

MENDEZ V. WESTMINSTER: THE LATINO BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

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A piece of forgotten history reveals that many of the issues and parties to Brown v. Board of Education of 1954 were instrumental in the desegregation of California schools in 1947. The class action discrimination suit brought by the Mendez family produced a rippling effect felt all the way to the United States Supreme Court. With the help of a television producer who produced a documentary on the Mendez case for public television, the author tells the story of the discovery of a missing piece of history.

I was excited to hear of the celebratory issue to be published by *Reflections* that would focus on the impact of *Brown v. Board of Education*. This landmark decision has long been a fixture in my comprehension of the evolution of equal rights in our country. As a social policy instructor, I teach students about the history and impact of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* on ensuring an element of advancement of oppressed groups. As a social activist, I base many of my community change activities on the premise institutionalized by *Brown v. Board of Education*—that racial inequality in separate but equal facilities is unacceptable. I stand in awe of the actions of African Americans, people of color and people of conscience who contributed to this landmark desegregation event.

To most social and legal historians, and as I believed it, *Brown v. Board of Education* was essentially a “Black and White” issue, as was much of the ensuing litigation related to school desegregation (Contreras & Valverde, 1994; Franklin, Gordon, Schwartz-Seller & Fass, 1991). It had always been framed as a “...battle that was fought and won solely in the American South” (Robbie, 2002a, p.1). While later legislation in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 expanded equal rights to other oppressed populations on the basis of color, religion, sex and national origin, the initial impetus for this movement has always been the “Black and White” *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Those of us who are not Black, but who are Mexicans (or the current designation of

“Hispanic [not White]”), may have felt a little bit like late-comers to the civil rights movement, and have sometimes been viewed as just another of the many immigrant and minority groups who have ridden the coattails of African American efforts and sacrifices in our country. To be sure, sacrifices have been made by African Americans, and there is a rightful pride and legacy that every African American child can learn about and carry into the adult world. They can enjoy a sense of empowerment that African Americans struggled for and made lasting changes in how we go about the business of ensuring social justice in our country. African American children can marvel at the wonderful and historic role models that played a part in creating, literally, revolutionary changes in our social structures.

But I have always been dismayed by the general absence of any discussion of the experiences of other diverse groups who have also suffered the experiences of exclusion. Issues of not only racial discrimination, but also language discrimination and discrimination due to national origin would certainly have been the experience of many diverse groups prior to 1954 in California. In the California of the 1950s where I was raised, my neighbors were Latino and Chinese and Filipino immigrants and numerous other non-English-speaking émigrés. As a social scientist, I know of the power of inaccuracies of social constructions of history particularly given the power of the majority to carve their own forms of history. Despite the sanitized, prevailing curriculum of that era, I had learned

early on that California had historically (and legally, since 1855) barred Black, Asian and Indian children from attending White schools (NPS, 2003). With the tremendous influx of Mexicans following the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the importation of Mexican laborers during World War I, and the growing need for farm laborers in California's citrus belts beginning in the 1920s, the Mexican American population grew to be an identifiable ethnic minority group whose presence in "American" schools was unacceptable. Segregated classrooms and then segregated schools grew in favor and in numbers in California communities. By 1919, the first "Mexican school" was built in Orange County, California. Throughout the southwestern United States, 80-90% of Mexican school children attended segregated schools mirroring Orange County, which, by 1930, had 15 "Mexicans-only" schools (Robbie, 2002b). These were separate and unequal schools housed in substandard settings and with inferior facilities. At that time, Mexicans were also confined to segregated seating in movie theaters, Mexicans-Only-Mondays at the community swimming pools (after which the pools would be emptied and cleaned for White patrons), and other forms of discrimination (Robbie, 2002b). These practices enjoyed the full support of the 1896 Supreme Court decision (*Plessy v. Ferguson*), which affirmed that states could provide "separate but equal" facilities, particularly with regard to education.

I knew of these injustices against Mexicans, Indians and Chinese Americans, particularly because I was raised amidst the diversity of San Francisco. But the social studies classes I took never really mentioned any organized opposition to this treatment. Having undergone kindergarten through college education in California schools, I, for one, had never been taught about any early efforts by Mexicans or Latinos to combat discrimination. I was left to wonder what was wrong with my ancestors, that they would tolerate the status quo until *Brown v. Board of Education* paved the way for major changes

for all minorities. Could a lack of a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy given an oppressed, minority status and, perhaps for many, a lack of language skills help to explain the dearth of efforts by other minority groups to combat these injustices to our children? I believed, as many believed, that our own experiences as Brown Berets, members of *Venceremos* (the Latino "We Shall Overcome") and as Latino social activists of the late 1960s and 1970s meant that our generation *alone* invented social activism and we *alone* rallied against the injustices of the status quo in fighting for equal protections for Latino communities. Missing was the cognizance that we were but one piece in a tradition of activism of previous generations.

Para Todos Los Ninos

These were the misconceptions resounding in my mind when, serendipitously, I happened to view a brief film on the local PBS station, KOCE. It was the documentary "*Mendez v. Westminster: For All the Children, Para Todos los Ninos*" (Robbie, 2002b). I could hardly believe what I was hearing and seeing. It was an unnerving challenge to everything I believed about the progression of events leading up to *Brown v. Board of Education*. It forced me to reconstruct completely my beliefs about the place of Mexicans and Latinos in the history of civil rights struggles in our country, and to this day, it still shakes me. I am angered that my generation was denied this piece of our history.

Essentially, the film tells the little known story of the desegregation case of *Mendez et al., versus the Westminster, Orange County, California School District*. This story begins during World War II with the internment of the Japanese American Munemitsu family of Westminster, Orange County. In 1944, Gonzalo Mendez and his family made arrangements to lease and manage the farm while the Munemitsus were forcibly relocated and interned at a camp in Poston, Arizona for the duration of the war. The three Mendez children were taken to the

local school in Westminster to enroll along with their cousins, who happened to be one-quarter French. Their cousins, who had light skin and eyes, were accepted; but the Mendez children, who had dark skin and a Mexican last name, were denied admission to the school and were told to attend the Mexicans-Only school located a greater distance away from their home and farm. For several years, the Mendezes and other Mexican families filed a series of complaints and attempted to seek resolution from the school district which would not move from its position that they had the authority to maintain White-only schools.

Because the Munemitsu/Mendez asparagus farm prospered under the demand for fresh produce to supply the war effort, Mr. Mendez had the means to hire an attorney, David Marcus of Los Angeles, who had made some advances in fighting other discrimination cases and who, ultimately, successfully brought the case to the California Federal District Court. He successfully argued that California's school admission policies violated both the Fifth Amendment which assures that no person can be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law, and the Fourteenth Amendment which provides that no State can deny to any person the equal protection of the laws. The case was a rallying point for many individuals and organizations interested in ending segregation. Amicus briefs in support of the Mendez complaint were filed by the ACLU, the NAACP, the American Jewish Congress, the Japanese American Citizens League, and the National Lawyer's Guild. The 1946 decision in favor of Mendez was written by federal district court Judge Paul J. McCormick who stated, "A paramount requisite in the American system of education is social equality" (Robbie, 2002b). Much of the wording surrounding this decision contended that "separate" was not "equal."

An integral player in California during the Mendez litigation was none other than Governor Earl Warren. He was to sign subsequent legislation in 1947 in support of the Mendez

finding prohibiting segregation in California, stating that, particularly in the educational arena, the doctrine of "separate but equal" could not be justified (Robbie, 2002b). This legislation also repealed existing laws allowing segregation of Asian and Native American students in separate schools. Seven years later, Warren would preside over and write the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision as the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. An equally important role in the Mendez case was played by then-prosecuting attorney Thurgood Marshall, who filed the supporting NAACP briefs. He would later go on to present the same arguments on behalf of *Brown v. Board of Education*, and would eventually become the first Black U.S. Supreme Court Justice.

Throughout 1947, *Mendez v. Westminster* served to provide legal precedent for many similar class action suits throughout the state of Texas and other areas of the Spanish-speaking southwestern U.S. (Contreras & Valverde, 1994; San Miguel, 1983). The NAACP, led by Thurgood Marshall, succeeded in making incremental advances towards desegregation on behalf of African Americans in South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware (Adams, 2001). These numerous, individual state decisions provided a momentum for the ultimate challenge to discriminatory educational policies—*Brown v. Board of Education*, Topeka, Kansas. But the "dry run," so to speak, would appear to have been *Mendez v. Westminster*—a California connection for all that would come to pass later at the highest level in Washington.

Conversation with the Producer, Sandra Robbie

To be able to feel a greater kinship with all these distant struggles has been a revelation. As a college professor who may teach the same courses semester after semester, year after year, it is important to me to remember why I became a teacher. I am a teacher, not only to impart information and a love of learning in students; but also because of my love of learning and my

love of personal growth in encountering new paradigms and new perspectives. It had been some time since I felt that excitement of discovery, that sense of being "bowled over" by such a departure from my view of the world. I was fascinated to learn more about how and why, 55 years after the fact, I was just now hearing about the Mendez case. I was delighted to learn that the film was produced in my own backyard, at an Orange County PBS affiliate television station. I made a point of meeting the energetic and exuberant woman who served as writer, chief researcher, and producer of the film. I was intrigued to learn of her inspiration and her experiences in the re-education of so many viewers to a new historical perspective.

Sandra Mendiola Robbie is of third generation Mexican American descent, originally from Arizona. Her family moved from Tucson, Arizona to Westminster, California when she was one year-old. In fact, her parents' home in Westminster was built on land that was once the Munemitsu/Mendez farm. Currently, she is an editor and reporter for a variety of public television projects and hosts a bi-lingual series directed at parenting skills. She graciously offered me her insights to the process of uncovering lost histories and to the importance of the Mendez legacy for Latinos nation-wide. I first asked her to recount her discovery of the Mendez case and its far-reaching impact:

***Robbie:** I remember I was sitting at my mom's kitchen table when I read about a school that was being built in honor of the Mendez family who fought segregation and won this case. And it was one of those moments—a paradigm shift. It was one of those moments when I literally felt the walls turning around me. I remember looking around me and wondering, somebody read this paper before me and why is everyone acting the same? I'm reading the paper and I was floored to find out that segregation had existed right here in California where I grew up and that a historic landmark case*

happened that changed schooling for every child in California—and that I didn't know anything about it. There was a flood of emotions that happened for me. First, there was shame in having been part of a group that had been segregated; and then guilt for not having known about this history. And eventually it exploded into feelings of pride and excitement that people like me had fought to make this change. And that this was a history that needed to be known by others. All of these emotions tangled all together in one morning. It was an amazing time for me. I just knew this was a history that was very important to me and from that point, it changed the way I not only looked at the world ahead of me—my future, but also it changed the world I had lived in.

Because of her experience and relationship in working with the public television station, Ms. Robbie had an opportunity to suggest the production of a documentary on the Mendez case. I was amazed to hear of the many necessary events that seemed quickly to fall into place as she describes the people and connections which came about in building support and momentum for the film:

***Robbie:** I told them I have a story which, if KOCE doesn't tell it, it would be the biggest shame, because it is huge. This is huge. And so I told them about Mendez and nobody here had known that segregation happened here. I had enough of a relationship and experience with them that they trusted me, even though I had never done a documentary before. So they said they wanted me to do it. I started making phone calls and I had spoken to Silvia Mendez (Gonzalo Mendez' daughter) before on several different community projects, because I had always been interested in civil rights. Silvia is listed in the phone book. You could look her up. And that's something I tell students when I go speak to schools. Many of the people that*

you read about in newspapers, that seem so far distanced from you, very often you can call them up and talk to them that very day. It's an amazing thing, and sometimes I even assign students to do that. Find somebody in the newspaper that you are interested in and call them. You can talk to them; they are real people.

So I called Silvia and I told her I was interested in the project and I asked her if they had ever had a documentary done on their family before. They had had a couple of interviews and brief segments on different shows, but nothing that really told the family story. They were very interested and right away wanted to participate. In doing a little more research, I met another gentleman named Christopher Arriola who is an attorney and a graduate of El Modena High School (one of the original test schools which contributed to the Mendez case) and he was also emphatic about this history and was ecstatic that someone was going to do something about it. He had also done a bit of research. He had received a grant to study the Mendez story and he came on board right away. Then through talking to other people in the community, I realized this story was bigger than just one family. But because of the limitations of funding (as I wasn't being paid to work on this) and because of the limited time (we wanted to have this ready for September's Spanish Heritage Month), we decided that this first telling of the story would focus on the Mendez family. Knowing that there were over 100 people who participated in the case and knowing that there were thousands of Mexican children who were attending schools at that same time, we knew each of them had a story to tell. But we wanted to focus on the Mendez family first.

So, little by little, we started collecting information, going to different resources, doing individual research. One aspect of the story that was really important and that I

felt needed to be told was one thread I wanted to bring to the surface—to make sure people understood that one of the reasons this is such a surprising story is that America's study of civil rights has basically focused on the Black and White issue. And that's why this is such a surprise for most people. We think we know something about civil rights and then to find out that this was happening here and involved Latinos, Asian Americans—that is just mind boggling.

Along with the excitement of learning radical new information, there is also the excitement of sharing that process with someone. I felt as if I could completely empathize with the producer's passion for spreading this new information. To be presented with the challenge of shifting conceptualizations about people and events which contributed to social movements was an exciting challenge for me. I could relate to that sense of urgency that the producer must have felt in getting this story told. Also, I could share in her amazement that Latinos are connected to other ethnic minority groups in more ways than mere oppressive socio-economic indicators. There is now a stronger connection of a more positive nature. There is now pride in many diverse ethnic minority groups working together toward a shared goal. As Sandra Robbie puts it, "It's like waking up one morning and discovering that I was related to Thurgood Marshall and Rosa Parks. That was that kind of a revelation for me." She was able to further elaborate on the contributions of history and social policies of that time which all contributed to the Mendez case outcomes.

Robbie: *One of the reasons the Mendez family was able to afford the lawsuit was because they were tenant farmers. They were leasing land from a Japanese family who were interned during World War II. So we had all these layers of history involving discrimination against many, many groups. I wanted to make sure that in the telling of*

our story we did not overlook other stories that were happening at the same time. Our histories touched each other—they intertwined. And without the Munemitsu family, the Mendez family story would not have been told. So I really wanted to tell a story that was inclusive, that showed the strands of so many voices and histories of people touching each other and working together to make history happen. I had to talk to 5 degrees of people to track down Janice Munemitsu who is the daughter of one of the owners of the farmland. I started to tell her about this story. She was amazed. She knew that her family had been interned when she was very young, but she did not know of her family's tie to the Mendez story. When I talked to Aki Munemitsu (Janice's aunt), Aki said I remember Silvia as a childhood playmate. The first time when we interviewed them for the documentary, that was the first time Aki and Silvia had seen each other since they were children. That was a really, really important piece to bring together for me. I was joyfully fulfilled by that.

There was one problem I had with this show trying to pull everybody's story together is that a lot of people don't realize that their family photos are important. Finding photos to tell the story was very difficult. Most of the Mendez family photos had been lost for generations. The Westminster School District was very helpful. They had the archives from the original documents and correspondence from when the case first started. They had the original business card of David Marcus as well as phone messages and records. That was just chilling for me. I did go to UCLA to collect photos available there with the help of a gentleman named John Franklin, who happened to grow up in Santa Ana. And he introduced me to a gentleman in the special archives section of the UCLA library who might be able to help me find a photo of the

attorney. And sure enough, he was able to find some photos that we were able to use in the documentary. And so it has been a lot of happy coincidences and confluence of people understanding and bringing this together. And also, one special person who helped a lot was Luis Acosta, who at the time was a librarian at the Howard University Law School. I believe he is now a librarian with the Smithsonian. I think librarians are magic people. The amount of information and resources that they have at the tip of their fingers is magical. Within three days I had copies of not only the NAACP brief that contributed to the Mendez case, but notes of the NAACP correspondence back and forth with different states, like Texas, who requested the documents after the Mendez verdict so that they could fight the segregation there. Luis was also able to give me names of several people associated with the case who might still be alive. It's just amazing. Through that research we were able to validate almost everything the Mendez family had said. So it's been wonderful.

One of the remarkable pieces of this story has to do with the belief that this transforming information could have remained buried for another generation if a Latina-American hadn't happened upon it. When we don't have a diversity of people in the media, or in educational institutions, then we are destined to maintain the status quo of information, perspectives and "realities." Each time I show the Mendez film in my classes, I think about the "what ifs?" What if Sandra Robbie had no access to media resources to bring this story to us? What if she had not been persistent in her efforts to get it produced without pay and with meager budget constraints? What if I had no education and no professional degrees allowing me to present this information to hundreds of students and to the readership of *Reflections*? The realization that this was a remarkable opportunity to influence the understanding of many ethnic minority group

members was one factor in Sandra Robbie's drive to complete the film. She persists in the world of media and I persist in the educational arena for similar reasons—because we may find opportunities to offer alternative paradigms for the young. She speaks of her specific motivation in bringing this topic to new audiences:

Robbie: My motivation to really explore the topic further was the reason I became involved with television. To be able to tell a story through visual medium...I had always wanted to pursue television, but was afraid to do it. I always thought that was something that was unapproachable — was unachievable for someone like me, because I had never seen someone like me on TV. The only Latino I remember seeing on TV was Ricky Ricardo. I loved that he looked like my dad to me, but I never really thought that was something you could achieve. And then, when I became an adult, I realized that those are just regular people, and I'm regular people, so I can do that too. I knew how much this story meant to me. I did not want another child in Orange County—Brown Black, White, Asian, any background—not to know what had happened here. That it happened here, and that people like them fought for them, for their education. That's how important it was. And that when you tell history, when you tell stories about people that you can relate to, people can identify with that story much more. They are empowered by it. And I didn't want any child in Orange County not to know this, to feel that coursing through their blood every day of their life. I wanted them to have that story and to feel proud and to carry that with them. That is really my motivation to tell this story. When we did the documentary, the furthest thing from my mind was that we would achieve any award or any attention from anybody else. The biggest prize in my mind was for all our children to know this story. That was my goal, with all respect to my

colleagues who have given us this acknowledgement. I've gotten emails from people who grew up in Orange County and are stunned that that had happened here. We've also gotten calls from across the country—University of Michigan Law School, public schools in New York, Texas, Berkeley, who have heard about this and have called to take it back to their schools. And that's amazing to me. I think the individual stories are great. I was at a conference in Texas over the weekend with the American GI Forum. People are hearing their story and they are just amazed and they applaud, they cry, and they come to me and tell me, "I went to a segregated school" or "My mother went to a segregated school," and they tell me what it was like. (One woman) said her father taped the show and made everyone in the family come over and see it on the big screen TV. Nobody could talk; they all had to sit and watch this show. And that is powerful to me. That we could share people's stories, and that everyone identifies with it. That's what it's about, and that's why it's so important for me to get it out to everybody.

From a social policy perspective, an important piece of "discovering" the Mendez case and all the events and people who contributed to its success is that it underscores the reality that social movements are incremental and that there are opportunities for many individuals, families and communities to contribute to a shared outcome. My own education in civics and history taught me that *Brown v. Board of Education* changed the world one day in 1954. Even as I struggled in social movements where change seemed almost imperceptible, there was the belief that, somehow, progress against injustice was being made. The appreciation of the many years of struggle on opposite coasts, with different groups, brings a sense that, as long as we are moving forward, we are making a contribution. I often tell social work students to "fight where you

stand”—meaning that they need not wait for a massive movement to join. They can create their own movements as leaders in directing social change. Social justice, then, becomes a life-long occupation in creating partnerships in advancing your cause and in taking a circumspective accounting of what has contributed to the “small wins” of each day’s efforts. Ms. Robbie speaks of similar lessons she hopes to impart to younger audiences:

Robbie: *Brown v. Board of Education is the civil rights case that most Americans know about. They know about the end of Black and White segregation. But what became apparent to me after learning about Mendez was that history does not just happen ‘cold turkey.’ People do not just change their minds in one case. There has to be some kind of legal or social evolution that led up to that. Having that understanding now is so important for students to have. That what you want doesn’t just happen because you say you want it and you fight for it. It takes years and months of changing people’s thinking about what society wants and could be. It takes that time for it to happen. And so that’s why I think it is so important for our students to know, too, not just that it’s their history, but that it gives them that reality of what change requires. When I go to schools now I ask teachers to ask their students to go home and ask their abuelas and abuelos (grandparents) if they went to a segregated school. To ask them ‘What was it like for you?’ I talk to them too, about how you can make history now. Because a lot of people think it takes organization, and yes it does take organization and you have to have a plan. And on top of all that if you don’t tell the media and if you don’t tell them over and over again—your story doesn’t get told. And so I try to teach them how to tell the media so that their story gets paid attention to. I think that is as important a part of making change as anything else.*

In many ways acknowledging the struggle that happened pays respect to the people who may have been forgotten. Because you know we live in a society that is not just all young people. It gives due respect to the abuelas and abuelos (grandparents) who have the memories. My grandmother, as we’re making tamales, always reminds us that we don’t make tamales the way she did when she was a girl. They had to butcher the cow and cook the meat that day, because they didn’t have refrigeration. Everything was done that one day. And we complain now because we have to sit for 3 hours putting masa in the corn husks.

It’s important for students to know about this story, but what I think I love about this story is I am hoping it can build a bridge between cultures. As I said earlier: that morning when I woke up it was like finding out I was related to Thurgood Marshall and Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King. And the whole civil rights struggle suddenly became my struggle. It wasn’t about people far away. And I’m hoping others can start to feel an identification with that struggle, too.

To appreciate the common ground and realize that this was an evolution of litigation and laws fought by a diversity of people over decades is an important lesson. Particularly interesting is that many of the important legislative and judicial players contributed to both the Mendez outcome and the *Brown v. Board of Education* outcome at different points in their careers. They may have moved through different states and different legal cases, but they converged in 1954 with the Brown case. Ms. Robbie describes the movement of Mendez arguments to the national arena:

Robbie: *...even though it was not a direct legal precedent, it (the Mendez class action suit) did in fact serve as a direct legal and social precedent because it made California the first state to end school*

segregation. Then, as former Governor of California, Earl Warren went on to sit on the Supreme Court, I don't understand how, having been the governor who desegregated schools in California, that he could now turn and say that segregation was any different at the national level. I don't see how he could argue that. Even though it was based on the 14th amendment, he still pushed through legislation in California to end segregation for all people of all colors, not because of their Latin origin or Asian origin—he just dismantled that totally in California. Even though it didn't serve as legal precedent, it did serve as grounds for ending segregation across the country. And so that is so important for people to recognize the seeds that were sown here. Also, the NAACP brief that was written was critical to this success. Robert Carter actually was the attorney who wrote the brief, and he was the attorney who served under Thurgood Marshall. I was fortunate to go out and interview Robert Carter who is still alive and is a judge in New York. The local organization One Hundred Black Men of Orange County and the Black Chamber of Commerce of Orange County both contributed money to fly me out to interview Judge Robert Carter. And he said that the brief that he wrote for the Mendez case was the dry run for the argument that eventually became *Brown v. Board of Education*. And so the legal thinking, not only in the African American community, was moving toward *Brown*. So that contribution to Mendez with Earl Warren reading that brief and being familiar with the arguments of Mendez changed not only an entire state's school policy, but had to influence that line of thinking.

May 17, 2004 is the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* and it is Ms. Robbie's hope is that everyone knows about Mendez and everyone begins to appreciate how social and legal change happens. In particular,

she sees a role for teachers in accepting this history that is theirs.

Robbie: *Not just California, but Texas, and New York. And not just Mexican Americans. Mr. Mendez was Mexican American, but I want everyone to know that Felicitas Mendez was a Puerto Rican. I want New York to know and to celebrate this too, because that's how all of America will know. We can't overlook this history of all of us working together. Everyone has to own that civil rights struggle—has to feel a part of it; and if Mendez can make that happen, I want all of America to celebrate. When they celebrate Brown v. Board of Education, I want all of California to stand up and say "Yea, Brown!" We helped, and this was how we did it.*

Conclusion

With this discovery of forgotten history, many thousands of Latino children in California and hopefully nation-wide will feel the empowerment of a shared culture and a shared history with those who have struggled and prevailed. We are, today, painfully aware that many aspects of educational advancement for Latinos and other oppressed minority groups in California and nationwide suffer *de facto* inequality and deficits. Somehow, as in my own social and political activities, there is some solace that can be drawn from knowing of shared aspirations and commitment. Hopefully, the Mendez case will resound for many more Latinos who can now better perceive a distinct bridge between ourselves and other populations in America who have historically suffered discrimination, and who have engaged in efforts, big and small, to ameliorate it.

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Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez (photo with permission of Sylvia Mendez)

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