



Embracing Culture Through the Universal Language of Mankind

“Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life, and to everything.” These are the words of Plato, and despite being spoken centuries ago, the remarkable and universal truth that can be found in them has far from dwindled over time. Traces of this truth can be found today through the actions of a few exclusive and outstanding individuals, such as the highly esteemed Ms. Martha Placeres of Brownsville, Texas, a remarkable individual who has been able to effectively integrate and blend culture in a way that highlights its importance through the gift of music.

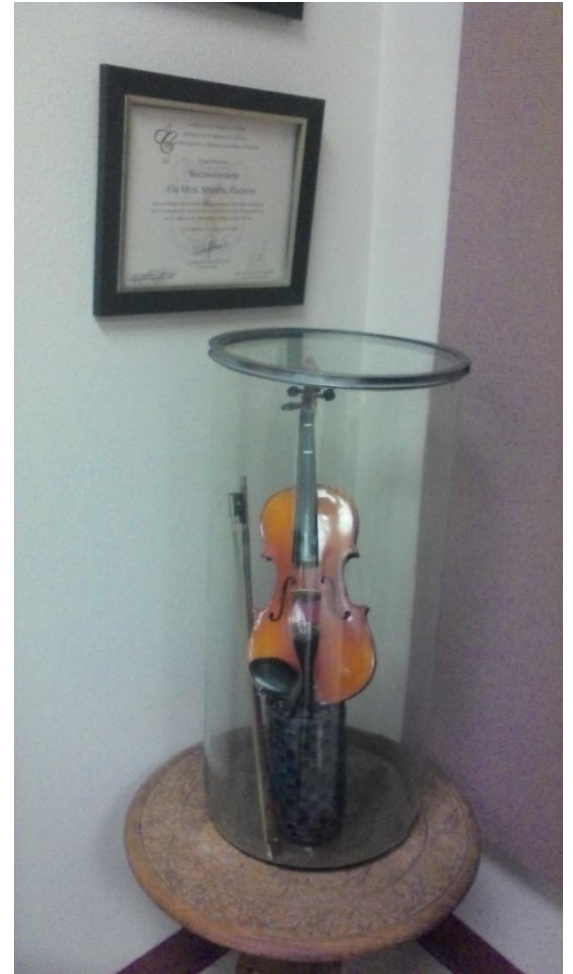
Born in Puebla-Mexico, Placeres spent the first twenty years of her life surrounded by music, even at a very young age. "I guess everything started with my grandfather," Placeres said. "He was a professional opera singer in Mexico City." Fausto de Andrés y Aguirre was always surrounded by Mexican composers as an opera singer, and was given the task of rescuing the ailing Puebla State Conservatory of Music. As a result of his hard work and dedication, the school began offering degrees. "He passed his love of music on to his 12 children," Placeres said. "He made sure that every single one of his sons and daughters could learn a little bit of music so they could understand his job...Growing up, it was just a part of my childhood" (Montoya).

Her father, the late Alfonzo Placeres was a pianist, and as is her mother, Martha Aguirre, who is currently an academic director at the Puebla State Conservatory. While Placeres herself could have easily followed in her parents' footsteps and also become a pianist, she instead decided to embrace her passion for music through playing the violin. It was this decision that has served as a very important role in the success she's had in the remainder of her life. Had it not

been for the loving support of her family however, she may not have been able to fulfill her desire to play the violin (Placeres).

Martha Placeres remembers peering curiously into the room in which her uncle stood producing a variety of rich and exquisite tones with the violin. “When I heard the beautiful sounds that he was able to create, I decided that that was what I wanted to do too,” she recalls. Because of her musical background, one would think that this would not pose an issue. The violin however, comes in different sizes, and at seven years old, Placeres needed a violin that was custom made for her petite frame. Unfortunately, the only way to obtain one was to travel miles away to Mexico City, where a heavy price was placed on such a unique piece of merchandise. This was something that her parents did not have the financial means for, but her uncle, who played the violin himself, wanted his niece to experience the same

passion that he had. He collected contributions from his siblings, and together, Placeres’ aunts and uncles raised enough money to buy her a new violin. The money was given to her music teacher, who made the trip to Mexico City, and upon his return she began taking lessons at the Puebla State Conservatory in what would soon become a zealous career (Placeres). To this day she possesses that same violin, aged with time, in an honorary display case that can be viewed in her office at the University of Texas at Brownsville. “To me, it is a constant reminder of the importance of family, and of not giving up on your dreams, no matter how small they may seem”



(Placeres). This symbol reminds her each day of the how far she has come, and of how much of a difference a seemingly small sacrifice can make to someone else.

Placeres since then has had a thriving career as a performer, and “has been part of different orchestras such as the Puebla Conservatory Symphony Orchestra, Puebla Chamber Orchestra, Valley Symphony Orchestra, and Lubbock Symphony Orchestra, and was even a featured soloist, performing the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with well-known orchestras in Mexico (Concert Program, 6).” Her performances, regardless of where they are, truly reflect her passion for what she does and they showcase the broad knowledge and experience that she possesses as a performer.

Placeres continued attending the Conservatory and received a degree in Violin performance. She then began attending the University of Texas at Brownsville in 2002 in order to broaden her knowledge of music as taught in the United States, which differs from the European styles. Here, she received a Masters Degree in Music Education and began teaching and conducting. This proved to be quite a challenge though, as the string program was lacking in numbers, resources, and funding at the time. “When I first started, it was just myself and three other students. It has been a challenge, but we have discovered that the key to the growth of the program has been recruitment. Having individuals from all over the valley, and even from Mexico come and play in our orchestra has truly contributed to its growth,” Placeres remarks. As a result of her hard work, Martha Placeres has successfully “created and developed the string program at the University of Texas at Brownsville, where she is currently the string studies director, teaches violin and viola, and conducts the UTB symphony and string orchestras” (Concert Program, 6). Amazingly, this is not the only outstanding accomplishment Placeres has achieved as a conductor. She is also responsible for founding and conducting the Puebla

Conservatory of Music Youth Orchestra and “has been featured with different orchestras in Mexico such as the Puebla Symphony Orchestra, the University of Tamaulipas Symphony Orchestra, the Puebla State Conservatory of Music Symphony Orchestras, as well as the Texas Tech University Symphony and String Orchestras” (Concert Program, 6).

In 2003, she published an exhaustive work about Violin History in one of the most important newspapers in Puebla, Mexico –*Sintesis*-, and in 2005 she made a research and Recital about 20th century Mexican Music written for Violin and Piano. In 2008, she was given an Award as “Woman of the Year in the Arts” in the state of Puebla, Mexico. The Award, “Carmen Serdán Alatríste,” is only given to women from Puebla who have an outstanding career and have contributed to the culture in the state (Concert Program, 6).

In the year 2013, she was a clinician for the Texas Region 28 and 15 middle and high school orchestra programs. Mr. Lucas Darger, chairman of the Region 28 program who has performed with her in the past states, “She gives greatly of her time to help the music programs not only at UTB, but also at different schools...She is an excellent teacher with an incredible ear and perfect pitch...Clearly very passionate about music, and has a way of getting through to students without having to get upset or impatient” (Darger).

At this event, Placeres conducted and directed high school students, but still she upheld an air of professionalism in executing the task which she was given, leaving behind an impression that many students will not be soon to forget. To this day, the message she impressed upon students throughout that rehearsal holds just as much relevance as it did on that day, “Notes are not governed by democracy, and they should not be treated in the same manner. Each note should be dealt with in its own way, and given its own value. Only then can music be made.”

These words unite to convey the most profound meaning that truly served to transmit the passion that exists in her on to those around her. They act as an invisible force that seems create an atmosphere of motivation and anticipation even to the far reaches of students sitting in the back of the room.

Always in complete control, Placeres executes each performance with utmost grace and accuracy; her love of what she does is evident in every move she makes. Despite her extensive knowledge and experience of both performing and conducting, Placeres is still a very approachable person, who is always willing to make time for her students despite her busy schedule. “It is very rewarding to watch students improve over time,” she explains, and improve



they have. Jose Antonio Delgado, a student of hers for three years relates, “I entered the University having no knowledge of music at all. I could not play the violin, nor could I read music, but she has been so patient with me, and I wouldn’t be where I am today had had not been for her. Now that I have advanced, she stresses doing more than just reading notes, but on making music... She is so much more than just a teacher. She teaches class on a personal basis. She knows what I am capable, and deals with me as a person rather than just another student” (Delgado). Delgado is currently planning to major in music education. Victor Flores, another of her students who began taking private lessons with her four years ago recounts, “I was a really bad violinist. I was last chair of the second

violin section, but she has been able to push me all the way up to being the *concert master*... She always expressed the importance of knowing what you want and going for it. I am honestly not the best violinist, but I feel that she has put in a lot of time with me, and I am really appreciative of that. She is the most patient teacher that I know, and is always there. If you ever need anything, you can just go to her and ask. There are times when our forty-five minute lesson turns into a two-and-a half hour lesson because she is so intent on me getting something right.” A couple of summers ago, Flores qualified to attend a summer camp at the Juilliard School for six months, during which he studied and learned to play the very intricate and technically complex Caprices of Paganini. “It was very difficult, but it has allowed me to grow as a violinist, and gain unique and valuable experience as a performer that I will never forget” (Flores).

Placeres not only has a way of nurturing the talent of her students individually, but she also successfully incorporates cultural importance through her selection of music performed by the UTB Symphony Orchestra. “She is an absolutely brilliant woman; when it comes to violin pedagogy, she definitely knows how to recreate technical aspects in a way that is individualized for each student... She has also found a way to embrace culture and bring it into our music. We have played everything from Beethoven’s 5th Symphony, which everyone’s heard of, to music by Silvestre Revueltas and other pieces or composers that are not as popular, but she really makes them stand out as we learn more about them,” says Leo Garza, a student under Ms. Placeres for almost four years(Garza). Another of Placeres’ students, Yolanda Vidaña, who has been under her direction for nearly three years adds, “For me, it has helped a lot that she speaks Spanish because like her, I am from Mexico, so when she speaks in Spanish to me during class, it really makes it easier for me to learn and understand. We have also played music from

Mexican composers such as *Huapango* by Jose Pablo Moncayo, which was one the pieces that I really enjoyed. It is nice to see all the different styles of music and to learn music of my heritage” (Vidaña).

Besides having a busy life conducting at the University, Placeres is also currently studying to receive a Doctoral degree in Orchestral Conducting at the Texas Tech University in Lubbock. Juggling this with giving private lessons to her students at the UTB and teaching at many other clinics around the Rio Grande Valley is a very trying situation, and she often travels back and forth from Brownsville to Lubbock for short periods of time (Placeres). “I would like to have her here all the time. I understand that she is busy, and when she is here, she gives 100%, which I love about her, but I just wish she didn’t have to leave. As soon as she gets her Doctorates degree, I really hope that she will stay here with us all the time,” says Christian Martinez, a freshman at UTB who has only been her student for two semesters (Martinez). Evidently, Placeres even has a way of leaving an impression on those who have not known her long. When she does receive her degree, Placeres reveals that she plans to continue what she is doing, and continue growing and learning with her students (Placeres).

This summer Placeres looks forward to traveling to Austria, where she was invited to conduct the student Symphony Orchestra of the Rheintalische Music School in Lustenau. This music school also invited three string students from UTB to accompany her in the trip to perform with their Symphony Orchestra as well to take master classes with their faculty at the Volarlberg Conservatory of Music. She held an audition open to all string students to be eligible to go to the trip, and three of her students qualified. “It is so rewarding to be able to share what I know. That is what I really enjoy—seeing my students progress as they gain experience and knowledge that I am able to share with them.” Placeres expresses.

Valuing the importance of family and of being able to share what she has to offer to others are qualities that truly set her apart as a remarkable person. Each Christmas, Placeres returns to Puebla to visit with her family, and they celebrate in a unique way that reflects her love of sharing with others. In the Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla, a hospital exists for low income families in need of medical care. Placeres comes together with her large family to play music for children and other patients in the hospital (Placeres).

This truly exemplifies the significance of spending time with family and embracing the gift of giving, a gift that she has brought with her to Texas, where each day, she gives her time to deliver valuable knowledge of culture through music. Rightly it can be said then, that this woman is brilliant in all she has done—an inspiration who serves as a paradigm for all, especially for aspiring musicians like myself. It is in my highest hopes that I too can one day develop a passion that I can share with the world in manner that yields such incredible results and impacts others in such a positive way.

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Eric Garza: The Hispanic Hero

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Eric Garza: The Hispanic Hero

United States Senator of Florida, Marco Rubio once stated, “The Hispanic community understands the American Dream and have not forgotten what they were promised – that in the U.S., a free market system allows us all to succeed economically, achieve stability and security for your family and leave your children better off than yourselves.” Every year Hispanics search the regions of Texas in search of this very opportunity to better themselves and especially their youth. One such region is the poverty stricken region that is the Rio Grande Valley. It is a region that has begun to accept its current role as nothing more than a region of widespread poverty and undervalued skill, but there is one man who will not sit idly by and watch as this region and the Hispanics who inhabit it are characterized by benighted stereotypes and filled with cruel insults. There is one man who will work diligently to better the region. That man is Eric Garza. Garza believes, “Future opportunity exists for Hispanics to excel and advance themselves and their families” (Garza). He sees that a disheartened culture has suddenly sprung up and is on the cusp of something greater than what people believe they can achieve. Eric Garza, a prominent figure in the RGV and State of Texas, has been working to better the welfare of Hispanics since he was a teenager, through his work with The Libre Initiative and his various involvements in local and statewide communities.

Garza’s journey began in the urban city of Houston, Texas in 1987 where he was born into a Hispanic family that was economically challenged. He later moved to the Rio Grande Valley when he was eight years old. He recalls, “My parents struggled and we were poor. My father was a construction worker and my mom stayed home to raise us, so it was difficult”

(Garza). Garza wasn't going to let his family's economic struggles or any obstacle stop him from pursuing his dreams and goals. "When I was in high school, my ROTC instructor spoke to me one day and told me that I had no leadership potential and that I would not amount to anything significant in my life. If my life is any example today, I have proved that instructor wrong"

(Garza). In high school alone, Garza showed that he was capable of becoming a prominent leader. While attending James Pace High School in Brownsville, Texas, Eric Garza attended the National Lorenzo de Zavala Youth Leadership Conference in Chicago representing Brownsville ISD as a sophomore. There he served as the Student Council Senator, and was in the top 10% of his graduating class (Garza). Although he considered law enforcement as a career option, his years spent in high school helped Garza learn he wanted to better the lives of Hispanics in Texas and he wanted to become involved in politics. Garza's display of leadership qualities and his assortment of skills led to him attending Texas A&M University in College Station, where he earned a bachelor's degree in Political Science. There he also served as the Assistant Director of the Legislative Relations Commission of the Student Government Association, being the highest ranked Hispanic student in the government body at the time. Garza's leadership and growth as a teenager and young adult would prove to be the foundation for his later works and involvement with Hispanics locally and nationwide.

In 2011, Eric Garza's works in the RGV gained the attention of Daniel Garza and The Libre Initiative, as he joined the emerging organization as the Texas Coalitions Director. He quickly supplanted himself as a valuable asset to the organization as he put in the time needed to help the organization grow and develop. "My job is to network and build working relationships with other organization and individuals who work in faith, business, education, and public policy, and who want to work to advance opportunity for Hispanics" (Garza). Garza works to

build relationships and help advance the goals of his organization through networking and coalitions. Of his work ethic, close friend Louie Hernandez says, “He’s a go-getter, and has the attitude of a workhorse. He’s the kind of person that will see a need and, if he’s capable of filling that void, he will” (Hernandez). Eric Garza travels frequently through the year to speak about LIBRE at leadership conferences, seminars, and meetings involving The Libre Initiative in order to fulfill his duties as the Coalitions Director. According to Garza, “LIBRE will soon offer a Leadership Academy where Hispanic youth can obtain their GED/High School Diploma online for free” (Garza). This monumental program will provide much more opportunity for Hispanics all over the Nation, allowing for access to education and opening a door for Hispanic youth to attend colleges and universities. Not only does Eric Garza help LIBRE with relations, but he also helps with work in communities. He proudly states, “We work directly with churches, youth based organizations, public policy organizations and other nonprofits that can open doors for us to meet and network with Hispanics. We also do projects with chambers of commerce and schools to promote economic success with youth and families” (Garza). The work of Eric Garza through The Libre Initiative is significantly touching the lives of Hispanics nationwide, as his efforts are showing the leadership skills that he displays on a daily basis. He believes in “making sure government does not take control over people’s lives , but instead offers opportunity for Hispanics to excel, to get educated and become prosperous and pursue the American Dream” (Garza). What makes it even better is that he loves doing what he does because he knows the situations that many of these young Hispanic males and females face. Worship Director at VICC in San Benito, Adrian Martinez, who works with Eric on a daily basis says, “I think it is a great thing, Eric is really passionate about his work and he works even harder knowing that it’s giving back to the Hispanic community. He has increased his workload to give more back and that is

something that is worth admiring” (Martinez). Garza’s connection to the Hispanic community only motivates him to try even more diligently to advance their well-being, and his work through The Libre Initiative has been a springboard for him to magnify his efforts and his ability to give back and help those for whom he devotes so much of his time.

Along with his works with The Libre Initiative, Eric Garza also serves as Production Director at Valley International Christian Center. He is chairman of the Board of Directors of Leadership Brownsville, Inc. He became a school board member of the Jubilee Academic Centers Charter District of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas in 2013, and he was appointed by former Texas Governor Rick Perry to the Governor’s Juvenile Justice Board. Eric Garza’s devotion to Valley International Christian Center, VICC, for the past five and a half years earned him the position of Production Manager, as he oversees three services every Sunday from 7:30 am to 2:30 pm. There are at least 1000 Hispanics attending weekly, and he takes part in weekly leadership meetings where he organizes and manages the structure of services, trains volunteers, programs lights, and oversees the pro-presenter software. “I think what makes Eric Garza an influential person in his world is his commitment to involving his personal leadership and his drive to serve others” says Abram Gomez, Executive Pastor of VICC. Along with his contributions to the Church, Garza also provides potential leaders with the ability and knowledge to participate and become effective in their communities through the Board of Directors of Leadership Brownsville. He works through these leadership classes in empowering and developing leadership in Brownsville, Texas, and the surrounding communities by offering monthly classes that teach principles of leadership. He also involves these individuals in community projects and activities. Because of his passion and work in helping Hispanic youth succeed in education, Garza was appointed to the Jubilee Academic Centers Charter District of

the Rio Grande Valley. “We can work to promote higher education, personal responsibility and opportunity in our Hispanic community. We can do more to work with families, to make sure Hispanics youth graduate with a diploma and go on to college, and that future opportunity exists for Hispanics to excel and advance themselves and their families. Our community has much to offer Texas in matters of business, education, and family values” (Garza). Garza’s goal is to help Hispanic youth reach higher education and attend universities, so that they may better their futures and better the lives of their parents. As part of the Juvenile Justice Advisory Board, since 2012, Garza oversees funding for juvenile justice departments all across the State of Texas and works with various other board members to budget the funds for Hispanics in juvenile detention. Eric Garza’s devotion to his Church and community through his vital roles allow him to touch the lives of countless Hispanic youth and adults and allow him to continue reaching and advancing their roles in their communities and in Texas.

Eric Garza’s early struggles economically, his drive to succeed, his work with The Libre Initiative and involvement with the Hispanic community are only some of the many influences that encourage him to advance the Hispanic culture in Texas. His passion and devotion to his work are true examples of his desire to see the Hispanic community excel and reach new levels of economic attainment. Garza ultimately wants “to help bring Hispanics out of government dependency and poverty” (Garza). Eric Garza sees a potential in this region that not even its own people can comprehend. The majority of these people view their lives and futures as empty and a waste of life, but Garza sees a region about to explode with talent and mass potential to exceed the expectations laid upon it by the rest of the country; Garza will not rest until his vision for the region comes to fruition and he sees the success for which he has dedicated his very life.

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A Man Like No Other

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A Man Like No Other

What is a real hero? A real hero is one who stands up to adversity, and achieves the impossible in the face of what seem like insurmountable odds. A real hero follows his heart, and puts the needs of his comrades and country above his own. He also goes out of his way to do things for others selflessly, without expecting anything in return. One such man not just fulfills these requirements to be a hero, but is the true embodiment of the word, and also surpasses it in every way imaginable. This great man is no other than Texas born Raul (Roy) Perez Benavidez, Master Sergeant in the United States Army, and recipient of the prestigious award the Medal of Honor, the highest military award for bravery. Through his actions on and off the battlefield, Benavidez broke through cultural and physical barriers to bring honor to the Latino community and to himself, and helped pave the way for future Latinos in the armed forces.

As a young boy, Benavidez was forced to endure hardships that few others have faced. He was born on August 5, 1935 in a small town of Cuero located in Southeast Texas to a Mexican father Salvador Benavidez Jr. and a Yaqui Indian mother, Teresa Perez. (Benavidez 1). Unfortunately at the age of two, his father died of tuberculosis, and sadly his mother also succumbed to the same disease five years later (Zullo 71). After these two tragic losses, Benavidez and his younger brother Roger were adopted by their uncle and aunt, and went to go live with them in the town of El Campo located southwest of Houston, Texas. He worked many odd jobs such as shining shoes at the local bus station, and as well as at a tire shop. Not interested in studies, he did not attend school regularly and finally dropped

out at the age of fifteen, and ran away from home. These actions were regretted later as egregious blunders.

After realizing his big mistake for not attending school, Benavidez decided that he was too old to return to his education, and instead joined the Texas National Guard in 1952. He saw men in uniform as honorable men with integrity who were willing to put their lives on the line to protect others, and he decided to follow the same path. After qualifying for the regular army, Benavidez completed his United States Army Airborne School training and was assigned to the prestigious 82nd Airborne Division in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Once there, he began training to join the Green Berets, which he was accepted into later (Zullo 72). He became a member of the 5th Special Forces Group and the Studies and Observations Group. After joining this elite group he was forced to face even greater obstacles than he could have ever imagined. In 1965, Benavidez was sent to South Vietnam to serve as an advisor to a Vietnamese military unit. Unfortunately, luck was not on his side as he stepped on a mine during his patrol, and was immediately evacuated to the United States, where he ended up in Fort Sam, Houston, Texas. He had been severely injured and paralyzed from the waist down, and the doctors told him that he would never be able to walk again (Billac 43).

Faced with a permanent paralysis, Benavidez was forced to choose between two daunting options: accept his fate, or fight against it with every ounce of strength he had. It was no surprise that he chose the second option. From that day on, every night when no one was watching, he would get out of bed and would struggle to reach the nearest wall using only his elbows and chin, in spite of the excruciating pain in his back. As the pain drew constant tears from his eyes, he would back himself against the wall and then attempt to

move his toes (Zullo 73). Throughout this agonizing experience, his mind was only fixed on one goal: getting back to Vietnam so that he could continue fighting for his fellow Americans. This goal even transcended hospital regulations, as sometimes the nurses would catch him out of bed, attempting to regain his movement, and give him a pill to force him to sleep. In spite of this predicament, he continued to use every chance he received to move his body. Almost a year later, the doctor came to Benavidez to give him his medical discharge papers, and Roy showed him that he could stand. This prompted the doctor to repeat the diagnosis that even if he were able to stand, he would never be able to walk again. It was at this time that Benavidez jumped up and moved, performing a feat so unimaginable that the doctor said, “Benavidez, if you walked out of this room, I’ll tear these papers up” (Warden 27). Defying the odds, Benavidez did walk out of that hospital, having overcome just one more obstacle that dared to challenge him.

Benavidez returned to Fort Bragg in North Carolina, determined to get back into the war by training. In no time, he was back to his old self, doing pushups, running long distance daily, and making parachute jumps. Eventually, he was able to return to Vietnam in 1968. It was here that Benavidez proved that an iron will and unyielding determination can work wonders in times of danger. He was waiting for his next mission when a radio call came in, a distress call from a small team of twelve Green Berets who were surrounded by hordes of North Vietnamese infantry. He recalled that in the radio transmission he heard “so much shooting, it sounded like a popcorn machine” (Goldstein). There had already been three rescue attempts, but all had failed due to heavy firing from the enemy troops on the ground. Without a moment of hesitation, Benavidez grabbed as many medical bags and guns as he could carry, and proceeded to get on the first helicopter traveling to the front

lines. He knew that the chances of him making a big impact were small, but he still disregarded these indecisive thoughts in the hopes of helping his fellow soldiers.

According to The New York Times article by Richard Goldstein, Benavidez later recalled that “When I got on that copter, little did I know we were going to spend six hours in hell.”

The events that happened next on May 2, 1968 in Loc Ninh, South Vietnam have gone down in history for all time. When the helicopter reached the battle zone, Benavidez did a quick assessment of the bleak situation. The American soldiers were pinned down by an entire North Vietnamese Army (NVA) battalion, which consisted of hundreds of Vietnamese soldiers (Zullo 76). At this point he could have easily given up, declared the situation unsolvable and turned the helicopters around, and no one would have blamed him for it. Instead, Benavidez drew on his past experiences of hardship and chose to focus on saving the situation with extreme fortitude. Keeping these experiences in mind, he jumped off from the helicopter in a clearing and rushed under heavy enemy fire to the wounded American soldiers to supply them with aid, getting shot many times in the process. Once he reached the Green Berets, he supplied medical aid to many of them and galvanized them to better retaliate against the North Vietnamese forces. In a time of desperation, he instilled confidence in the worn out soldiers and gave them hope to fight back. Using only a rifle, he held off the enemy soldiers and cleared a path toward the extraction point, even picking up a dead enemy soldier’s weapon when he ran out of bullets in his own gun (Zullo 77). When the helicopter arrived, Benavidez individually carried the wounded soldiers to the departure point, and even made a separate trip to secure the classified documents which was the original mission of the team. Inopportunistly, as they were getting ready to evacuate, he was blown off of his feet by a nearby grenade and knocked out unconscious. When he regained

consciousness, he opened his eyes to see smoking wreckage at the site where the helicopter had been.

All hope seemed lost. The one chance at surviving they had was now decimated, laying in an obliterated heap in the field. They were still surrounded by enemy infantry. Benavidez was back on his feet instantaneously, and began pulling the survivors out of the rubble. He went about the colossal task of setting up a last stand around the helicopter. With most of the other soldiers out of commission, it was up to Benavidez alone to ensure the survival of the group. Bleeding profusely, he fought tooth and nail for six hours until the next rescue helicopters arrived. When they did, he once again assisted in pulling the men toward the extraction point. The enemy, seeing them escaping, rushed the helicopter in a final effort to stop them. Benavidez, realizing how close they were to being rescued, rushed the enemy soldiers in a hand to hand combat in order to buy time for the American soldiers to load themselves in the helicopter. In this last effort, he was stabbed multiple times and his jaw was even broken by a rifle butt. Having been shot, stabbed, and imbedded with shrapnel a total of thirty-seven times during the whole event, Benavidez hauled himself up on the helicopter, and once he knew they were safe, drifted into unconsciousness (Blehm 2). When they arrived at the base he was declared dead. In the last moments of his body bag being zipped up he managed to spit in the doctor's face, and was then rushed into surgery followed by rehabilitation. It turns out that Benavidez had saved the lives of eight American soldiers that day.

Roy Benavidez was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions. When the account of a witness to the event was authenticated, Benavidez was finally able to receive the highest congressional medal of all on February 24, 1981 from the U.S.

President Ronald Reagan: The Medal of Honor. Fortunately, Benavidez did not stop there, and continued to show his devotion to his country. After proving himself on the battlefield, he took it upon himself to motivate others by giving inspirational speeches at schools and to several other groups of people, doing whatever he could to impact lives. He encouraged children especially Latinos to stay in school, to stay away from drugs, and to be patriotic towards their country. His good deeds have inspired Latino individuals to take the same path he did, a path of honor and integrity towards an honest goal. He received the Texan of the Year in 1981, and many other esteemed awards. There are many buildings and institutions named after him in many cities including Fort Knox, Houston, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and El Campo. He also shared his life and military experiences through three books that he wrote with other authors called *The Three Wars of Roy Benavidez*, in 1986, *Medal of Honor: A Vietnam Warrior's Story* in 1995, and *Medal of Honor: One Man's Journey from Poverty and Prejudice* in 2005. Others authors also wrote books on this humble, loyal and determined Vietnam War veteran.

Master Sergeant Roy Perez Benavidez is truly a paradigm of the indomitable American and Texan spirit. Throughout his early life, he faced obstacles, from losing his parents to when he had to work in the fields to support his family. He faced racism nearly every day as a man coming from Mexican and Yaqui heritage. He accidentally stepped on a mine and was told by doctors that he was paralyzed and would never walk again. He took it upon himself to save his comrades in the face of hundreds of enemy soldiers and bullets. He was declared dead but managed to communicate that he was still alive. Any single one of these experiences could have broken a normal human, but Benavidez was anything but normal. He was an extraordinary man whose immaculate character and sense of morality

guided him to do almost superhuman tasks. Benavidez stood up again after stepping on the mine. He survived thirty-seven wounds, escaped death, and lived to tell the tale. He exemplifies the true hero, the knight in shining armor, the one that stops at nothing, whether it be paralysis or hundreds of enemy soldiers firing at him, to help others in need and make a difference. His life and actions have served as a guiding force for not just the Latino community, but to the human race as a whole. He has had a major impact on the Latino communities today, showing that hard work and determination in anything can yield remarkable results, success, and recognition, whether it be on the battlefield, or in the workplace. Today, young Latino individuals can look up to him as a good role model to achieve their dreams, and he has opened the door for Latinos to join the army and gain respect. Although he passed away on November 29, 1998, Benavidez's life is a testament to unselfish devotion. He has taught a lesson of strength and determination, and he is a man like no other.

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The Sun Also Rises in El Cenizo:
Raul Reyes' Impact

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] High School

The Sun Also Rises in El Cenizo:

Raul Reyes' Impact

A rooster's cry signals a new day in El Cenizo, Texas. Wind picks up loose dust and pigweed, the city's namesake, and blows it a few hundred yards across the town into the Rio Grande River. El Cenizo's citizens awake to the sound of the rooster, maybe theirs, maybe a neighbor's, and begin their day. Cousins who have grown up together and live down the road from each other swim and fish in the river. People regularly cross the Texas-Mexico border to see family. Just as regularly, people are deported by Border Patrol. In this city on the edge of America, out of the public eye because of its small, largely poor, largely Hispanic population, one man strives to improve his city. Each morning, El Cenizo mayor Raul Reyes wakes up along with the rest of the population, and he looks out the window of his house at the town that is expanding and improving before his eyes. He might note the newly paved roads, the new concrete sidewalks, the new drainage systems that keep the city from flooding. He might see the newly instituted fire and police departments or the construction that has just begun on the city library. He might even see the newly built town hall, where he has worked each day for the past twelve years as El Cenizo's mayor. Each day, Mr. Reyes sees all of these features in the town which he helped bring about, and he remembers the time, merely twelve years earlier, when such features did not exist. He might look around him and note his accomplishments, but Mr. Reyes knows that as surely as the sun rises, another day brings another challenge. As the sun rises over the Rio Grande and over El Cenizo, as the rooster signals a new day, Mr. Reyes will continue working to better the lives of the people of El Cenizo.

Those lives have vastly changed over the years since Raul Reyes has been mayor. Originally formed in 1980 as one of Texas' 2,294 "colonias," El Cenizo came into existence

after developers took agriculturally worthless floodplains, invested in the land with little or no infrastructure, and divided them into lots sold to low-income individuals looking for cheap housing following the maquiladora boom on the Texas-Mexico border (Barton et al.). These communities thrived in their own way, existing in an unregulated, “extra-legal” sort of limbo, while becoming home to approximately 500,000 Texas and Mexican citizens (Barton et al.). Families put down roots. Children were born. Houses were built. But largely nothing had been done to better El Cenizo’s infrastructure, even after it was incorporated as a city of Webb County in 1989 (“About Our City”), even though it is only fifteen miles from Laredo, Texas. Each mayor prior to Mayor Reyes served only one two-year term, and of these mayors, El Cenizo citizen Beatriz Longoria recalled, “Although several mayors had been in power, they never did anything to better El Cenizo. In fact, they were sent to jail for illegal activities. It was not until Mr. Reyes took office that things began to change.”

Before Mayor Reyes was elected, he experienced firsthand El Cenizo’s lack of infrastructure. Born in Corpus Christi, Mr. Reyes and his four brothers lived with their mother. He and his siblings grew up watching their mother “wake up every day and try to make ends meet just to provide a roof and the commodities of life” for her children (Reyes). Mr. Reyes recalled, “The neighborhood where we lived in Corpus wasn’t necessarily the most elegant neighborhood, but it was a decent neighborhood,” a neighborhood in a town that at least had the infrastructure capable of supporting its citizens. This period of his life in Corpus Christi gave Mr. Reyes experience of life in a developed community so that when he and his family moved to El Cenizo in 1992 so that his mother could care for her grandmother, who had suffered a severe stroke (Reyes), he had an idea of what a town should be even when it lacked the most basic resources. Of life in El Cenizo, Mr. Reyes recalled, “when we first moved, we had no electricity,

no running water, no infrastructure whatsoever. . . . Coming from a fully developed community to a non-developed colonia was really life-changing and really made things difficult.” He remembered going to school with “muddy shoes on rainy days because [the] streets weren’t paved” (Reyes). “Vehicles could not even get out of their own property” (Longoria) because the dirt roads were in such poor condition. As Mr. Reyes noted, “A city without infrastructure is not a city.” El Cenizo was barely on the Texas map when Mr. Reyes was a child. He, in fact, grew up with the city, witnessing firsthand the lack of resources the town experienced, and he realized what effects these deficiencies had on a town and its people.

As a teenager, in noticing these deficiencies and recognizing that the mayors before him were doing nothing to improve the conditions of the town, Mr. Reyes began “volunteering in the local Boys and Girls Club, . . . forming an award winning, community respected youth choir, giving ESL and Citizenship classes to adults, and [teaching] basic computer skills courses” for El Cenizo citizens (“About the Mayor”). As a volunteer in El Cenizo, Mr. Reyes began his career as a dedicated public servant. By the time he was nineteen years old and a graduate of the Academy of Global Business and Advanced Technology Magnet School, a subdivision of United South High School in Laredo, Texas, Mr. Reyes had become interested in politics (“About the Mayor”). Of this interest, Mr. Reyes stated, “Never did I imagine that I would actually get in politics. All across my high school years, I really saw myself as a teacher. . . . I think that the frustration of seeing so much need in my community, seeing a government that was not responsive to the needs of the people—this was really what triggered my interest in politics.” He continued, “Rather than complain and become bitter about what was not being done in El Cenizo, I chose to do something and get involved and make the difference in my community myself.” In 2002, at the age of nineteen, Raul Reyes ran for mayor. Although his initial run for

office was “unsuccessful, [Mr. Reyes] was determined to continue his community involvement and serving the people of El Cenizo by advocating for better city services and better city infrastructure” (“About the Mayor”). At the city’s next election in 2004, at the age of twenty-one, Mr. Reyes ran for mayor again, and this time, he won.

With this 2004 victory as mayor, Mr. Reyes became the youngest mayor not only of El Cenizo but also in Texas history. Immediately after being elected, he began working to further his impact by improving the infrastructure of El Cenizo. Of his goals for El Cenizo after being elected mayor, Mr. Reyes said, “When I first ran for mayor, I knew that there were tons of problems, but I never promised anybody anything. What I did promise was that I would work very hard, that I would wake up every single day and work as hard as I could to improve upon the many challenges that our city faced.” And improve the city he has done. When asked about what changes and infrastructure Mr. Reyes has brought to El Cenizo, he recited the long list of improvements that have come to the city because of his hard work. He said, “Now we have paved streets. Now we have running water. We have electricity. We have public lighting. We have sidewalks on some of our streets. We have a fire station, a municipal park, a police department, a municipal court. We have a modernized city hall.” Through Mr. Reyes’ diligence, through his dedication to the advancement of the more than three thousand people of El Cenizo (“About Our City”), he has helped secure “4 million dollars of federal funding” (“About the Mayor”), funding that El Cenizo might never have seen if Mr. Reyes had not put forth the effort to obtain it for his city.

Perhaps one of Mr. Reyes’ most controversial contributions to El Cenizo is making Spanish El Cenizo’s official language so that official city business is conducted in Spanish to encourage citizen participation (Constantini). All city council meetings, all court proceedings—

everything is conducted in Spanish, with Mr. Reyes translating each item of city business back to English before it is sent to the State's records (Constantini). His dedication to his people, clearly seen through his determination to allocate more funding to the town's infrastructure and through his efforts to make city business more accessible to El Cenizo's citizens, is only further enforced by the fact that Mr. Reyes has been re-elected seven times. In addition to serving the people of El Cenizo for twelve years, Mr. Reyes has also diligently worked to improve himself so that he can further improve his city. During his time as mayor, Mr. Reyes attained a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in public administration at Texas A&M International ("About the Mayor"). Clearly, Mr. Reyes is doing everything that he possibly can to enhance his ability to continue improving the lives of the citizens of El Cenizo. He believes that the biggest step the town must take to improve itself is changing the mentality of its citizens (Reyes). With a median income that is less than half the national average (Barton), with 96% of the population of Hispanic origin (Reyes), with border patrol vehicles roaming the streets and existing as a constant reminder of the hardships that accompany living in a border town with a mixed legal and illegal population (Reyna), with "unsafe living conditions, low educational attainment, high unemployment, comparatively high rates of the spread of communicable illness, lack of access to health care, and poverty" (Blume et al.) —the citizens of El Cenizo have many things that lower their morale. Yet it is people like Mr. Reyes who give them hope.

Angel Ivan Garza Reyna, a high school student living in El Cenizo, reflected that Mr. Reyes has given him hope for the future as he recognizes the sacrifices Mr. Reyes has made for the community. He said, "Mr. Reyes has helped the city drastically, even if some citizens do not appreciate what he has done for them. People do not realize all the hard work, all the sacrifices

he has put in, all the time he has lost, all the sleep he doesn't get—to make things better for them.” Reyna continued, Mr. Reyes “still continues to achieve his goals. We may not have much, but we have more than we used to have. We don't have pools, but we have a river. We don't have those fancy houses, but we have a roof. We don't have restaurants, but we cook our own food. This is our life”—a life whose conditions have greatly improved because of the hard work and dedication that Mr. Reyes has put in to achieve his goals for El Cenizo. After all, Mr. Reyes' ultimate goal is not to better himself. His goals in life have always been to better El Cenizo so that he can create a pathway for people to better themselves. Of this dedication to his people, Mr. Reyes said, “I've been fortunate enough to be in a position where I can provide people of all ages the tools and resources to get ahead, to stay ahead, and to eventually achieve greatness.” While the city of El Cenizo still faces many problems associated with its proximity to the border and its lack of economic security due to the lack of jobs within the city, Mr. Reyes remains dedicated to continuing to improve the city in whatever ways his position will allow him. Mr. Reyes declared, “As long as the people allow me the opportunity to serve and work for them, I'm going to wake up every single day, like I promised, and find ways to improve our community and make it a better place to live and raise a family.”

Each day, at the sound of the rooster, El Cenizo awakens from its slumber. The residents open their eyes. Cousins play in the river that separates one country from another. Mr. Reyes awakens with them. He opens his eyes and looks out the window at the town that is expanding before him. He notes all that he has accomplished and all that is yet to be achieved. He watches the sun rise over the river, over his city, and he smiles. A new day brings new challenges, and Mr. Reyes awakens ready to face them.

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The Amazing Life of George I. Sanchez

“The worst form of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal” (Aristotle 1).

George I. Sanchez was an honorable man who made many improvements in the Latino community including initiating equality, ending discrimination, and providing adequate representation for all individuals from Latin descent. He dedicated his life to the Latin American community by standing up against the injustices placed upon them.

George I. Sanchez (Jorge Isidoro Sánchez y Sánchez) was born on October 4, 1906 in Albuquerque, New Mexico to his parents, Telésforo and Juliana Sánchez. Sanchez was raised in a slum neighborhood a few miles west of Albuquerque where he attended elementary and secondary public schools. Sanchez’s upbringing already defied most odds because, “in the 1930s and 1940s, hardly any Mexican Americans graduated from the public school system—few made it past grade school” (Sanchez 4). This idea held true in his own life because his parents dropped out of school shortly after the third grade. Sanchez was fortunate that he finished high school and was determined to work hard as a school teacher to further his education. His hard work propelled him forward and in 1930 he received his bachelor's degree from the University of New Mexico. He later earned his master's degree from the University of Texas in Austin in 1931, and his doctorate from the University of California in Berkeley in 1934. Both of his master's thesis and doctoral dissertation dealt with educational problems of Spanish-speaking children, which were inspired by the injustices he witnessed growing up as a child. His experiences as being poorly treated because of his skin color would set the tone for much of his later writings.

The educator began his career as a teacher. However, he later served as a school principal and head of the Division of Information and Statistics in the New Mexican State Department of Education. From this position of leadership, he strove to actively work at improving the funding

of public education. The General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation aided Sanchez's career by awarding him fellowships for graduate study, underwriting the funding of the Division of Information and Statistics for a four-year period, and sponsoring research projects in topics of concern to Mexican-American citizens. However, Sanchez's strong support of state funding for rural schools earned him powerful enemies in New Mexico. Despite his impressive body of scholarly work, he was not offered a tenured position at the University of New Mexico. Although, the University of Texas at Austin did offer him a tenured position as a full professor (Tevis 2).

The educator joined the faculty of the University of Texas in Austin in 1940 and chaired the Department of History and Philosophy of Education from 1951 to 1959. While teaching in Texas, Sanchez continued his activism on behalf of the Latino community. He took an active role in both university and state wide issues, and frequently spoke publicly regarding the needs of the Mexican-Americans. He took part in many court cases dealing with the segregation of Spanish-speaking people. The most famous case he was involved in took place in 1945 named *Hernandez v. Texas*. This was a landmark case that held that Mexican Americans and all other nationality groups had equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S Constitution (Sánchez 1). This case was a turning point in Latino history because it was the first case in which Mexican-American lawyers had appeared before the U.S. Supreme Court.

George I. Sanchez's later career, for a period of more than thirty years, involved dealing with socio-cultural factors in Texas which he perceived kept Spanish-speaking people from reaching their optimum economic and social development. While Sanchez taught at the Texas public institution, he studied the economic and educational deprivation of the Spanish-speaking

people. Over the course of time, he realized that Texas' historical development differed so markedly from his native New Mexican culture and that he would need to attempt different ways to find the means of solving educational problems for this group. Sanchez attempted to do this by taking part in activities involving teaching at the university, taking part in leadership roles in Mexican-American activist organizations, as well as expository writing designed to inform Texans about Spanish-speaking individuals. Sanchez used his knowledge of Texas history and culture to combat the institutionalized prejudice he found in educational and political practices in the state (Dugger 3).

George Sanchez went on a search for measurable criteria which could document the severity of the segregation of Mexican-American children. Sanchez had an idea to examine ten different Texas school systems in attempt to evaluate and provide evidences of segregation. He looked at factors such as segregation practices, teacher-pupil ratio, instructional programs, administrative staff, classification, and promotion practices.

Among doing this research project, Sanchez questioned educational leaders concerning their segregation practices. He found that educators tend to defend and justify their customary policies. First, they would declare that separate elementary schools gave Spanish-name children opportunities to learn both English and other curricula, easier than they would be able to in a more competitive and integrated setting. They also reported that local community pressures demanded maintenance of separate facilities for this minority group because these children required extra help (Tevis 1).

Because educational leaders defended their segregation practices on the basis that these children received more individual help from instructors, Sanchez expected to find a lower

teacher-pupil ratio in the segregated schools. However, he found the opposite to be true. The ratios of teacher to pupils for Spanish surnamed children fluctuated from 26.5 to 61, while the range in Anglos schools varied from 15.2 to 42.2. Also, he reported that schools failed to use any pre-tests, to determine if these children needed separate educational facilities because of language handicaps. These blanket segregation practices made authors accuse school districts of continuing their discriminatory educational practices seemed prejudicial both to the growth and development of the Mexican-American child.

He and others observed that educational practices found in the ten school systems indicated that these districts violated both state and federal laws. They concluded that data revealed "irrefutable, objective evidence that the segregation of Spanish-name children in the selected school system is prejudicially discriminatory, and that the good faith of the 'pedagogical reasons' offered for that segregation is questionable" (Sanchez 2). Sanchez also blasted local districts' favorite policy of creation of school zones to enable them to draw school boundaries based on ethnic lines. He reminded his readers that improperly drawn boundaries did not provide a legal route for the commission of an illegal act of segregation. He also brought the reader's attention to the fallacious reasoning used to confuse English skills with education. Sanchez noted that Texan children coming from Czech or German language homes were not isolated in segregated classes, although they, too, may have limited language skills when they first entered school (Sanchez 3). Moreover, he stated that it remained a specious argument to assert that children learned a foreign language from the teacher alone.

When the educator lived in New Mexico and worked in the state's education department, he learned that Hispanics generally exhibited a lower achievement level and a greater degree of

overagedness than the Anglos in the public schools. He believed this educational downturn was caused by inadequate educational funding in areas of Spanish-speaking population concentration contributed to the bilingual child's poor educational achievement. Sanchez's writings, both from political and educational viewpoints, indicated that the Spanish-speaking children could not achieve on a comparable level with an English-speaking one until he had the same educational opportunities. Sanchez insisted that children had to be given the same learning experiences before they took the same standardized tests.

Sanchez was also concerned with the influence of discrimination in standardized testing. He demonstrated that many tests, such as the IQ test, were biased against Latinos. He argued that “standardized testing ensured that Latino children would inevitably receive second-class educations” (MacFarlane 4). He showed the inherent bias of verbal I.Q. test. The study concluded that poor language concepts served to lower I.Q. scores. Sanchez asserted that bilingual children required the same good teaching that all children needed and advocated for the widespread use of audio-visual materials for these children. He concluded that socio-economic conditions, rather than hereditary factors, contributed to the generally lower scores for this group and that this should not result in the child being segregated from the general population.

Sanchez also believed that Spanish-speaking children, like all other children, required teachers who could respond properly to their educational needs. He pointed out that Texas contained one-half of the total Mexican-American population in the Southwest and this population was concentrated in the counties closest to the Rio Grande river as well as in the south and central portions of the state. Because of this population distribution, residents in Texas should become more aware of these people's needs. This is why after the election of 1960,

Mexican-American leaders met in Victoria, Texas in November to discuss strategies on increasing their political power. “Soon after the meeting, the Community Service Organization and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) met to politically organize and unite Latinos (George I. Sanchez 1).” The meeting resulted in the establishment of PASO. George I. Sanchez' political ideas influenced the formation of PASO, as Sanchez promoted measures to protect and promote the Latino community. The measures included increased regulation of the border between Texas and Mexico, a minimum wage for migrant workers, welfare, and increased federal funding for education. PASO chapters soon opened throughout Texas.

Additionally, Spanish-speaking Texas lacked sufficient political leadership to prevent Anglos from flagrantly ignoring their civil rights. During the thirty-two years that Sanchez lived and worked in Texas, he continuously challenged these leaders to join a movement that would teach new and needed educational concepts to colleges in their own institutions. Sanchez stated that local educational leadership, largely native to Texas, should understand the Mexican-American problems and actively cooperate with all other community leaders in their combined search for solutions.

Because of Sanchez's many advancements in the United States Office of Education, they named a work section for him in 1978 and a room after him in the new United States Office of Education Building in 1985. In 1984, Ruben E. Hinojosa, a member of the Foundation Advisory Council of the College of Education at the University of Texas at Austin, endowed George I. Sánchez the Centennial Professorship in Liberal Arts through the College of Education, the first such honor accorded a Mexican-American professor in the United States. Schools in Houston,

San Antonio, and Austin, Texas, were also named in honor of him and the AAMA honored the legacy of George I. Sánchez for improving educational opportunities for Latinos by naming its charter school in his memory.

George I. Sánchez died on April 5, 1972 in Austin, Texas. George was a teacher for half a century, the chairman of the Department of History and Philosophy of Education at the University of Texas, and the director of the Center for International Education. He was the pioneer Mexican American educator, upon whose shoulders fell the task of defending his people against the racist claim that Mexicans were congenitally inferior intellectually to whites. Following his death, many honors were awarded to him in his memory, “the National Education Association sponsored the George I. Sánchez Memorial Award to recognize him as the "father of the movement for quality education for Mexican-Americans"; and in 1998, the University of Texas renamed the College of Education building the George I. Sánchez building. He will be forever remembered as a “man of rare courage and infectious high spirits who never hesitated to say what he thought about bigotry and prejudice and institutional stupidities; he was never in awe of the high and mighty” (Duggar 16).

One day when the entire issue of inequality of opportunity for minority groups in the United States remains a "quaint" concern for students of history, Sanchez's struggles will be noted as one of the building-blocks used by Mexican-Americans to surmount these problems. When the fight can be remembered with distance and affection, then the accomplishments of this Mexican-American leader will stand out for the strengths of his attainments, and his personal foibles will be forgotten.

George I. Sanchez made many improvements in the Latino community including creating equality, eliminating discrimination, and providing adequate representation for his race.

Although Sanchez did not come from much, with his hard work and determination, he blossomed into a powerful and driving advocate for many Texans today. “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter” (Luther 1).

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Gloria Anzaldúa's Significance in Shaping Contemporary Latino Communities

Latino History Essay Contest

20 February 2019

Gloria Anzaldúa was a revolutionary figure in Texas Latino history and greatly influenced contemporary Latino communities with both her transformative theories on cultural identity and her activism for women's and minorities' rights. With a very complex identity not limited to isolated traits, Anzaldúa considered herself a Chicana, lesbian, feminist, theorist, poet, activist, and teacher (Napikoski). Anzaldúa was extremely active within the Latino community as a representative for the marginalized minority group, and the discrimination she faced throughout the entirety of her life impacted her future writings and theories extensively. The culmination of her theories and writings was *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Cuevas). The importance of this masterpiece cannot be understated, for it effectively communicated ideas of acceptance, with Anzaldúa even claiming that being caught in "the borderland", the figurative area where Mexican and American cultures merge that is representative of the U.S.-Mexico Border, could allow for one to form "a new *mestiza* consciousness" (Anzaldúa 80). A "new mestiza consciousness" is a mindset that compels a minority to accept his or her place within dual cultures such as those of the U.S. and Mexico, thus allowing one to accept his or her cultural identity and to form a new perspective on it, with the basis being love rather than disdain (80). This acceptance of a new mestiza consciousness allowed for all minorities, even minorities within the Latino community, to credit their cultural identities while giving the majority a new perspective into Latino culture.

Gloria Anzaldúa's life began in the lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas on the 26th of September in 1942; the location's "geographical proximity [to] the U.S.-Mexican Border figures prominently throughout in her work" (Dahms 12). The U.S.-Mexican border, which was extremely close to the city of Raymondville, Anzaldúa's birthplace, was extremely diverse, and clashes between the multiple races ultimately resulted in unique racial tensions that affected

Anzaldúa's early life, such as the racial discrimination that frequently plagued the lives of Latinos, herself included (Anzaldúa and Keating). As a child, she suffered "from a hormonal imbalance that caused her to menstruate as a three-month-old infant and undergo puberty as a seven-year-old," causing the young Chicana woman to grow up quite rapidly (12). In addition to Anzaldúa maturing physically at a young age, she also had to mentally mature to enter the workforce and joined her parents to work in the fields. The responsibility of working in the fields extended into the financial responsibility of caring for her family upon the death of her father when she was fourteen, which meant that she had to balance work while "making time for her reading, writing, and drawing" ("Gloria Anzaldúa"). However, Anzaldúa proved successful in her time management, for she focused on her numerous hobbies, working in the fields, and obtaining a high school diploma from Edinburg High School (Cuevas). After many years, and facing many financial difficulties, Anzaldúa was able to pursue education full time and eventually earned her bachelor's degree in English from Pan American University (Cuevas). Afterward, Anzaldúa obtained a master's degree, also in English, from the University of Texas at Austin and began working on a Ph.D. in comparative literature (Cuevas). The acquisition of higher education provided Anzaldúa with the contextual knowledge required to begin her career in activism and feminist theory.

Upon beginning her career in the 1970s, Anzaldúa taught a course entitled "La Mujer Chicana," meaning "The Chicana Woman", at the University of Texas at Austin. While teaching this course, she was exposed to "the queer community, writing, and feminism" present within the university's community (Napikoski). Eventually, Anzaldúa's teachings and writings culminated in *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In the robust volume, Anzaldúa details her familial history, dating as far back as the Toltecs, Aztecs, and Olmecs. As illuminated in her

writing, Anzaldúa explores the position of women through the centuries, which served as the beginning of her feminist theory and stated that “the exalted role of women” within ancient cultures was common and that “(common people) continued to worship fertility, nourishment, and agricultural female deities” against the authority of central rule (Anzaldúa 33). Anzaldúa’s insightful comment provides historical context to the capitulation of feminism by expounding on how female worship has been ingrained within the common people throughout history but has been increasingly suppressed by central rule. She then notes the downfall of the female position in exchange for the elevation of “male culture [which] has done a good job on [women]” (22/23). In fact, Anzaldúa notes that “for 300 years [women were] invisible... [but they] wished to speak, to act, to protest, [and] to challenge” (22/23). Anzaldúa allocated the idea of how females, especially Chicana females, have been betrayed by time and the contemporary patriarchal society; she advocated for an end to these injustices and promoted female rights. The awareness demonstrated in Anzaldúa’s works on feminist theory aided the activism movements of the 1970s and 1980s, which focused on female and minority rights, changing the world’s outlook on female rights, both within Anzaldúa’s own Chicana community and within other racial groups on a national scale as well.

Anzaldúa also ensured that her belief in minority rights and her activism against injustice were reflected in *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. One right Anzaldúa believed minorities were entitled to is the first amendment of the United States Constitution: freedom of speech; she argued against the unlawful requirement to “speak ‘American’” and “to get rid of our accents” (Anzaldúa 53/54). Language is particularly important to cultural identity, and indigenous linguistic ties between multi-ethnic minorities serve to unify them against the oppressive majority, which is significant for contemporary Latino communities, especially those

in Texas, who are still subject to maltreatment in the contemporary era. This sentiment resonates with Anzaldúa's theories for she believed that "language... can connect [minority] identity to ... the realities and values true to themselves" (55). However, language is not to be used to battle back the majority in a minority rebellion but can be used to expand cultural identity and, most importantly, to promote acceptance. "A new mestiza consciousness" or the "consciousness of the Borderlands" describes the pacifist mindset that the Latino community can embrace to deal with linguistic oppression and other injustices (77). With this outlook on life, one "copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity...[with] a plural personality... nothing is thrust out, the good the bad the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (79). Thus, the new mestiza consciousness enables Latinos to brave racism without being inundated with anger or confusion. Therefore, Anzaldúa promoted self-acceptance within the Latino community, which influenced the behavior of Latino communities in modern times. No longer are they segregated based on regional dialects; no longer do they go into violent rebellion over injustice; instead, they are now united and push for justice without the loss of life.

Although *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* exemplifies many of Anzaldúa's theories, all of which are applicable to present Texan Latino communities, there is a greater intricacy in the theories discussed outside of the volume. Anzaldúa preached acceptance, understanding, and awareness. As she stated once in an interview with the Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies, she also battled against the evils of "neo-colonizing," an oppressive and systematic degradation of minority culture to preserve that of the majority (Anzaldúa Interview). She was extremely perceptive to white privilege and how it subsequently undermined vibrant Latino culture but was also aware of "the internalized domination and internalized racism and prejudice that ... people of color have among [themselves]" (Anzaldúa Interview). Unlike many

theorists of her time, Anzaldúa placed the blame of injustice not on just the white majority, but also upon the Latino minority. Latino isolation and racism originated from both sides of the spectrum, with Latinos being racist to the distinct ethnic groups, such as African Latinos, within the entire Latino community. Racism was, and still is, an exorbitantly convoluted subject which can be viewed from a myriad of positions, but Anzaldúa was able to utilize it to promote acceptance for all racial groups, not exclusively for one or another. The general spirit of humanity in Anzaldúa's theories, such as those commenting on the nature of feminism and the struggles that minorities face, is expressed by Anzaldúa's focus on alleviating the sufferings of women and minorities through exploring the social psychology of the American majority. The composition of Anzaldúa's works also echoes her sentiments on humanity. Many of Anzaldúa's works, including "La Prieta", *This Bridge Called My Back*, and the quintessential *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, were all partially autobiographical, so it can be deduced that they communicate Anzaldúa's personal experiences as both a woman and a minority (Anzaldúa Interview). Anzaldúa's first-hand experiences with racism and sexism formed the basis of her theories, which juxtaposed negativity and hatred with positivity and acceptance. Due to the focus of Anzaldúa's theories being humanity and acceptance, it is clear that her theories greatly affected contemporary Texan Latino communities as they promoted the unification of a marginalized group with the backing of true human experience.

The most notable effect that the theories within Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* has on Texan Latino communities is the destigmatization of code-switching, colloquially known as Spanglish. Code-switching is defined as "the alteration of two languages" to represent a bicultural heritage and is very prominent near the U.S.-Mexico Border (Jordan 104). Although code-switching has existed for centuries, Anzaldúa was one of the first authors to

support code-switching as a “rejection of dualities” (Jordan 105). In fact, Anzaldúa notes that by rejecting dualities, she is “participating in the creation of yet another culture” (Anzaldúa 81). This statement is extremely important to contemporary Texan Latino communities, especially communities near the U.S.-Mexico Border, who employ code-switching on a regular basis amid cultural clashes. Anzaldúa promotes the acceptance of a bicultural heritage by regularly “switch[ing] between English and Spanish” throughout the novel (Jordan 106). By employing Spanglish throughout *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa normalizes the prospect of code-switching with Latino communities. Anzaldúa’s theories also serve to normalize code-switching, as she continually stresses the importance of embracing a bicultural heritage rather than adopting a dominant cultural presence. Anzaldúa’s teachings are especially impactful to the Latino communities along the U.S.-Mexico Border, who are constantly barraged by two cultures, so acceptance of a bicultural identity is pertinent to Latino unification. Thus, Anzaldúa’s use of Spanglish and her support for bicultural heritage throughout *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* promotes acceptance within the contemporary Texan Latino community.

Anzaldúa’s activism outside of her literary works also contributed to contemporary Texan Latino communities. After relocating to California in the late 1970s, “she devoted herself to writing ... [and] political activism” (Napikoski). This political activism included “conscious-raising”, where Anzaldúa sought to spread information about lesbian and minority rights on a national scale through political essays and interviews (Napikoski). Her indefatigable efforts were rewarded by a new American outlook on not just lesbians and minority women, but also on the Latino community. The marginalization of this racial group was scrutinized for the first time, and, although majority oppression did not entirely cease, Anzaldúa’s activism allowed for the

process towards racial justice to begin. Anzaldúa was able to accomplish this by noting that there was a lack of “writings either by or about women of color” and worked to combat this with the editing and publishing of two anthologies titled *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* and *Making Face Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (Napikoski). The expansion of writings by these minority groups influenced Latino communities to undertake the mission towards justice through writing as well, so Anzaldúa can be credited with incidentally causing an inundation of writing by Latinos in the 1980s and onward. Even in contemporary society, there has been a clear increase in minority literary works by well-known Latino as indicated by the Latin American Boom of the 1970s and 1980s (Hill and Echevarría).

Without Anzaldúa, a literary cultural identity around Latinos would either not have formed or would not be as powerful within the community.

In summation, Gloria Anzaldúa’s metamorphic theories on identity and Latino culture greatly influenced contemporary Texan Latino communities. By providing a platform for marginalized groups, they could thus elevate themselves and fight for their rights with the unification of many distinct communities into one cohesive unit. Anzaldúa’s theories inspired both majorities and minorities and allowed Latinos, particularly those on the Texan borderlands, to take pride in their own cultural identities while respecting others’. Minority women were especially elevated by Anzaldúa, who placed them in a novel position in their respective minority groups. Without Gloria Anzaldúa’s exemplary work, the Texas Latino community would be far more oppressed, and women would not have garnered as much respect as they have in the contemporary era. With that, it is clear that Anzaldúa greatly influenced Texas Latino

communities while also changing the perspective of the majority so that they will have a novel outlook on the struggles of the minority.

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Fingerprints of Success: Rick Garcia's Impact on Texas

“Wherever you find something extraordinary, you'll find the fingerprints of a great teacher,” observed former United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (“Arne Duncan”). His words address the lasting influence teachers can have on their students. Someone who truly understands the importance of this influence is Mr. Rick Garcia, an award-winning teacher, theatre director, and creator of his own continuing education company called Maestro Theatre. Garcia has inspired thousands of teachers and students in his almost forty years as a classroom teacher and director. However, before he became an accomplished educator, Garcia was once just a student with great potential and caring teachers who cultivated his gifts to put him on the path to success. Today, Garcia teaches at St. Andrew's Episcopal Upper School in Austin and travels across the state to schools with his educational theatre company, helping theatre teachers and students find their potential and give them resources to help them thrive. With his maxim, “A teacher helped me, now I'm helping a teacher,” in mind, Garcia uses his talents to inspire many teachers and students not only across Texas but the nation as well.

Garcia grew up on his family's ranch in Spur, Texas, which he owns today. Here he helped harvest cotton and raise beef cattle with his eight brothers and sisters. He has many fond memories of his siblings, especially of his sister Sylvia, whom he identifies as his very first teacher. When Garcia and his little brothers were too young to attend school, Sylvia would bring home her worksheets, erase the answers, and share her elementary school lessons with them. He also cites these early days of acting out school as his first contact with theatre (Garcia). After these early days of playing school, he enrolled in Ralls ISD, about forty miles from his family's farm. Throughout his twelve years of public education, he encountered many teachers who inspired him to identify and to work to achieve his greatest ambitions. An example of one of his

influential teachers is his first-grade teacher Linda Hicks (now deceased), who traveled frequently and shared her adventures in Mexico with Garcia. Hicks proved to be significant because in spite of Garcia's Mexican American heritage, he had never heard of Mexico until she exposed him to the world outside of Texas (Garcia). His third-grade teacher, Betty Polvadore, was influential because she started his UIL career by entering him in the Storytelling contest, which he won, giving him a newfound confidence. His fifth-grade teacher, Patricia Jentsch, fostered his leadership skills by entrusting him with the position of editor of the school newspaper and appointing him as student council president. She also continued to engage Garcia in numerous UIL activities. From athletics, to speech, to journalism, to theatre, to choir, he loved the competition aspect of every UIL event. Garcia reflected on competition, saying, "Sometimes people think of competition as a negative thing, especially in the arts. But I like to remind my students and my teachers that competition is American and if I had not been given the opportunity to compete, I would never have won a contest and consequently would never have validated my self-worth and lifted my self-confidence." Throughout his years of school, his teachers continued to support him. When high school graduation came, his trusted teachers Mike and Patsy Fisher encouraged him to attend college as a first-generation student. From his sister Sylvia to Mr. and Mrs. Fisher, his many influential teachers helped reveal his potential, so he enrolled at The University of Texas at Austin to pursue a BFA in Acting.

Garcia's decision to attend UT-Austin came from the love he had developed for Austin's rich culture. He had attended UIL journalism events in the city along with a student council conference on the campus. His family did not have the opportunity to take vacations, so these school activities gave him a chance to see some of Texas. Used to the Texas plains, he was mesmerized by the trees and water throughout the city. Most of all, he felt a sense of welcome

and support by the city's progressive ideas. On a visit to the campus, he recalled "walking down the drag and seeing a banner advertising a gay social group." He thought, "I want to go to school in a city where that word [gay] can be printed publicly and where I can feel comfortable, confident, and accepted. I was never going to find that in my rural school or in the high plains conservative colleges." Thus, off he went to Austin. After his first year, however, because of a professor's disheartening words about the slim likelihood of his finding a job as an actor, he switched to theatre education, simultaneously vowing not to discourage his future students' dreams. The switch proved to be fruitful, and he met many more great teachers along the way, like Ruth Denny, the founding director of the Kinder High School of Performing Arts, and Lynn Murray, former UIL State One-Act Play Director (Garcia). He finished his degree in four years, paid for it all out of his own pocket, and prepared to return home and teach in Ralls ISD and help his family on the farm. As he began his teaching career, he was ready to influence his future students as his past teachers had him.

In Garcia's first year at Ralls in 1981, his students competed at the State One-Act Play competition, a feat that first-year teachers rarely achieve. However, in the midst of his success in his career, his family lost their farm. Because of this loss and due to the increase in job offers that came his way as a result of his play having advanced to state, Garcia opted to accept a position with Barbers Hill ISD, where he taught for the next four years. Along with theatre, Garcia had a passion for language. Thus, while at Barbers Hill, he earned his master's in creative writing from the University of Houston, hoping someday to be published. He taught next at Klein Oak High School, where future Emmy winner Jim Parsons, star of *The Big Bang Theory*, was one of his students. He also obtained his first State One-Act Play win in 1989. During his time as a teacher, Garcia used his own life experiences to engage his students and to provide a

deeper understanding of the curriculum. One of Garcia's current students, Christian Brown, stated, "I come from a background similar to Rick, being colored, lower class, and a minority in a predominantly white institution. Rick is one of the only teachers who take care of my needs. He knows I don't have the same resources, cultural background, or understanding [as other students] and he makes sure I'm taken care of and can still be held to the same expectation of his other students." Focused on building personal connections with his students, Garcia is a trustworthy teacher on whom many students rely for support they don't have outside of his classroom. This quality is reminiscent of his past teachers who meant so much to him and is a confirmation of his success as an educator.

Although Garcia loved and found great success in teaching, he wanted a chance to explore self-expression through literature. Thus, Garcia took a break from teaching for a year and used his creative writing training to write, direct, and perform in his autobiographical play entitled *Cucuy, the Mexican Boogeyman*. Garcia described his play as his "personal narrative about my own journey as a young Latino artist in Latino culture that I didn't really feel a part of." To share his story, he explained, "I wove Latino ghost stories in and out of my own personal ghost stories." This play provided representation to other Texan Mexican American artists, as stories like his had not been widely told.

After telling his story in Texas theatres for a year, he decided to return to teaching. He worked for a year at his alma mater, UT-Austin, but ultimately he found a better fit at Johnson High School, a liberal arts academy where he worked for fifteen years, before moving to St. Andrew's Episcopal Upper School in Austin. In each school, Garcia left a lasting impact on his students and colleagues. Former student Robin Carsner attests to his large influence not only on her life but also on the lives of all his students, saying, "He taught me not only about theatre but

also how to live my life as a kind and driven individual. He shows his students that he cares about them beyond what they do in the classroom and really wants to help them on their path to becoming successful adults. Even after leaving high school, I still keep up with him and he continues to pour into me and will always be a mentor to me even if I live in a different state. He has been like a second father in my life and for that I could not be more grateful.” In his many years of teaching, Garcia has had the opportunity to influence hundreds of students. However, he still felt many Texas students were deprived of the arts due to a lack of well-prepared teachers and quality resources, so in 1991 he decided to create a program that could help give every student access to theatre, the place where many, including Garcia, find safety in the sanctuary of the stage.

Garcia began the Maestro Arts Project with the goal of providing rural teachers and students with quality theatre educations by conducting workshops at the Eastwood Special Events Facility, located on the land Garcia’s family farm once occupied. The teachers directing these workshops include Garcia, Renee Buchanan, Mandy Epley, and Patty MacMullen. Renee Buchanan was once a teacher thrown into directing the One-Act Play for her school, so she sought out Garcia to teach her the ropes of theatre as she had heard about his great success in the competition. Once they met, Garcia became her theatre mentor, and she became immensely successful as a director (Buchanan). Situations like Buchanan’s, where teachers find themselves lost and in need of guidance to teach theatre, are very common, especially in rural schools. With the help of Maestro Theatre, though, inexperienced teachers called upon to become theatre directors can properly train students who are interested in the arts. Garcia’s company has expanded his influence as a leader in theatre education to thousands of teachers and students across Texas. Mandy Epley shares Garcia’s role as a leader and encourager in his company. She

expresses: “His encouragement has helped me to share my knowledge with others as a clinician. My experiences across the state have helped me gain a following and have a lucrative side business as an acting coach and critic judge. He has also helped to encourage me to keep growing as a leader.” The Maestro Arts Project team provides summer theatre camps and college audition training as well as employment and mentoring opportunities for fine arts college students to develop their portfolios and résumés. Maestro Theatre recently qualified as a non-profit organization, a career defining moment for Garcia, as he hopes to raise money to provide even more opportunities in the next five to ten years. His goals include constructing an amphitheater, creating a read-aloud program for first through fifth graders, providing after-school theatre programs for high schoolers, building a home for new plays for women by women, and developing a study abroad program for rural teachers (*Maestro*).

The impact this organization has had on many Texans is readily apparent. A testament on their website by Jill Ludington from Texas A&M University-Canyon reads: “I cannot put into words what the Maestro workshops, the educational growth, and the lifetime Maestro friendships mean to me. Maestro provides a warm welcoming environment that is safe to learn in and to share” (*Maestro*). Proving this feeling of teamwork and encouragement has been the driving force in the Maestro Arts Project’s goal to help spread effective theatre education across Texas.

Garcia’s dedication to theatre education has not gone unnoticed by members of the theatre community as he has received several awards over the years. In 1996, he was presented with the Texas Educational Theatre Association’s Teacher of the Year Award. He received an honorable mention for a 2019 Tony Award for Excellence in Theatre Education presented by Carnegie Mellon which “celebrates teachers who create the next generation of theatre artists” (“Excellence”). He also received an Emmy nomination for *The Children’s Dignity Project*,

hosted by Oprah Winfrey. At the time, Garcia had received national attention for curriculum called “Talk Theatre” designed to help lower socio-economic students share their stories. This program developed as a result of Garcia’s inability to find any plays with enough characters for his thirty-five person class. The students were required to write their own comedic and dramatic personal narratives, which Garcia then wove together. This program gave the students a chance to express themselves in a way unknown to them before. The ABC network decided to create a documentary similar to what Garcia was already doing in the classroom. Thus, Garcia’s friend who knew a producer on the project connected the two of them so some of his students and their stories could be featured in the documentary. This national broadcast gave Texans representation on a national platform (Horst). Without Garcia’s creative problem solving, this opportunity would not have been given to these students. However, the awards are not how Garcia wants to be remembered. He recalled being at a class reunion with his former St. Andrew’s students several years ago, “and they were all arguing that they were my favorite student. I think it’s pretty amazing that they thought and still think that they were all my favorites. I’d like to be remembered as that person who made everybody feel like the favorite.” So, while the awards are special to him, Garcia hopes that his true legacy lies in the way he made his students feel special.

Garcia has left his fingerprints on the hearts of many teachers and students because of the impressions left by his own teachers. During his almost forty years of service to the field of theatre education, he has played a variety of roles just by being an educator. He said, “There was a point in my career where I realized that not only am I a teacher, not only am I a director, but I’m an engineer; I’m a creator; I’m a communicator; I’m a mathematician; I’m a therapist; I’m a counselor; I’m a doctor.” The curtain has not yet closed on his many roles. As he continues to teach students and expand his company, Garcia’s fingerprints will continue to touch teachers and

students across Texas to make exposure to the theatre, a place where every person is welcome, a possibility for every student.

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Bea Salazar: Changing Lives One Sandwich at a Time

Bea Salazar: Changing Lives One Sandwich at a Time

One moldy piece of bread. One child. One peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

It was a typical hot summer day in 1990. Beatriz Salazar, a disabled single mother of five who lived in a low-income apartment complex in Carrollton, was taking out her trash when she saw a small boy rummaging for food and clutching a piece of moldy bread in his chubby hand. As he lifted the bread to his mouth, Beatriz cried, “No!” As he began to cry, Bea took him by the hand and led him to her apartment, where she fixed him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich that he immediately devoured. Days later, more children showed up at her apartment in hopes that she would be able to make them sandwiches as well. Weeks passed and Bea began not only to supply sandwiches to the unwatched children in her apartment complex but also to tutor them and to make other snacks for them. “*Quiero ayudar a estos chicos y chicas,*” Beatriz told her youngest daughter, Bel. “I have to help these boys and girls.”

From that first peanut butter and jelly sandwich came many more. Feeding hungry children turned into mentoring the next generation. From that humble beginning emerged the nonprofit known today as Bea’s Kids. Thirty-one years after Bea spotted the boy digging in the trash for food, her reach has grown from twelve children to thousands. Since then, Salazar has been recognized at both the state and national levels for her work with Bea’s Kids. At least two alternative schools in the Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD have been named after her, in honor of her hard work and dedication to the children of the area. Her determination to aid and encourage children, no matter their background, is inspiring. Bea’s Kids Learning Centers are located in the Carrollton-Farmers Branch area, where they offer student tutoring, teen counseling, parenting classes, school supplies, shoes, uniforms, and exposure to art, sports, and life skills (“Bea’s Kids Centers”).

Reflecting on how everything began, Salazar said, “I went to throw out my trash, and I found a little boy digging through the dumpster. I brought him home and fed him and sent him home. A few minutes later, there’s some more children at the door saying, ‘Is it true you’re giving away free sandwiches?’” (“Bea’s Kids Centers”). Since then, thousands of meals have been prepared every year over the last three decades for children from low-income families. In Dallas, the average household income is \$86,393, with a poverty rate of 18.94%. The population of Dallas is 1,347,120 as of 2021. Over forty percent of Dallas’ population is Hispanic; of 305,328 Hispanic residents, only 155,889 are high school graduates. Of the 155,889, only 33,723 pursued their bachelor’s degrees. One out of every 4.6 persons lives in poverty – of the 21.8%, 83% are either Black or Hispanic (“Dallas”).

The mission of Bea’s Kids is to prevent children from repeating these statistics. Salazar’s main goals are to form a crusade against hunger, illiteracy, school dropouts, domestic strife, violence, gangs, and poverty, efforts for which she has received much recognition. She appeared on the show, *Oprah*, to receive a \$50,000 “Use Your Life” award in exchange for her efforts at educating and mentoring low-income Hispanic children in the Dallas-Carrollton-Richardson area. Her efforts saved Salazar’s own life according to Oprah Winfrey. At the time Salazar found the hungry boy at the dumpster, she was falling into a state of depression due to her own struggles, which began in 1986 when she suffered an accident at work that left her unable to provide for her five children. As her situation worsened, Bea grew depressed and even recalls considering suicide (“Bea’s Kids Centers”). While Salazar was at her lowest point in life, she managed to pick herself up and change her life as well as those of many others. Salazar says the hungry child at the dumpster moved her from self-pity to passion, and taught her an eye-opening lesson about the lives of the working poor (“Bea’s Kids Nurtures”). Bea recalls the realization

she had when she gave the child she encountered at the dumpster that sandwich: “That’s when I realized that there was a child out there in greater pain than my own” (qtd. in “Bea’s Kids Centers”).

Following Bea’s accident at the factory she worked at, she reached out to Metrocrest, located in Farmer’s Branch, Texas, in hopes of obtaining aid for paying rent, finding work, and feeding her children. It was several months after her incident while she was in between surgeries when Bea Salazar chose to volunteer at Metrocrest, helping translate for those who spoke only Spanish, to ensure that other women, children, and families got the help they needed. Immediately, Salazar was hooked on the idea of helping others. “A lot of people will say ‘I know how you feel’ but they really don’t,” Salazar told a reporter for *Texas News 5* in 1989. “And I can understand the people whether they are in pain, or whether they need assistance with food or rent money. I have been there” ([News Clip]). After more children began to arrive at her apartment, Beatriz convinced the Metrocrest manager at that time to let her use an empty apartment to house the children after school.

The city of Carrollton noticed Bea’s dedication to her children, and she has received two proclamations recognizing her years of service to her community. Salazar commented, “I am very happy, and of course everybody is celebrating that Bea’s Kids is in the community, that Bea’s Kids helps children get out of poverty, because that’s our big thing – and that can be done through education” (“Bea’s Kids Centers”). One reason Bea is so passionate about Hispanics getting an education is that Bea herself never finished high school – she dropped out at sixteen to get married. Salazar wants to break the pattern of Hispanic children not receiving the education they deserve. In the first year or so, as many as 125 children would come to the empty apartment Bea used to care for them after school. Soon, children who were falling behind in their

schoolwork – some who did not even know how to write or speak English – were making A/B honor roll in the schools they attended. Her tutoring sessions had paid off, and as more children came, the reward was definitely worth it. Salazar took the children on field trips, obtained free dental care for them, secured the services of an optometrist who provided eyeglasses for the children who needed them, and collected donated underwear and socks for the many children who did not have any. Salazar also managed to bring a couple of city policemen to talk to the children about staying safe and staying out of trouble (Hollandsworth). A continuous effort of Bea's is getting every family participating in Bea's Kids "adopted" during the holiday season. Currently, Bea's Kids helps more than 200 children and almost sixty families in Carrollton ("Bea's Kids Is Buzzing").

Year after year, as new immigrant children showed up on her doorstep, Bea kept up with all of them and met with their parents to help them assimilate and sometimes even went so far as finding a church to donate mattresses for those families who didn't have beds (Hollandsworth). One child whom Bea helped was named Omar Cabrera, a boy who had come to the United States from Mexico when he was about four years old. As a child, he told Bea he was going to attend college and then medical school. Sure enough, when Omar graduated from high school, he attended Baylor University and later enrolled at the Medical College of Wisconsin, as promised. On vacation, he returned to Dallas. When Bea Salazar asked him to return to talk to the latest group of children, he told them, "You don't have to end up like other kids around here and run with the wrong crowd; this is your chance to do anything you want" (qtd. in Hollandsworth). Based on her experience, Salazar wonders if more after-school tutoring programs were available to low-income families across the entire state, would there be more successful children? Would it

make a difference in terms of education? The problem is that there is simply not enough money for these programs throughout the state.

As for Bea, she has done her best to expand what she started, purely by chance, thirty years ago. Today Bea's Kids is a medium-sized nonprofit organization that offers after-school tutoring in several low-income apartment complexes. Every year, an estimated two hundred children use the four facilities they have and the hundreds of volunteers to continue learning ("Bea's Kids Proclamation"). Bea Salazar never stops encouraging her kids. As her organization grows, she continues to motivate and build connections with every child she encounters. Bea has been recognized at the city, state, and national level regarding her heart for children. In 1990, she received President George H. W. Bush's Point of Light Award. Beatriz Salazar is a light for the students and children of the Dallas area.

Years following that first peanut butter and jelly sandwich, Bea wanders into her kitchen in search of something to eat. A jar of grape jelly on the top shelf of the fridge catches her eye. She smiles as she retrieves a jar of peanut butter from her pantry and then spreads jelly on one slice of bread and peanut butter on the other. Her smile widens as she cuts the sandwich into two triangles, her technique long perfected. Every time Bea Salazar makes a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, she is reminded of that first boy she fed. She is reminded of where everything she has now originally came from. Her heart swells with pride and joy, something she's become familiar with over the years of helping people in her community. Ms. Salazar knows one thing – even the smallest of things, such as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, can flourish into something that makes a difference to the generations that follow.

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