreet.org](http://www.henrystreet.org).
- 19 Fraga, interview.
- 20 Fraga, interview.
- 21 Tsanoff, “Neighborhood Doorways.”
- 22 “What we do,” Neighborhood Centers Inc., [www.neighborhood-centers.org](http://www.neighborhood-centers.org).

## THE MOTHER CHURCH

- 1 Sister Mary Paul Valdez, M.C.D.P., *The History of the Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence* (n.p.: Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence, 1978), 1.
- 2 Roberto R. Treviño, *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno-Catholicism in Houston* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 86.
- 3 Carmen Ramirez, interview by author, July 22, 2010, UH-Oral History of Houston, Houston History Project, Special Collections, University of Houston. Translated by author.
- 4 Treviño, 25.
- 5 Arnoldo De León, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: Mexican Americans in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 6-7; Treviño, 25-26.
- 6 The primary employment opportunities for Mexicans in the 1920s were located in the Houston ship channel and the railroad yards.
- 7 Treviño describes this concept, using the term “ethno-Catholicism” to describe the Mexican American way of being Catholic.
- 8 Petra Guillen, interview by author, July 8, 2010, UH-Oral History of Houston, Houston History Project, Special Collections, University of Houston.
- 9 See Arturo Rosales, “Mexicans in Houston: The Struggle to Survive, 1908-1975,” *Houston Review* (Summer 1981): 227. Violence broke out in Mexico due to the persecution of Catholics based on the anti-clerical provisions of the 1917 Constitution.
- 10 The nuns who ran the orphanage were the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word.
- 11 The monument was removed in the 1960s to make room for the parish hall kitchen. The statue was given to the Sisters of Divine Providence and the plaque to St. Andrew’s.
- 12 Sr. Lucina Schuler and Sr. M. Rachel Moreno, *Memoirs: Sisters of Divine Providence* (n.p.: Sisters of Divine Providence, April 1966), 135, Archives of the Congregation of Divine Providence, San Antonio, Texas (ACDP).
- 13 Sister Valdez, 8.
- 14 Schuler, 135, 137. The Scanlan sisters were also beneficiaries of Our Lady of Guadalupe School.
- 15 Schuler, 139. The warning about haircuts appeared in the church bulletin on August 23, 1964. The term *pachuco* refers to Mexican American youth marginalized by American society and the Mexican culture of their parents, who in the 1930s and 1940s developed their own style typified by the zoot suit.
- 16 Santiago interview.
- 17 Sister Valdez, 26, 30.
- 18 Ibid, 26.
- 19 Guillen interview.
- 20 Ramirez interview.
- 21 Sister Valdez, 30.
- 22 ACDP, Houston, TX, Our Lady of Guadalupe.
- 23 Mary Christine Morkovsky, CDP, *Living in God's Providence: History of the Congregation of Divine Providence of San Antonio, TX, 1943-2000* (n.p.: Congregation of Divine Providence), 114, ACDP. A new convent replaced Providence Home in 1954.
- 24 See Treviño for a detailed account of early perceptions of Mexican Catholics as spiritually poor. HMRC, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church Collection.
- 25 Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC), Vertical Files, Houston Churches, Catholic.
- 26 Ramirez interview.
- 27 Santiago interview. Emphasis added by the author.
- 28 Guillen interview.
- 29 Santiago interview.
- 30 Ramirez interview.
- 31 See Treviño for a discussion of these cultural traditions and their relevance.
- 32 HMRC, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church Collection.
- 33 Treviño, 155.
- 34 HMRC, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church Collection.

- 35 Santiago interview. Mexican Americans opposed the desegregation by the Houston Independent School District because they, not white students, would integrate schools with African Americans.
- 36 Guillen interview.
- 37 ACDP, Houston, TX, Our Lady of Guadalupe.

## LYDIA MENDOZA

- 1 Garth Cartwright, “Obituary: Lydia Mendoza,” *Guardian*, January 3, 2008, [www.guardian.co.uk/music/2008/jan/03/folk.usa](http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2008/jan/03/folk.usa).
- 2 Carlos B. Gil, “Lydia Mendoza: Houstonian and First Lady of Mexican American Song,” *Houston Review* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 250.
- 3 Chris Strachwitz with James Nicolopoulos, *Lydia Mendoza: A Family Autobiography* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1993), 8-9.
- 4 Strachwitz, 10-11.
- 5 Gil, 252.
- 6 Gil, 254.
- 7 Gil, 255-256.
- 8 Gil, 258.
- 9 John Burnett, “Lydia Mendoza: The First Lady of Tejano,” *NPR*, May 24, 2010, [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=127033025](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=127033025).
- 10 Cartwright.
- 11 Burnett.
- 12 Cartwright.

## CHICANO MOVEMENT

- 1 The Mexican American Youth Organization is described in the Texas State Historical Association of Texas Online as follows: “MAYO, founded in San Antonio in 1967, was for a decade the major political organization of Mexican-American youth in Texas; it also led to the founding of the Raza Unida party in 1970. . . . MAYO sought social justice. But unlike older and more established groups . . . it stressed Chicano cultural nationalism and preferred the techniques of direct political confrontation and mass demonstration to accomplish its goals. . . . By the late 1970s, MAYO was losing momentum as the Chicano movement weakened throughout the Southwest. . . . The Raza Unida party was in ruins after. . . its [1978] gubernatorial candidate, Mario Compean, had received only 15,000 votes, a poor showing that caused the party’s originating organization to lose its political clout statewide.”

## MEXICAN FOOD AND POLITICS

- 1 Chrystel Pit, “Deal with Us: The Business of Mexican Culture in Post-World War II Houston” (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 2011). I have chosen to use the term “Mexican American” when speaking of the political community here in Houston. The term “ethnic Mexican” refers to the community populated by both Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Use of the words Hispanic or Latino/a have only been included if used by the interviewee or by the author of the named source.
- 2 Thomas H. Kreneck, *Mexican American Odyssey: Felix Tijerina, Entrepreneur and Civic Leader, 1905-1965* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001).
- 3 Arnoldo De León, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: Mexican Americans in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 190.
- 4 See Diana Kennedy, *The Cuisines of Mexico* (William Morrow Cookbooks, 1972) and Waverly Root and Richard De Rochemont, *Eating in America: A History* (Ecco, 1976).
- 5 Jenalia Moreno, “From the barrios to big business/immigrants who came to the United States with little or nothing built empires

that now provide for others," *Houston Chronicle*, February 1, 2004, [www.chron.com/default/article/Immigrants-built-up-from-the-barrios-to-big-1562134.php](http://www.chron.com/default/article/Immigrants-built-up-from-the-barrios-to-big-1562134.php). Moreno uses the term "Hispanic" in this article. De León, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt*, 205.

- 6 Lori Rodriguez, "Fighting City Hall / Uphill battles are nothing new for activist lawyer Reyes," *Houston Chronicle*, October 28, 1991; Cesar Rodriguez, interview with Mikaela Selley, August 11, 2011.
- 7 Rafael Acosta, interview with Mikaela Selley, August 11, 2011.
- 8 Yolanda Black Navarro, interview with Mikaela Selley, July 27, 2011; Yolanda Black Navarro, interview with Mikaela Selley, November 1, 2010. I use the term Latina in this portion of the article only in reference to Navarro's own use of the word in the interview.
- 9 Anthony Espinoza, interview with Mikaela Selley, August 2, 2011.

## TATCHO MINDIOLA

- 1 Unless otherwise noted all information is from Professor Tatcho Mindiola, interview with David Goldstein, June 4, 2008, Houston Oral History Project, Houston Public Library Archives.
- 2 Tatcho Mindiola, interview with José Angel Gutiérrez, November 10, 1997, Tejano Voices, University of Texas at Arlington, 50, 55.
- 3 Mindiola, interview, 2008.
- 4 Mindiola, interview, 2008.
- 5 Mindiola, interview, 1997, 6.

## FINDING A WAY: CMAS

- 1 The first Mexican American student organization at the University of Houston was the League of Mexican American Students (LOMAS). We changed the name to MAYO to affiliate with the larger MAYO network. A split developed because some believed MAYO was too radical. Those who objected formed another organization, the Aztecas and focused primarily on social activities. For a history of the Mexican American Youth Organization and its activities see Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995).
- 2 Professor Tatcho Mindiola, interview with David Goldstein, June 4, 2008, Houston Oral History Project, Houston Public Library Archives.
- 3 Tatcho Mindiola, interview with Natalie Garza, July 8, 2011, UH-Oral History of Houston, Houston History Project, Special Collections, University of Houston, 8.
- 4 Mindiola, interview, 2008.
- 5 For a history of the Raza Unida Party see Ignacio Garcia, *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1989).
- 6 Mindiola, interview, 2008.
- 7 Mindiola, interview, 2008.
- 8 Mindiola, interview, 2008.
- 9 Mindiola, interview, 2011, 35.
- 10 Mindiola, interview, 2008.
- 11 Mindiola, interview, 2011, 32.

## BILINGUAL EDUCATION

- 1 Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., *Contested Policy* (Denton, Tx: University of North Texas Press, 2004).
- 2 For an overview of these developments see Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., *Brown Not White: School Integration and the Chicano Movement* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001).
- 3 Gabriel Vasquez and Jeff Shadwick, "A Blueprint to make bilingual education better in HISD," *Houston Chronicle*, June 13, 1999, 4C.
- 4 For local policy see Bilingual Education, Multilingual Department, HISD, n.d.
- 5 See Proposed Board Policy on Multilingual Education Programs, May 31, 1999.
- 6 Vasquez/Shadwick, 1999.
- 7 Letter from eleven area legislators, [Mario Gallegos, Jr. et al] to Rod Paige, June 14, 1999.
- 8 Letter from Mario Gallegos, Jr. to Laurie Bricker, board president, June 14, 1999. Proposition 227 was a proposition aimed at replacing the state's bilingual education program with an intensive English language one. For a historical and contemporary view of this proposition and its impact on public education see Susana Flores and Enrique G. Murillo, Jr., "Power, Language, and Ideology: Historical and Contemporary Notes on the Dismantling of Bilingual Education," *Urban Review*, 33, no. 3 (September 2001): 183-206.
- 9 Letter from Rick Dovalina, national president of LULAC, to Rod Paige, June 16, 1999; Letter from Arturo Vargas, executive director, NALEO, to Rod Paige, June 17, 1999.
- 10 Letter to Hon. Mario Gallegos from Peter D. Roos, co-director, META, June 15, 1999.
- 11 Letter to Sen. Mario Gallegos, Jr., from Cynthia Cano, MALDEF staff attorney, June 10, 1999.
- 12 Salathea Bryant, "Some HISD trustees favor revisions to bilingual ed program," *Houston Chronicle*, June 18, 1999, 1A, 34A.
- 13 Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., Letter sent to the editor of the *Houston Chronicle*, August 16, 1999, unpublished.
- 14 The leaders of the group were the author and Angela Valenzuela, a professor of sociology at Rice University.
- 15 The author helped organize this meeting and presented the results of the ongoing negotiations with HISD at this meeting.
- 16 Office of the Board of Education, Board Meeting of July 22, 1999, 1-6.
- 17 For a balanced account of the research on bilingualism and learning see Kenji Hakuta, *Mirror of Language: The Debate on Bilingualism* (NY: Basic Books, 1986). See also more generally Josué M. González, ed., *Encyclopedia of Bilingual Education* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008) and San Miguel, Jr. *Contested Policy*, 2004.
- 18 See Board Policy on Multilingual Education Programs, July 22, 1999.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 See Roos, July 21, 1999, letter stating that the current definition sets the bar too low.
- 21 See Izaguirre, July 20, 1999, letter; it will place LEP children at a disadvantage.

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