Mendez v. Westminster: The Trailblazer that Led the Way to School Desegregation

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Individual Exhibit

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As a Mexican-American, I have always been interested in history pertaining to the Mexican or Latino community. When I began searching for a topic related to this year’s theme of “Breaking Barriers,” I decided to explore a more personal route. It did not take long for me to discover the court case Mendez v. Westminster, and I soon found myself engrossed in this monumental event I had never heard of. Mexicans are oftentimes stereotyped as less academically-oriented, and to find a story that portrayed Latinos as pioneers in the educational desegregation movement was inspiring for me. Thus, I quickly selected this topic for my exhibit.

I discovered a surprising plethora of information available once I began my research. The National Archives were undoubtedly the most valuable resource as the process progressed. Through the online collections, I was able to access trial transcripts, amicus briefs, and other documents related to Mendez. Furthermore, the book Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation, written by Gilbert Gonzales, revealed new areas for investigation. Through his book, I realized that to truly understand Mendez, I first needed to understand why segregation of Mexicans was in place. This course brought me to many sources such as journal articles and newspapers written between the 1910s and 1940s, allowing insight into the beliefs and social expectations of the time.

I chose to create an exhibit due to my previous experience with the category, and I wanted to present Mendez in a colorful and attractive way. The board itself is red, accented by beige, blue, and red paper, reflecting the rebellious, American spirit of Mendez, as it was not only a fight for the Latino community, but a fight for the rights of all Americans oppressed by their own nation. I have also included a timeline to help create a focus on the events as they
occurred chronologically. On the table are the limited-edition stamps commemorating *Mendez* and an illustrated children’s book about the case.

*Mendez v. Westminster* epitomizes this year’s theme of “Breaking Barriers” because it laid the foundation to the difficult path of desegregation. Although it was not the first desegregation case in the U.S., *Mendez* was the first to argue that segregation was unconstitutional, and to use social science tactics to do so, making it a revolutionary event in 1947 when such arguments succeeded. Without *Mendez*, it is possible that *Brown v. Board of Education* would not have had the monumental effect it did. Still even after the Civil Rights Movement, segregation is still evident in the modern United States. The story of the Mendez family and discrimination forced me to reconsider my perceptions of equality in the nation today, and I realized that the struggle for desegregation continues. *Mendez v. Westminster* is inspiring because it succeeded in spite of discrimination and in spite of injustice. For future generations, *Mendez* proves that the bold actions of one family can tie people of all backgrounds together to change history.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

Books


This unpublished book (available online as a PDF) was extremely valuable in understanding the hardships and journeys that immigrants must go through as they adjust to life in the United States. Although the immigrants featured in this book came to the U.S. after the fight for desegregation in *Mendez v. Westminster*, I realized that many obstacles and challenges facing the Latin-American community are the same. Assimilation to American society is still a relevant issue, and lack of assimilation in an effort to maintain cultural identity still results in discrimination, presenting an ongoing cycle in the modern world. I used the knowledge I gained from this book to expand the section about the fight against discrimination today.

Documents


This brief argues specifically that school segregation of Mexican and Spanish-speaking students is a violation of not only California law, but also of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. This argument was vital to breaking the barriers of segregation and eventually led to the success of *Brown v. Board of Education*. This document showed me that the success of *Mendez* was several decades in the making, as the authors of this brief cited dozens of court cases that proved their position that segregation was unconstitutional. Unfortunately however, this was never argued at trial, nor was the concern ever pushed to the Supreme Court, but the seeds of change had been planted.


This document affirms the ruling of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals and mandates that the
appellants follow the ruling of Judge Paul J. McCormick. This document finalized the success of *Mendez v. Westminster*, which led to the desegregation of the state of California as a whole a few years later. This document helped me contextualize the timeline of events in *Mendez*.

“Judgement and Injunction in Mendez v. Westminster.” *DocsTeach*, 21 Mar. 1946, docsteach.org/documents/document/judgement-and-injunction. Accessed 1 Feb. 2020. This document, signed by Judge Paul J. McCormick, who was presiding over the case, details his ruling on *Mendez v. Westminster*. The injunction states that the schools of Orange County, California, the Santa Ana City Schools, and the El Modena School District may no longer segregate Mexicans or Latinos. This document marks a pivotal turning point in the story of desegregation that ultimately went on to inspire further desegregation cases for both Latinos and those of other minority groups. This document helped me contextualize the case and place it in a series of actions that led to landmark cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Marcus, David C. “Petition in Mendez v. Westminster School District.” *DocsTeach*, 2 Mar. 1945, docsteach.org/documents/document/petition-mendez. Accessed 30 Jan. 2020. This document was helpful in understanding exactly what the Mexican families were fighting for. The petition lays out for the court their complaints, being specifically that children of Mexican or Latino descent were discriminated against and segregated on the basis of their nationality or color of their skin. Marcus argued that this violated the 14th amendment and called on the court to judge these actions unconstitutional. I realized that these families were fighting for equality and respect from the schools that were supposedly educating their children.

Marshall, Thurgood, Robert L. Carter, and Loren Miller, representatives of the NAACP. “Motion and Brief for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People as Amicus Curiae.” 2 Oct. 1946, archive.org/details/NAACPWestminsterBrief/mode/2up. Accessed 14 Mar. 2020. This document was the brief connecting Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP to *Mendez v. Westminster*. Interestingly, I found that Marshall utilized many African American desegregation cases in order to support the desegregation of Latin American children in California. I realized that *Mendez* was successful in weaving together the stories of people from a plethora of various cultural backgrounds, and that its course was affected as much by these different groups as it affected future fights for justice such as *Brown v. Board of Education*.


This memorandum revealed the thought process of Judge McCormick regarding the decision to desegregate schools. It allowed me to understand the effectiveness of David Marcus’s argument. As his tactics gained success, they were recognized and borrowed by fellow civil rights lawyers such as Thurgood Marshall in his fight for equality in Brown v. Board of Education. I recognized that even though there was clear racial bias surrounding segregation, it was an argument that could not be made in this case due to the fact that Mexicans were legally considered “white”. I realized that tackling the issue from a language perspective allowed for a skillful breakdown of the defendant’s argument that language affected mental capacity, ultimately creating a legacy for civil rights.


This document outlined the reasons for which the school districts chose to appeal the case. Interestingly, they reasoned that the issue was not under the jurisdiction of the District Court, and that the ruling could therefore be invalid. Rather than simply accepting the ruling of Judge McCormick, the school districts chose to fight it, showing their worries regarding the ruling. I realized that integration would result in anger from discriminatory parents and officials, and that the main reason the school boards may have wanted to avoid integration besides their personal beliefs was to avoid conflict.


This is the official decree stating the ruling on Plessy v. Ferguson. Accompanying the document was a small paragraph describing the decision, which I included in the timeline to describe the event. I realized that because of the decision’s emphasis on “separate but equal” doctrine, bringing about established equal rights for persons of color took nearly 70 more years.


This document allowed me to further understand what the plaintiffs were arguing for specifically. Their questions of constitutionality were based on Section 1 of the 14th
amendment, where all citizens are guaranteed equal rights and protection under the law. Although the constitutionality of the school boards’ rules were never truly debated due to the refusal to send the case to the Supreme Court, the idea that a fight could indeed be fought citing constitutionality revolutionized the fight for equal rights nationwide.


This document revealed to me the process by which the judges of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals analyzed this case. As the Court reviewed the appeal, they ultimately found that the actions of the superintendents were wrong and against California state law. Interestingly, I found that the case did not pass to the Supreme Court because of this. Seeing as the segregation of Mexicans was not mandated by California law, the Court chose to uphold the ruling of Judge Paul J. McCormick rather than further the argument claiming that segregation was unconstitutional under the 14th Amendment. Nevertheless, I realized that Mendez laid the groundwork for Brown v. Board of Education through this argument.


This transcript was of the first day of the trial. Several witnesses were called to the stand, notably the superintendent of the Garden Grove district in Orange County, James Kent. Through reading this, I found that all of the witnesses’ children had been rejected from the white school due to stereotypes regarding Mexicans, such as the belief that they were “dirty.” Mr. Kent attempted to excuse his actions, but ultimately admitted his belief that most Mexicans were inferior to whites in both academics and hygiene. This portion of the transcript made it clear to me that segregation in Orange County was purely based on thinly veiled racial discrimination. I used excerpts from this document to help tell the story of this trial.


This transcript presented the accounts of several more parents and another superintendent, Harold Hammersten. Strikingly, a 14 year old girl, Carol Torres, was called to the stand to testify. Her testimony showed me that students oftentimes did not attempt to transfer to the white Roosevelt school because they believed they were inferior to the Anglo-American students there. I found it interesting that once again, the superintendent attempted to mask the reality of the situation between the white and Mexican schools. Instead of giving straightforward answers, many were vague or did not answer the question asked. I realized
this meant that the superintendents felt that their point of views must be wrong, but rather than admitting to their mistakes and accepting change, they chose to try and present themselves as correct through their cryptic and misleading answers. I used excerpts from this transcript in order to portray this aspect of the case.

This transcript allowed me to see exactly what happened during the trial. It allowed me to have a deeper understanding of the persons involved, as I could view their responses to various questions and answers on this day. I realized that the School Board was in essence, avoiding the uniting of Mexicans and Anglo-Saxon students. This avoidance was clear at several points, as was their discrimination against Mexican pupils. I learned that traditional beliefs have a strong hold on a community, as many of the ideas presented by Superintendent Richard Harris were based on theories from thirty years prior that were undoubtedly outdated by 1945. Gonzalo Mendez also testified that day, pointing out the injustices that were to be found in the system. I used excerpts from this transcript to present first-person accounts of the Mendez v. Westminster case.

This portion of the transcript presented the testimonies of several superintendents. Gonzalo Mendez and his wife Felicitas Mendez testified on this day. This allowed me to see their interpretation of events, which was often skewed by the superintendents. I learned more about the school boards’ representatives’ points of view, and their beliefs regarding Mexicans as a whole. I learned that superintendents viewed Latinos and Spaniards differently, as they believed those of more European descent were superior. Overall, this transcript presented the side of the defendants, which allowed me to gain insight into their thoughts as they justified segregation in their school districts.

This final portion of the transcript brought conclusion to the development of the case. Interestingly, to prove their point in rebuttal, the defendants called experts in the sociological fields who had first-hand experience with Mexican students. Dr. Ralph Beals testified that segregation actually hindered the process of learning English. Marie Hughs, a researcher and education specialist, explained that segregation also provoked a feeling of inferiority amongst children. These testimonies allowed me to understand the sociological perspective regarding segregation in California. I ascertained that the superintendents were misinformed in their beliefs, and that for the children to thrive, they would need an equal
and inclusive environment.

**Interviews**


This interview with Sylvia Mendez was conducted just after she had received the Presidential Medal of Freedom for her work in telling the story of *Mendez v. Westminster* and for advocating for the education of Latinos in the U.S. She explains that education is important for Latino students and that stories like those of her parents’ struggle against school segregation prove just how important education should be. I learned that the story of *Mendez* is inspirational in that it offers hope for the future of education and the future of the Latino community in America.


This emotional interview with Sylvia Mendez allowed me a clear view of the effects that segregation had on her. Mendez describes the Mexican school; it was dirty and dilapidated and in stark contrast with the beautiful, manicured look of the white school. She also describes how she was treated on the first day of class at the white school; she recalls that a white boy told her “Don’t you know that Mexicans don’t belong in this school?” I realized that the process of desegregation would go on for much longer than it took to win the case, and that this process continues today. I used this source in the exhibit to display the story of the case from young Sylvia’s point of view, which allowed for greater depth in the material.


This interview with Sylvia Mendez allowed me to gain perspective on how she viewed the ordeal as a child. I also learned more about her life after school, as she described her life in college studying to become an assistant nursing director while working at a hospital full-time. I used an image from this source to show Mendez’s achievement when she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

**Journal Articles**

Baughman, Ruby. “Elementary Education for Adults.” *The Annals of the American Academy of*
This article describes the issues facing new immigrants as they came into the country such as an unfamiliarity with new surroundings. Baughman makes the point that skilled and trained teachers are necessary for teaching adults, and emphasizes that U.S. society was not welcoming to immigrants. I learned that education for immigrants was a necessity to help integrate them into American society. However, its execution only furthered discrimination by presenting immigrants as inferior.

This journal article provided a rather modern point of view regarding the treatment and segregation of Mexicans. In the past, unfair and degrading assumptions about Mexicans and Latinos were quite evident, reflecting the ideas that led to their exclusion from American society. Bogardus’ article showed me a turning point in how Mexicans were being regarded. He implies that Mexicans were dehumanized by many, and that the Americanization (assimilation) process hindered their progress through such dehumanization. He defends the fact that many choose not to become American citizens by pointing out that the hostility against them keeps them from feeling welcomed as Mexican-Americans. I used excerpts from this article to help illustrate the changing views regarding Mexicans leading up to Mendez v. Westminster.

This article provided an unfiltered view of the opinions of some during the early 20th century of Mexicans. In this leading Progressive journal, Bryan uses racist beliefs and negative stereotypes of the Mexican culture to prove that they are a threat to American society. Views like these are what fueled segregation and Americanization programs in the U.S., as the dominant Anglo-Americans feared the negative consequences of allowing Mexicans to integrate and spread their lifestyle across the country. I used this source in the exhibit to display the most harmful underlying ideas that formed segregation.

This journal article interpreted the results of a study comparing the performance of white students to Mexican students. Although Coers attempts to avoid bias by repetitively
mentioning that both Mexicans and whites outperformed each other in various subject areas, he bases this off of his assumption that Mexicans are of inferior mental capacity. This belief that Mexicans were innately inferior to whites is what supported the system of segregation. It ignored the fact that placing them in this system continued to keep students in a system of inferiority. With this source, I was able to observe how deeply rooted racism was in society, and how it led to a system of unjust segregation.

This source discussed the case of Mendez v. Westminster and its outcome. Although it did not offer clear support for segregation or desegregation, the source explained why Mendez did not pass to the Supreme Court. I learned that although Mendez was a groundbreaking case for desegregation, it was an issue that could be and was resolved within the state court.

This article details the economic and political history of Mexico, and how that applied to the Mexican Revolution, which lasted from 1910-1924. This shed light on why Mexicans may have chosen to permanently relocate to the United States, including violence or poverty. However, although Mexican, Obregon criticizes the indigenous residents of the country and promotes negative stereotypes as he champions a eurocentric and conservative view of politics and economics. Thus, this source also proved useful in understanding how various Mexican communities faced discrimination both in the United States and in Mexico.

This source provided a look at views regarding immigration in the early 20th century. Interestingly, this source compared the U.S. to an overfilled raft from the Titanic, using the metaphor to describe immigrants as the man who would tip the boat over. Parkinson argues that literacy should be the defining factor in whether or not an immigrant could be let into the country, explaining that illiterate persons posed as a threat to U.S. democracy. I connected this reasoning to the segregated system of education, as literacy in the English language became a determining factor in whether or not a child was sent to a vocational school. Parkinson’s ideas reflected the roots of segregated schools, and I used this article

This self-contradictory article provided an interesting look into the ideas surrounding education and Mexican children. Russell makes the argument that there is fault on both the side of Mexicans and the side of the educational system, and that these faults create problems in schools that create inequality. He also mentions that there is clear discrimination against Mexicans in the Southwest and praises Mexicans for their cultural traditions. However, he does not contradict the negative stereotypes of filth and apathy that were prevalent at the time. He also writes that Mexicans should be educated as assets to the national welfare, continuing the viewpoint that Mexicans are first and foremost laborers. I realized that the self-conflict presented within this article reflects change, as people tried to become more accepting of those who were different whilst refusing to admit that previous views were wrong.


This source responds to the success of *Mendez v. Westminster* case and predicts an outcome for segregation as a whole. It showed me that *Mendez* had captured national attention and sparked conversation about the injustices of segregation. The journal article expresses support for the eradication of segregation, and predicts that should the Supreme Court be faced with the decision to uphold or to overturn *Plessy v. Ferguson*, they would choose to overturn it. This allowed me to understand the changes in views regarding this issue, and how this would ultimately lead to the success of *Brown v. Board of Education*.


This study measured and compared the results of two different non-language IQ tests when given to students of various language backgrounds. I learned that these tests favored students whose parents spoke English, but this result was doubtful. The article concludes that neither test is an accurate measure of intelligence, and that there were cases in which students scored lower than it seemed they would. I found, interestingly, that once again the results of IQ tests were deemed inadequate representations of the actual intelligence of foreign-language speaking students. Still, this conclusion seems to have been ignored by those who used the data from these experiments to create and uphold segregated systems
of education.

Tireman, L. S. “Bilingual Children.” *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 11, no. 3, Jun. 1941, pp. 340–352. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1168704. Accessed 1 Feb. 2020. This article presented the findings and conclusions of various psychological and sociological studies regarding bilingual children. I learned that by the early 1940s, evidence had been presented that bilingualism had little to no effect on students’ performance in various areas of study. However, I noticed that once the studies began focusing on Mexican children in particular rather than bilinguals of European descent, researchers used their studies to draw conclusions about the intelligence of bilingual Mexican children. The results, which were likely biased or incomplete, pointed to the idea that Mexicans were less intelligent than their Anglo-American peers, and that this had correlation to the fact that their second language was English. Studies such as these unfairly presented Mexicans as inferior, justifying the discriminatory system they had been subject to. Tireman concludes that these studies are incomplete, and that more research would be needed to prove any of the conclusions he discussed. Nevertheless, Americans used these studies to shelter themselves from their fear that Mexicans would negatively impact U.S. society.

**Maps**

“Mapping Inequality.” *Digital Scholarship Lab*, dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=10/33.999/-118.481. Accessed 18 May 2020. The map in this article depicts areas in Los Angeles according to the desirability of the neighborhoods in the 1930s. The introduction to the website describes the data collected. The data was compiled between 1935 and 1940 by the Home Owners Loan Corporation, or HOLC. This helped me understand how communities were segregated in the time of *Mendez v. Westminster*. On the map, neighborhoods that were considered least desirable, mostly made up of minorities and immigrants, are marked red (“hazardous” and given a D rating) or yellow (“definitely declining” and given a C rating) while communities of mostly white persons or others of wealthier background were marked blue (“still desirable” with a B rating) and green (“best” neighborhoods with an A rating). The HOLC often cited reasons for their appraisals as being related to the racial composition of a community. The resulting racial segregation has continued into the modern day and is clearly visible in many urban centers today, including Los Angeles and other cities across the nation.

This map allowed me to view segregation in Los Angeles and Southern California as of 2015. I noticed that the effects of white flight are evident even today, as communities of Hispanic and white populations seem to be clearly grouped together rather than integrated, evidencing the \textit{de facto} segregation of modern day. I used this to understand the effect of change on today’s landscape, and to show that there is much work left to be done in fighting segregation.

\textbf{Newspaper Clippings/Articles}


This newspaper clipping helped me put the beliefs and movements that surrounded the successful decision of \textit{Mendez v. Westminster} in context. The article mentions that the judges cited a correlation between segregation and Hitler’s anti-semitism. This corresponds with my earlier research in which I found that due to the changing atmosphere surrounding race as a result from the horrors of WWII, many people began to question their long-standing beliefs in a “superior” race. This source allowed me to connect my secondary and primary research as well as further my understanding in the complex and shifting ideologies of the time.


This article describes the current situation of integration of schools nationwide as it applies to African American students. Surprisingly, I learned that instead of progress, segregation has remained a part of U.S. society. Much like segregation of Latinos, segregation of African Americans has become \textit{de facto} segregation and is therefore a product of discriminatory practices rather than a law. I realized that despite the success of landmark desegregation cases of the mid-twentieth century, discrimination and segregation has adapted rather than become eradicated.

\textbf{Photographs}

This is a photo of David Marcus, the lawyer who fought for civil rights in *Mendez v. Westminster*. This source helped me visualize what the event might have looked like; I use this picture in the exhibit to aid the viewer in visualization as well.

“Frank & Arthur Palomino.” *Chapman University Digital Commons*, 1934, digitalcommons.chapman.edu/mendez_v_westminster/6/. Accessed 23 Feb. 2020. This is a photo of Frank Palomino and his son. Frank Palomino became a plaintiff in *Mendez v. Westminster* after he agreed to sign Gonzalo Mendez’s petition to the school board. The plaintiffs in this case each represented a different school district in Orange County, although the complaints were compiled under the name *Mendez*.

“Governors Records Program.” *Governor's Records: California State Archives: California Secretary of State*, www.sos.ca.gov/archives/programs/governor/. Accessed 25 Feb. 2020. This source provided a photo of Earl Warren as governor of California. Warren was an important figure in the history of the U.S. and California. I learned that he advocated for desegregation on both levels, bringing about change and an end to *de jure* segregation.

“Hoover School.” *Chapman University Digital Commons*, digitalcommons.chapman.edu/mendez_v_westminster/1/. Accessed 18 Feb. 2020. This is a photo of the Hoover Elementary School in Westminster, California. From this image, I noticed the stark contrast between the mostly-white Westminster School and the all-Mexican Hoover School. Where Westminster presents itself as home-like, Hoover appears as a prison. I realized that the inequity between the schools was not only in curriculum, but also in environment. I used this photo in the exhibit to help display this observation.

“Paul J. McCormick.” *Chapman University Digital Commons*, digitalcommons.chapman.edu/mendez_v_westminster/24/. Accessed 18 Feb. 2020. This is a photo of Judge Paul J. McCormick, the presiding judge in *Mendez v. Westminster*. This photo helped me visualize the scenes and dialogues I had read about in the trial transcripts, thus connecting my various areas of research. I included this photo in the exhibit to help create a cohesive story across the board.

**Podcasts**


In this Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) podcast episode, Sylvia
Mendez is interviewed by Kristin Grayson, M.Ed., and Bradely Scott, Ph.D. Mendez tells the story of how her father began his fight against Mexican segregation in Orange County. She recalls that she thought the fight was about going to a beautiful school, but that later she learned the fight had been for justice and equality. She describes how she continues the work her parents did, as her mother’s dying wish was for Sylvia to continue telling their story. She continues to speak about modern segregation, de facto segregation. She calls for the education of students in order to help battle this. I recognized that the fight for justice took much courage, as fighting against society’s belief was a formidable task. This source helped me understand the emotions surrounding the case from the Mendez family’s point of view.


In this Code Switch podcast episode from National Public Radio, Meraji interviews Sylvia Mendez about the case and its legacy. Mendez recalls that at only nine years old, she thought the dilemma was about going to a nice-looking school. Now she recognizes that the case was much more important than a playground. Mendez talks about the case’s legacy and about segregation today, mentioning that she believes it has gotten worse. I learned that many of the schools that were affected by the 1947 upholdment are now mostly Hispanic. Mendez describes how her own neighborhood changed from middle-class and diverse to mostly low-income and Hispanic. She attributes this to de facto segregation in which segregation exists without government policy or law. Through Sylvia Mendez, I realized that segregation did not end with the Civil Rights Movement, and that it is still something that affects our nation today.

Videos


Sylvia Mendez talks about the importance of finding a solution to de facto segregation, and that education, for Latinos especially, is key to changing the world. She explains that receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom inspired her to keep speaking to students and educating them about Mendez. She urges that the future generations carry the torch of the struggle for equality, and that although the problem can never be completely solved, discrimination must always be fought.

Sylvia Mendez shares her story and family history in this video. I learned about how her family came to the U.S., and about her father’s dreams of being his own boss. I realized that the struggle for desegregation is one that faces modern U.S. society. Through *de facto* segregation, discrimination continues to reveal itself in schools in Southern California. The road to equality will likely take many more years, and Mendez calls upon the next generations to help lead the nation towards true desegregation.


This video is of the Presidential Medal of Freedom Ceremony in 2011. Sylvia Mendez, along with 12 other distinguished individuals, were recognized for their work in helping the world towards freedom and equality. Through this source, I gained a deeper understanding of the effect that the Mendez family had on not only civil rights, but the nation’s society as a whole. Today, people can live with equality as a result of the actions of Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez. In the exhibit, I used clips from this video to help portray the importance of *Mendez* and its legacy.
Secondary Sources

Books

This book was an eye-opening resource in my research. It details the causes and effects of the segregation of Mexicans, allowing me to see the progression of discrimination in the Southwest United States. This source also showed me various viewpoints I had not considered before, allowing me to expand my research. As a result, I decided to add the “History of Segregation” section to the exhibit, as I realized the importance of understanding the past to gauge its effect on both Mendez and the present day.

This book recounted and analyzed the story of Mendez. Although it came towards the end of my research process, I realized that most of which I had found from various other sources could be found in summary in this book. I also learned about how Americans regarded different cultures and why they avoided foreigners in the early 20th century. Interestingly, this book drew my attention to the myriad of people who contributed to the story of Mendez, including Pancho Villa and a Japanese family, the Munemitsus, who leased their farm to the Mendezes while they were forced to live in internment camps.

This children’s book was an entertaining part of my research on the Mendez family. It describes the story of the *Mendez v. Westminster* through the eyes of a child, simplifying the details of the case whilst maintaining its complexity. This source helped me identify the most important ideas of the case and convey them in a summarized format. I use this book in the exhibit as both a visual aid and a summary in order to present a simple breakdown of events.

Interviews

This interview with Judge Frederick Aguirre provides a summary on the events of the case. Judge Aguirre emphasizes the importance of all the families who participated in the lawsuit rather than just the Mendezes. I learned about the significance of the joined effort, as it was truly a diverse group fighting injustice, involving Mexican-Americans, other Latinos, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and those of Jewish descent.

Philippa Strum. “Mendez v. Westminster: School Desegregation and Mexican-American Rights.” YouTube, uploaded by the Woodrow Wilson Center, 2 Oct. 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3Oz6JilwC1. Accessed 2 Feb. 2020. Strum is interviewed about her book, Mendez v. Westminster: School Desegregation and Mexican-American Rights. She explains that the type of discrimination was ethnic discrimination rather than racial discrimination, as Mexican-Americans and other Latino-Americans were considered “white”. I learned more about the diversity of people who were involved in the case, as it involved several groups of different racial and ethnic origin. Strum also described how many people in the 1940s believed that Mexicans and Latinos were “dirty”. She recalls that when she was little, people believed that there were intellectual and biological differences between races and ethnicities that made white a superior race. The significance of the case was not only that it broke the barriers of segregation, but that it also represented people of different backgrounds coming together to overcome racial and ethnic discrimination, making Mendez v. Westminster an example of the American dream of equality.

Newspaper Articles

Mendez Sandoval, Johanna. “Gonzalo Mendez's Enduring Legacy.” Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 20 Oct. 1996, latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-10-20-me-56076-story.html. Accessed 28 Dec. 2019. This article was written in response to another Los Angeles Times article, “Lesson Learned on School Discrimination,” about the Mendez v. Westminster case. It helped me uncover Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez’s personalities and beliefs through their granddaughter’s eyes. I learned that they were a courageous couple who were outraged by the injustice of the Orange County school system’s decision to refuse their children. Mendez Sandoval recalls that her grandmother, Felicitas, would still become angered and pained by the idea that her children would be rejected from school on the basis of their last name. This helped me understand the personal impact the case had on those involved.

This article highlighted the social tensions at the time. Interviews with Felicitas Mendez and Orange County superintendents described the main points of conflict at the time. Felicitas Mendez talked about race relations during the 1940s and how they compared to racial tension in 1996. Her insight helped show that many of those opposing integration were truly racist, and the author’s usage of quotes from the trial support this. I learned about how the trial progressed and its impact on the future. As of 1996, the story of *Mendez v. Westminster* was not part of the curriculum, but Orange County schools had been successfully integrated with a third of students being Hispanic.


This interesting article shined a light on the deep and widespread impacts of *Mendez v. Westminster*. I learned more about racial segregation in California schools and about the deplorable conditions of Mexican schools. Through their interview with Sylvia Mendez, I was able to learn about what she recalled about the case, and how she came to realize the importance of her parents’ actions. I discovered that the case had been widely unheard of until the late 1990s, which is when Mendez began to bring attention to it and its impact. I realized that *Mendez v. Westminster* serves not only as a block-breaking precedent to *Brown v. Board of Education*, but also as an inspiration to Latino students throughout the nation. I was able to pull various powerful quotes and pictures from this article to help tell this story.

**Radio**


This radio transmission describes the effects of *Mendez v. Westminster* on the community in Orange County. I learned that unfortunately, due to the issue of white flight, *Mendez* did not do much to eliminate segregation. However, *Mendez*’s historical importance cannot be denied. It broke the barriers of segregation, and for a short time, brought children of varying cultural backgrounds together instead of teaching that they should live apart.
Speeces

This detailed speech was given at Chapman University in recognition of the upcoming fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court Ruling on Brown v. Board of Education. It opened my eyes to many aspects of the case I had never before considered. I learned that this was more complex than the single issue of racial discrimination. Moreno points out that white farmers were able to maintain wealth by keeping Mexicans and Latinos uneducated. It interested me that there were ulterior motivations to such a widespread acceptance of segregation in the white community in Orange County, widening the span of my future research. I also learned more about the involvement of civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, the ACLU, and the American Jewish Congress. Moreno also brought up the compelling idea that white flight that took place after the success of Mendez v. Westminster continued de facto racial segregation in California, an issue that was been addressed by Sylvia Mendez. I learned that the issue of racial segregation continues today, however less visible it may be. This speech also helped me draw parallels to other racial segregation conflicts, such as Apartheid and the Little Rock Nine that helped me place Mendez in a more three dimensional light.

Videos

This is a video clip of Philippa Strum, author of Mendez v. Westminster: School Desegregation and Mexican-American Rights, explaining the story to an audience. I learned that agriculture was a motivating factor in segregation, as many Mexican children living in the Citrus Belt needed to leave school to work, and that many white employers encouraged segregation and even Americanization in order to keep a steady flow of workers on their farms.

Websites

This source offered a succinct description of Mexican immigration to the U.S. during the early 20th century. I learned that influxes of immigration from the 1910s through 1930s were a result of revolution in Mexico and of the successful U.S. economy. Interestingly, I discovered that many Mexicans returned to Mexico with ease due to the openness of the U.S.-Mexico border and that moving to the U.S. was not always a permanent decision as it is today.

This online article recounts the details of the *Mendez v. Westminster* story. It allowed me to see multiple aspects of the story and explained how other world events, such as World War II, affected the case. The article also described the aftermath of *Mendez*, allowing me to more fully grasp its effect on the modern United States and civil rights.

This source offered a general summary on the details of the case. One fact that piqued my interest was the connection of Thurgood Marshall, the attorney who ultimately won *Brown v. Board of Education*, to the *Mendez v. Westminster* case. This prompted me to delve deeper into Marshall’s association with the case in order to understand how it affected *Brown v. Board of Education* and ultimately the entire nation’s policy on school segregation.

This special report (pdf) outlined each step of the case and discussed the different moving parts of the trial and its effects. I learned about how the cases *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Mendez v. Westminster* intertwined through people, bigotry, and a common goal for desegregation and equality. It also helped me understand that this issue stemmed from a root fear of cultural differences. Through analyzing this report, I identified a pattern in school segregation in the state of California: once the minority became the majority, Anglo-Saxon Americans felt the need to segregate themselves from those of
other ethnicities. This helped me shape my project and explain why segregation occurred in the first place.

This source provided a summary of information regarding Brown v. Board of Education. It allowed me to identify the main figures of the Supreme Court case, and it gave me a clear explanation of the Court’s ruling. I used this source in my exhibit to aid in explaining Brown’s impact on both education and the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.

This source dove into details about school segregation laws in California dating back to the 19th century and brought up interesting points about the innovative tactics lawyer David Marcus used when arguing the case. For example, Marcus used social science to prove that segregating students based on their heritage made them feel inferior to white students, thus diminishing their productivity as U.S. citizens. It also explained the role Thurgood Marshall played in Mendez v. Westminster and how it affected Brown v. Board of Education. I learned that while efforts to desegregate schools in California was not a relatively new idea, Mendez v. Westminster was able to successfully argue that desegregation was unconstitutional on a federal level. This source opened up a lot of doors for me to explore as I continued my research.

This encyclopedia entry provided a detailed explanation of Brown v. Board of Education. It allowed me to understand the large combined effort that it took for the case to be successful, and how it affected the United States after its success. I found it surprising that Southern states remained segregated until the 1960s. The South’s reaction to the ruling of Brown nearly mirrored that of Southern California after Mendez had succeeded. In both situations, a white flight led to de facto segregation that continues today in various areas.

This article described the life story of Earl Warren. Warren was governor of California before becoming the 14th Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. This source helped me
understand the impacts that Warren had on the nation, as one of his most important accomplishments is considered the unanimous ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education*. I used an image from this site of Warren as Chief Justice in the exhibit.

Gerson, Daniela. “The California Schools Named after the Parents Who Led Desegregation Are Now Almost 100% Latino. Does It Matter?” *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 27 June 2016, www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-edu-mendez-segregation-20160625-snap-story.html. Accessed 18 Feb. 2020. This article discusses the lack of integration in Los Angeles schools, particularly in Mendez High School, named after the Mendez family. This source illustrated as to how the conditions of schools were today regarding integration—an aspect I had not before considered. I learned that schools are more segregated now in Southern California than they were when Sylvia Mendez was in attendance. This allowed me to expand on the legacy of *Mendez v. Westminster*, and how it applies to modern life. I also used pictures from this source to show students from Mendez High School as they celebrate at their graduation ceremony.

Goulding, Susan Christian. “Community Group Launches Fundraising Website to Memorialize the Mendez Desegregation Case that Put Westminster on the Map.” *Orange County Register*, Orange County Register, 1 Aug. 2018, www.ocregister.com/2018/07/31/westminster-launches-fundraising-website-to-memorialize-the-mendez-desegregation-case-that-put-it-on-the-map/. Accessed 18 Feb. 2020. This article announces the plans for a monument to commemorate the actions of Gonzalo Mendez in the fight for equal rights. This source illustrated the importance of his struggle and brought the legacy of his actions into a tangible form. I used artist sketches from this article to help show the impact that Mendez had on the community.

“History: *Brown v. Board of Education* Re-Enactment.” *United States Courts*, www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/history-brown-v-board-education-re-enactment. Accessed 19 Feb. 2020. This website allowed me to understand the timeline of desegregation, beginning with *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and ending with *Brown v. Board of Education*. I learned about the formation of the NAACP and its role in desegregation cases other than *Mendez*, and its role in organizing *Brown*. I realized that by building on David Marcus’s innovative tactics, Thurgood Marshall was able to lead the way to school desegregation in *Brown*, creating a major victory for the Civil Rights Movement. I recognized that *Mendez* played a monumental role in the success of this case, and that its legacy extended far beyond the desegregation of schools in California.

These educational materials, developed by the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, provided me a greater understanding of the material, and helped me connect Brown v. Board of Education to Mendez. It gave small summaries of information and a plethora of pictures. I used these resources in my exhibit to help portray the story of Mendez.


This source provided a photo of the seal of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The accompanying article about Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) immigration policy of 2012 also aided me in understanding that the issues of South American and Mexican immigrants continue to affect the U.S., and that these issues have remained somewhat consistent since the early 20th century.


This article discussed the role of Felicitas Mendez in this civil rights case. What I found surprising was that Felicitas was the one who convinced her husband to file a lawsuit. She valued education and was passionate about equality for her children after being faced with racial inequality. Felicitas also continued to run their farm while her husband Gonzalo Mendez was forced to appear in court nearly every day. This allowed for the Mendez family to continue to pay for legal representation and fight the battle until the very end. This article showed me that Felicitas was truly an instrumental part of the success of Mendez v. Westminster, and it gave depth to her character by describing her family history and identity as a Puerto Rican. Felicitas was married to a Mexican man, but regardless of cultural identity, all Latinos, not just Mexicans were referred to as such.

This online exhibit depicts segregation in the South regarding people of all races, including Mexicans and Latinos. The image that I used from this site displays a sign from a Dallas restaurant reading, “No Mexicans.” This expanded my view on racial discrimination throughout the Southwest rather than focusing solely on California. I learned that anti-immigrant sentiment became more evident in areas where immigrants most commonly lived.

Longley, Robert. "What Is De Jure Segregation? Definition and Examples." ThoughtCo, Oct. 6, 2019, thoughtco.com/de-jure-segregation-definition-4692595. Accessed 4 Feb. 2020. After coming across the term through various sources, I used this article to explain and define “de jure” segregation. De jure segregation refers to legally enforced or allowed segregation. I learned that this term could be applied to laws that did not explicitly segregate a population. It can be applied to any law that unjustly keeps a group of people from equality with another. This allowed me to understand the usage of the term as it applied to segregation of Latino-Americans in the 1940s. Under California law, Mexicans and others of Latino descent were considered “white,” yet their segregation was encouraged by laws that allowed separate schools to promote Americanization, creating de jure segregation.

“Lorenzo A. Ramirez.” Mendez v Westminster, mendezetalvwestminster.com/ramirez-family-page/lorenzo-a-ramirez/. Accessed 10 Feb. 2020. This website provides a timeline of the events in the life of Lorenzo Ramirez, a parent in the school system. Ramirez was one of the plaintiffs in Mendez v. Westminster. Through this source, I learned that Ramirez had been involved in activism regarding Mexican rights long before Mendez, as he attended hearings in 1943 to help expose the discrimination against Mexican workers in San Francisco, California. Although Ramirez was not as involved in the case as Gonzalo Mendez, his contributions helped the success of Mendez, and ultimately, of desegregation efforts.

was purely a racial discrimination issue as Mexicans were legally considered “white” by the state. I realized that Marcus chose to innovatively argue the case using social science in order to attack the problem of a social perspective. Ultimately, this source helped me piece together the more obscure causes and effects as well as led me to dive deeper into them.

This article describes how the Mendezes are being remembered 70 years later. I learned about how the Mendez Museum Without Walls continues to celebrate the case with a fiesta during Hispanic Heritage month. I also learned that the last standing Mexican school in Orange County had been remodeled and now serves as the home of the local historical society. This article features progress in a way I had not seen in other areas of my research. I could see how society had grown and changed since the segregated era of the 1940s, and how this was a result of Mendez v. Westminster’s widespread impact.

This pdf source provided pathways of research for me to follow as it recommended various primary and secondary sources to pursue. From this source, I used a photo depicting the segregation of whites and those who spoke Spanish. It reminded me that segregation between Hispanics and Anglo-Saxon Americans did not exist only in the educational environment, but also in various establishments throughout a city. Mendez set the precedent that no one should be segregated based on personal differences, an idea that went on to result in desegregation across California and across the U.S.

The map in this article displays various areas in Los Angeles according to the desirability of the neighborhoods in 1939. The article explains that the Federal Housing Administration (FHA, created in 1934 under the National Housing Act of 1934) and the 1939 Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC, created under the New Deal) worked to segregate areas of Los Angeles through the process of what became known as redlining. This helped me understand the degree of segregation in communities during the time of Mendez v. Westminster and how it compares to today. On the map, neighborhoods that
were least desirable, oftentimes made up of minorities and new immigrants, are marked red (least desirable and given a D rating) or yellow (less desirable and given a C rating) while communities of mostly white persons or well-to-do immigrants (Asian-Americans and African-Americans were almost always in red-marked areas) were marked blue (decent neighborhoods with a B rating) and green (the most desirable neighborhoods with an A rating). I realized that the process of *de facto* segregation began early, and was perpetuated for generations through its being the status quo.


This source provided a broad overview of the events and timeline of *Mendez*, allowing me to utilize it as a summary of events. Located in this blog entry was a scan of a newspaper headline from 1947 reading, “Ruling Gives Mexican Children Equal Rights.” I presented this on the exhibit to help relay the feeling of impact this decision had on the community.


This was the first source I came across regarding *Mendez v. Westminster*. Before reading this article, I had never heard of *Mendez*. Intrigued by the significance of it, I continued to research the topic, unearthing more of U.S. history as I went along. Ultimately, I chose to use the case as the topic of my exhibit.


This article introduced various events including *Mendez v. Westminster* that helped open the path to *Brown v. Board of Education*. I learned about students’ strikes in Virginia and Project Exodus. It was interesting to see how such vastly different events all intertwined to produce an anti-segregation movement that swept across the United States and that changed the cultural landscape in many areas. I realized that the path to equality was complex and difficult, and that its success relied on the actions of many regular people, such as the Mendezes.
Roos, Dave. “The Mendez Family Fought School Segregation 8 Years Before Brown v. Board of Ed.” History.com, A&E Television Networks, 18 Sep. 2019, history.com/amp/news/mendez-school-segregation-mexican-american. Accessed 10 Jan. 2020. This article provided details on how exactly the Mexican schools were inferior to white schools. I learned that the schools were often built next to each other, separated by an electric fence. I learned that students at the Mexican school started school two weeks late to participate in walnut harvesting and left school early during the citrus harvest. I learned that this was because students at the Mexican school were taught agriculture and housekeeping skills rather than mathematics and language arts due to racial prejudices.

Rosenberg, Jennifer. “Biography of Pancho Villa, Mexican Revolutionary.” ThoughtCo, ThoughtCo, 5 June 2019, thoughtco.com/pancho-villa-1778242. Accessed 13 Mar. 2020. While continuing my research on the Mendez family, I discovered that Gonzalo Mendez’s uncle had been a secretary for Pancho Villa. The fear of execution drove the entire Mendez family to the United States. This article helped me understand who Pancho Villa was and why being involved with him would have put a family in danger.

Rosenberg, Jeremy. “Remembering the Case That Challenged Segregation in Southern California.” KCET, 1 Apr. 2013, www.kcet.org/history-society/no-dogs-or-mexicans-allowed-mendez-v-westminster-and-its-legacy. Accessed 18 Feb. 2020. This article recounted the story of Mendez v. Westminster, and provided an overview of the details and events regarding the case. This allowed me to utilize the article in my telling of the story through the exhibit. From this article, I used the image of a Mexican class from the Hoover School to help display and contextualize segregation in the presentation.


This article helped me understand how Mexican immigration to the United States had evolved from the late 19th century through the early 20th century. It allowed me to make a connection between the growth of Latin American communities to how they were treated by Anglo-Saxon Americans. I learned that when compared to immigrants from Eastern Europe or Asia however, Mexicans were considered more “docile” and more likely to put up with unfair labor practices, and were therefore viewed as more desirable.

This biographical sketch introduced me to the life and story of Thurgood Marshall. I learned about his journey from working on cases with the NAACP (such as Mendez v. Westminster) to becoming a Supreme Court justice. This helped me connect Mendez v. Westminster to multiple fights for equality rather than simply Brown v. Board of Education. The lawyers who fought for Mendez gained experience and insight that undoubtedly contributed to their work later in life, and helped about a social movement for equality that continues to this day. I learned that Marshall, specifically, went on to help draft constitutions for African nations and became an important figure in deciding many Supreme Court cases such as Roe v. Wade. This showed me the ripple effect that a single action can have on history and on a society.

This source provided pictures and descriptions of places involved with the story. I was able to see and visualize what certain events would have looked like. This source helped me create three dimensional models to represent the depth and inequality found along with segregation.

This article accompanied the release of the 2007 commemorative stamp and described the case in summary. This source showed me that Mendez v. Westminster provided a resounding impact on today’s society and culture and that its ripple effect continues to affect us. I also realized that despite recognition from various organizations and the government, Mendez v. Westminster continues to be largely absent from the public eye. I included these stamps in the “Legacy” section of the exhibit.
This was an eye-opening source in my research on Mendez v Westminster. It described in minute detail the causes and legacies of the case, introducing me to lanes of research I had never considered before. This source was also the first source I had found that directly connected racial and ethnic discrimination to the issues surrounding Mendez. Its breakdown of this discrimination utilizing Critical Race Theory proved extremely useful to my understanding of the social situation in 1944 California. I learned that the common belief at the time was that whites were intellectually and biologically superior; I also learned that this belief was challenged by the horrors of Nazism in WWII. As a result, non-white Americans began to seek equality, leading to what would eventually become the Civil Rights Movement. This source also named specific events that occurred as a result of Mendez, thus proving incredibly useful in my discovery of how the case became a trailblazer in history.

This article from Sylvia Mendez’s website was a starting point for my research on the Mendez v. Westminster case. Its summary of historical events before, after, and during the case allow for a simple explanation that introduced many topics for me to investigate, including the situation of segregation of schools in America before and during the 1940s, names of lawyers and associations involved in the case, and the names of other families involved in the case.
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<th>Title:</th>
<th>Mendez v. Westminster: The Trailblazer that Led the Way to School Desegregation</th>
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Mendez v. Westminster broke barriers in 1947 with its success in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals; it was the first to suggest that segregation was unconstitutional under the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and lawyers utilized social science to do so. The bold actions of the Mendez family ultimately led to nationwide desegregation in Brown v. Board of Education, thus the ripple-effect of Mendez continues today.
Background

Pictures of Left Panel
“In 1943, when Mendez’s fair skinned nieces with the Italian-sounding last name of Vidaurri were accepted for enrollment into the school but his own darker children were sent to Hoover Elementary School, an inferior non-white school, Mendez, Sr. was outraged.”  
(www.kcet.org)

“When my aunt Sally got there to the school, it was my two cousins, Virginia and Alice; it was my brothers Gonzalo, Geronimo, and myself. And they said, ‘Ms. Vidaurri you can leave your kids here but your brother’s kids will have to go to the Mexican school’, and my aunt said, ‘But why? I'm not going to leave my children here.’ They said, ‘I'm sorry but we don't accept Mexicans...’”

*Sylvia Mendez, speech at Cypress College*

The Mendez family was among many who faced the injustices of segregation in Southern California, and in response, led the fight against it by gathering support to sue the school boards.
“The Mexican school she and her siblings were forced to attend was ‘terrible,’ said Mendez. Besides the two wooden shacks, the books were ‘hand-me-downs’ and the desks were ‘all falling apart.’ An electric fence — which she said shocked one of her classmates — separated the school from a neighboring cow pasture.”

The Los Angeles Times (2016)

“We would all be in the same bus, the other children, and they would drop us off in front and they would drop us off in front of the white school, this beautiful manicured lawn with palm trees and a wonderful playground right there in the front with swings, and then we had to walk to the Mexican school.”

Sylvia Mendez, “Voices of History: Sylvia Mendez”
Background

“We weren’t taught how to read and write,’ [Mendez] said. ‘We were taught home economics, how to crochet and knit.’”

The Los Angeles Times (2016)

“[My father] was being called a communist at the time because he was trying to fight the establishment and people didn’t want to join him there in the neighborhood. They were comfortable in the segregated school in Westminster. They weren’t aware of what was going on. Some of the parents were so complacent.”

Sylvia Mendez, interview with Jocelyn Y. Stewart, (www.calstatela.edu)

“Four others eventually got on board — Lorenzo Ramirez from Orange, Frank Palomino from Garden Grove, and William Guzman and Thomas Estrada from Santa Ana.”

The Los Angeles Times (2016)
Background

Those who were of Latin descent were oftentimes pushed away by the Anglo-Saxon community, creating a sense of societal justification for segregation.
Desegregation in California

California became a trailblazer by being the first in the nation to desegregate schools, providing an example for others to follow.

“...probably the most significant effect of the Mendez decision was its value as an initial step in eliminating de jure segregation in California.”


“After an appeals court upheld the decision, Gov. Earl Warren signed legislation that broadened it, making California the first state to officially ban segregated neighborhood schools. In 1954, as chief justice of the Supreme Court, Warren would apply the argument from *Mendez v. Westminster* when he wrote the unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark case that ruled that state laws that segregated schools were unconstitutional.”

*The Los Angeles Times (2016)*
Desegregation in California

“And I’ll never forget the first day I walked into that school, and this little boy comes up to me, and he says, ‘You’re a Mexican! What are you Mexicans doing here? Don’t you know that Mexicans don’t belong in this school? You’re not supposed to be in this school.’”

Sylvia Mendez, “Voices of History: Sylvia Mendez

“Mendez recalled of her first day: ‘I was crying and crying, and told my mother, ‘I don’t want to go to the white school!’ And she said, ‘Sylvia, you were in court every day. Don’t you know what we were fighting? We weren’t fighting so you could go to that beautiful white school. We were fighting because you’re equal to that white boy.’”

The Los Angeles Times (2016)

Similarly to desegregation in the South, Mexicans continued to face discrimination in their communities. The map below illustrates enclaves of the Hispanic population (orange) in Los Angeles today.
Desegregation in California

“In Westminster, Sylvia Mendez said, schools were integrated by placing all the older children in the Mexican school and the younger children in the white school. ‘The white people got so upset to see their children in that horrible school, so they went to the superintendent and they closed it down,’ she said.”
*Sylvia Mendez, The Los Angeles Times (2016)*

“As white flight and *de facto* segregation replaced *de jure* segregation, the district’s resources declined and school facilities deteriorated.”
District Court Case

“...Mendez is the struggle for education and for basic human rights.”

*Sylvia Mendez, speech at Cypress College*

“In an English-speaking home, English language, there are certain cultural backgrounds which undoubtedly were formed, many of them, and came in earlier days from England. Out of those come Mother Goose rhymes. Out of those come stories. Out of those come stories of our American heroes, stories of our American frontier, rhymes, rhythms. Now, let us compare the cultural background which the child of Mexican-speaking families come to us with. He apparently has not had these stories read to him in the English language. He has no conception of them, and the fact of the matter is that as to certain objects, he doesn't know their meaning in English. He knows them in Spanish. He has no conception of them when you put the word in English. Therefore, there is a need for that training in those groups which must be met with a specially trained teacher, and in a class where a teacher can best use all her time for such training as is necessary.”

*Richard Harris, superintendent. “Trial Transcript” (9 July 1947)*
District Court Case

“One of the main protests that he put was that most all the Mexican people lived in nothing but shacks, and unsanitary, and that was not sufficient hygienic as to go to the Main School. ‘How could we send our children, when they were so dirty?’ That we should elevate our standard of living up to the standard of living of their race meaning the Anglo-Saxon race.”

Gonzalo Mendez, “Trial Transcript” (9 July 1947)

Plaintiff attorney David Marcus transformed the fight for equal rights by using witness testimonies to prove that segregation produced feelings of inferiority.

Even though the primary argument rested on the students’ ability to speak English, discrimination was evident throughout the trial.
District Court Case

“U.S. District Court Judge Paul J. McCormick agreed with the plaintiffs and ordered that the school districts cease their ‘discriminatory practices against the pupils of Mexican descent in the public schools.’”

(www.uscourts.gov)

The success of *Mendez* signified that in spite of prejudice, race, culture, and ethnicity did not designate inferiority.
9th Circuit Court of Appeals

“The school districts appealed the case to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. The Court of Appeals affirmed Judge McCormick's ruling. Two months later, California's Governor Earl Warren signed a bill ending school segregation in California, making it the first state to officially desegregate its public schools.”

(www.uscourts.gov)

“The case, which argued that the four segregated school districts violated the 14th Amendment’s guarantee of equal protection, attracted attention outside Orange County. Thurgood Marshall, who at the time was chief counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, wrote an amicus brief in support of Mendez. The Japanese American Citizens League, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the American Jewish Congress and the American Civil Liberties Union also lent their support.”

The Los Angeles Times (2016)
9th Circuit Court of Appeals

“In unusual and strongly worded opinions, the appellate justices unanimously branded the practice [segregation] illegal, ‘vicious’ and a corollary to ‘Hitler’s anti-Semitism.’”

“Court Denounces Segregation of Mexican Pupils.” p.4, The San Bernardino County Sun (1947)

“The effects of a dual school system force a sense of limitations upon the child and destroy incentives, produce a sense of inferiority, give rise to mechanisms of escape in fantasy and discourage racial self-appreciation.”
Yale Law Review (1947)

“With increased judicial vigilance against attempted evasions of the spirit of the Fourteenth Amendment, discrimination can be checked and, it is to be hoped, eventually obliterated.”
Yale Law Review (1947)
Although it never reached the Supreme Court, the success of *Mendez* in the Ninth Circuit Court forged a path for desegregation by implicating all citizens, no matter their cultural or racial background, deserved equal rights.
Marcus’s innovative strategy of using social science to fight inequality marked a turning point in the struggle for Civil Rights. His tactics were repeated in *Brown* by Thurgood Marshall, a domino-effect that brought about a movement for equality.

“Thurgood Marshall, who helped write the NAACP’s *amicus curiae* brief on behalf of the Mendez and other Mexican-American children, argued against black school segregation in the *Brown* case. As in the *Mendez* case, he made extensive use of social science evidence demonstrating how segregated schooling harmed minority children.” ([www.crf-usa.org](http://www.crf-usa.org))

“The NAACP, which called Mendez a ‘dry run for the future,’ used much of the same legal reasoning in 1954 in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the landmark case that declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional.”

*The Los Angeles Times (2016)*
Impact on *Brown v. Board of Education*

“...legally, Marshall argued that segregation in public education produced unequal schools for African Americans and whites...but it was Marshall’s reliance on psychological, sociological, and historical data that presumably sensitized the court to the deleterious effects of institutionalized segregation on the self-image, social worth, and social progress of African American children.”

*Encyclopædia Britannica*

“On May 14, 1954, he [Chief Justice Warren] delivered the opinion of the Court, stating that ‘We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. . .’”

([www.uscourts.gov](http://www.uscourts.gov))
Roots of Segregation

As Mexican communities grew within the U.S., Americans began to fear “The Mexican Problem”: the idea that Mexicans posed a potential threat to society, producing segregation and discrimination.

“[Mexicans’] low standards of living and of morals, their illiteracy, their utter lack of proper political interest, the retarding effect of their employment upon the wage scale of the more progressive races, combine to stamp them as a rather undesirable class of residents.”

*Samuel Bryan, "Mexican Immigrants in the United States," The Survey (1912)*

“Americans as a class still treat Mexican immigrants as laborers and not as full-fledged human beings and potential citizens.”

*Emory S. Bogardus, “The Mexican Immigrant and Segregation” (July, 1930)*
Roots of Segregation

“In another case a Mexican business man of worthy traits rented a home in the better part of the city... but shortly after he moved in he was threatened. He owned a Buick and was a man of means, but was forced to give up his home...” Emory S. Bogardus, “The Mexican Immigrant and Segregation” (July, 1930)

“What is the use [of becoming an American citizen]? They will call me a dirty greaser anyway.” Unidentified Mexican, “The Mexican Immigrant and Segregation” by Emory S. Bogardus (July, 1930)

“Neighborhoods receiving the highest grade of ‘A’--colored green on the maps--were deemed minimal risks for banks and other mortgage lenders when they were determining who should receive loans... Those receiving the lowest grade of ‘D,’ colored red, were considered ‘hazardous.’...These grades were a tool for redlining, making it difficult or impossible for people in certain areas to access mortgage financing and thus become homeowners. Redlining directed both public and private capital to native-born white families and away from African American and immigrant families.” (Mapping Inequality)
Segregation in Education

To quell their fears, Americans turned to assimilation as the primary education for Latinos, instilled for children and adults in an effort to eradicate their “dirty” lifestyles.

“The migrant child generally attended an inferior and segregated school with emphasis on Americanization and vocational education. Rarely did the migrant child progress as far as the fifth grade.”
Gilbert G. Gonzalez, Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation

“Americanization teachers viewed immigrant communities as threats to the well-being of society. The immigrants and their cultures became the locus of destabilizing influences in society for supporters of Americanization.”
Gilbert G. Gonzalez, Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation
Segregation in Education

“Incidentally, these systems of tracking served the white landowners well as many Mexican children dropped out early and continued their parents’ work in the fields.”


Americanization education enforced the idea that Latinos were inferior to Anglo-Saxons; their academic potential would be perpetually restrained by their ethnicity.
Today: Conclusion

“We are more segregated now than we were in 1947 when I was turned away from that white school, when I was nine years old... you are the ones that have to find a solution for that, we have to.”

*Sylvia Mendez, speech at Cypress College*

“The Latino students who are dropping out of high school need to know that Latinos have always fought for education,’ she said. ‘And that’s something to be proud of.’”

*The Los Angeles Times (2016)*

*Mendez v. Westminster* broke down barriers for desegregation movements across the country by revolutionizing methods to fight injustice. However, discrimination continues in a cycle of social inequality. *Mendez* teaches a lesson in perseverance in the struggle for equality, and it continues to inspire new generations to persist against injustice.
1896: *Plessy v. Ferguson*
“... the ruling in this Supreme Court case upheld a Louisiana state law that allowed for ‘equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races.’”
*(National Archives)*

1944: “The Mendez children attempted to enroll at the nearby 17th Street School but were turned away, while their fair-skinned cousins with the French last name Vidaurri were accepted.”
*(The Los Angeles Times)*

1945: “…the Méndezes and four other Mexican-American families filed a class action suit against the Westminster, Garden Grove, El Modena and Santa Ana boards of education…”
*(Teaching Tolerance)*

1946: “Judge McCormick...ruled that the Orange County school districts, acting on their own, violated the ‘equal protection’ rights of Mexican-American citizens.”
*(Constitutional Rights Foundation)*
1946: “The Orange County school districts appealed Judge McCormick’s decision to the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco.”
(Constitutional Rights Foundation)

1946: “Thurgood Marshall...helped write an amicus curiae...legal brief, presenting evidence that separate schools based on ethnicity or race were far from equal.”
(Constitutional Rights Foundation)

1947: “…the federal appeals court judges ruled 7–0 to uphold Judge McCormick’s decision...the Orange County school boards violated both California law and the ‘equal protection’ clause of the federal 14th Amendment.”
(Constitutional Rights Foundation)

1954: “…the Supreme Court unanimously rejected the doctrine of separate but equal and struck down lawful school segregation in America.”
(The Washington Post)
Extra