



TRANSCRIPT

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Title: Mendez v. Westminster

Sylvia: We would stop at that school everyday and see those kids go in but this playground was right next to the street and in that playground they had monkey bars, they had teeter-totter, they had swings and my thing was that I always wanted to go to that school because of the playground, 'cause we didn't have all that at the other school.

Jeff: In 1944, eight year old [Sylvia Mendez 00:00:32] didn't understand why she and her brothers couldn't go to the school with the nice playground. Neither could their parents, [Gonzalo 00:00:39] and [Felicitas Mendez 00:00:39]. What resulted was Mendez versus [Westminster 00:00:42], a landmark court case that shattered many of the legal justification for segregating public schools. Maybe you haven't heard of the Mendez, maybe you're more familiar with the Brown versus the Board of Education decision of 1954, but not only did the Mendez case precede that decision by seven years, it lay the foundation for the United States Supreme Court declaration once and for all that segregated schools were in violation of the constitution.

We sat down with Sylvia Mendez and Gonzalo Mendez Junior on the 70th anniversary of the resolution to the Mendez case.

Speaker 3: What- [Gregor 00:01:17] are we good on sound? [crosstalk 00:01:19]

Gonzalo jr: You can hear us?

Speaker 5: Yes, I can hear you. We're good to go.

Sylvia: Okay.

Speaker 3: So basically-

Jeff: Sylvia and Gonzalo Junior are warm, welcoming down to earth people. But they're also icons of the school integration movement. Sylvia won a presidential medal of freedom in 2011. Seventy years ago, the Mendez family changed the world. They make America a better place for all of us.

Sylvia: My mother says, "Sylvia, don't you realize what we're fighting for?", "Yes, so we can get to that beautiful school in Westminster", she said, "No Sylvia, that's not we're fighting, we're fighting because under God we're all equal, you belong at that school just like everybody else belongs to that school, that's what we're fighting for".

Jeff: In this episode of the Deeper Learning podcast, you'll learn what they did, how they did it, and how we might be able to follow in their footsteps.

Why are we here? What does it mean to live a good life? How can we make a difference in the world for our children in the generations that will follow? How can we make education a force for good?

This is [Jeff Hittenberger 00:02:27], in this podcast you'll hear amazing stories about people who have pursued these questions often against great odds, who have made a difference in the world. People who can point us in the direction of doing the same. Let's get started.

It all started on a sunny morning in September 1944. Sylvia was eight, Gonzalo was seven, their brother [Jerome 00:02:51] was six, that morning they rode with their aunt [Sally 00:02:54] and two cousins to Westminster school. Sylvia was excited about the first day at this new school.

Sylvia: All dress up, all new shoes, new dress, new everything.

Jeff: But when Aunt Sally talked to the school clerk, it didn't go well.

Gonzalo jr: When we were gonna get enrolled, she took her two kids who are like blue eyed, blonde haired, the administrator of the school the one that was admitting us actually told my aunt that she would keep her two kids at school, even though they were Mexicans because they didn't have a Mexican sounding name and they [inaudible 00:03:28]. But she actually told him, "Well, we'll keep your two kids but those three have to go to the Mexican school". That's when she got up and said, "No, if you don't take my brother's kids-

Sylvia: I always say when I go and speak to the students, and that's when she did her [Rosa Parks 00:03:44] stands and said, "I'm not leaving my children here if you won't take my brothers kids".

Jeff: Aunt Sally hustled them in to the Buick and hurry back to Mendez's farm.

Sylvia: That's when my aunt told my dad what had happened and she was all upset and my dad told her to calm down, "You know, it's gonna be okay Sally, it's gonna be okay, I'm just gonna go talk, there's been a mistake, you know in [Santa Ana 00:04:06] we went to a Mexican school because they told us we were in that, on the side of that Mexican school right now we're on the side of the white school". So he just told her, "I'll go talk to him tomorrow".

Jeff: Gonzalo Mendez was a confident person. He had come to the United States from Mexico as a child and now he's an American citizen. His wife Felicitas was also an American citizen, born in Puerto Rico. Their children were born in the United States and they all spoke English fluently, there had to have been a mistake. But when Gonzalo talked to the principal, he got the same story, "Your children have to go to [Hoover 00:04:42] school, the Mexican school. Remember, it was 1944, 350,000 Americans of Mexican heritage were serving in the United States military in World War II, 9000 Latino American troops would die fighting for their country in World War II. But here in Orange County, a school was refusing to enroll American kids because of their skin colors and their Mexican heritage.

Gonzalo appealed to the superintendent and then to the school board, but the answer was always the same, "Your children have to go to a Mexican school". Gonzalo decided to keep the children home and teach them himself, while he decided how to fight this.

Sylvia: My father refused to take us to the other school and then the superintendent, he came to the house and told, "Mr. Mendez, it's against the law if you don't send your children to school, you have to send them by law to the Mexican school", my dad said, "I'm not sending", he says, "Well, you'll be against the law if you don't send-

- Gonzalo jr: Throw him in jail probably.
- Sylvia: Yeah, if you don't send them to school.
- Jeff: So, the children went to the Hoover school.
- Sylvia: We would walk from the farm with all the Anglo [inaudible 00:05:52] look children to the bus stop, get on the bus, bus would take us to the white school, all our friends would go into that white school and we had to walk from 17th and ... that was 17th and Hoover where the white school was ... we had to walk into the [barrio 00:06:10].
- Gonzalo jr: Yeah.
- Sylvia: Into the Mexican school.
- Jeff: While Westminster school was clean and new, filled with new books and materials and outfitted with a grass playground, equipped with swings, teeter-totter and monkey bars, Hoover school had no grass, no playground, nothing but dirt.
- Sylvia: But now ... but next to it was a dairy with cows and it had a fence that had a little bit of electricity on it. And I was there, the day that this girl throws a ball and she throws the ball and it runs over towards the fence and she's running to grab it and she grabs a hold of the fence. And the fence was not enough to kill you, but to shock you but once you grab a hold of it like that it wouldn't let go, she couldn't let go but ... it just kept like that ... she was like ... like that shaking, like that and the teacher had to go all the way around all the way to the dairy and tell the dairyman to turn off the electricity on the farm 'cause one of the student was caught, she couldn't let go of that fence and so, that was a bad part, it was all dirt and then ... you know the flies came from the place.
- Jeff: Everyday the kids would come home and tell their parents about what happened at school that day. One of the rules was that if you spoke Spanish you got punished. Gonzalo and Felicitas were not gonna let this happen to their kids, Gonzalo was a leader in the community, everybody liked him and Felicitas ...
- Sylvia: My mother was a feisty Puerto Rican lady-
- Gonzalo jr: She was the kinda person that laughed and had a good time and was always happy and ... so when she worked at the [Cantina 00:07:49] with my dad, she's always like that.
- Sylvia: And then in the farm she was a boss for other women, she was the leader.
- Gonzalo jr: Of course she was also the boss at the Cantina more or less.
- Sylvia: Yeah, yeah that's right.
- Jeff: Of all the people whose children were affected by segregation, why did these two decided to challenge the injustice.
- Gonzalo jr: I think they were at the right place at the right time.
- Sylvia: Absolutely, they were.

Gonzalo jr: It's just that ... we think that opportunities like that don't come too often, and they just got the opportunity and they went with it.

Jeff: A friend told them about an attorney name [David Marcus 00:08:24] who had fought segregation in public facilities like parks and pools. They decided to hire David Marcus to fight their case.

Sylvia: My mother said to my dad at that time, "We have the money, let's go Gonzalo".

Gonzalo jr: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sylvia: "We have the money Gonzalo, let's do it".

Jeff: "We have the money Gonzalo, let's do it", and what were they up against? Generations of court sanction discrimination.

Let's go back more than 50 years to the morning of June 7th 1892, to a train station in New Orleans, Louisiana. A man named [Homer Plessy 00:09:02] was a part of multi-racial coalition known as the Comité des Citoyens or the committee of citizens. He bought a ticket and boarded a train car marked "whites only", but no one notice. That's because Homer Plessy looked like a person of European ancestry, he looked white. In fact he had eight biological great grandparents, seven of whom were of European ancestry, only one was of African ancestry. But according to Louisiana law, that meant that Homer Plessy was black.

Homer Plessy was intentionally challenging an 1890 Louisiana law that segregated train cars in the state. He had to tell the train stewards that he was not white, the steward summoned a police officer and Homer Plessy was removed from the train and arrested. His trial in New Orleans was presided over by Judge [Howard Ferguson 00:09:51], who found Plessy guilty of violating the Separate Car's Act. The Plessy versus Ferguson case went all the way to the Supreme Court which ruled seven to one against Plessy, and in favor of the State of Louisiana.

According to the majority of justices, segregation could be justified because the train cars for whites and the train cars for blacks were of equal quality. Thus was born the separate but equal doctrine, that provided legal cover for segregation for two generations to come. In reality of course, separate was never equal. Which is exactly the dilemma the Mendez family and thousands of other families of Mexican heritage were facing in Orange Country in 1944.

Gonzalo and Felicitas rallied the Mexican and American community. They recruited four other plaintiffs from other school districts that also practiced segregation. With Attorney David Marcus, they extend the complaint to over 5000 other Mexican-American children in Orange County. LULAC, the League of United Latin American Citizens joined the caused. They reached out to other ethnic communities and eventually the NAACP, the American-Jewish Congress, the Japanese-American Citizens League and the ACLU all joined in. But all of this came at a cost to Gonzalo.

Dr. Al Mijares: He experienced a lot of hate ... you don't make changes like this in a manner that doesn't create waves and you find people who are on the other side of the argument, who can become very passionate and very destructive. So he had ... there was a lot ... so called hate crimes, they were in large numbers back then.

- Jeff: This is Dr. [Al Mijares 00:11:32] the current Orange County Superintendent of Schools.
- Dr. Al Mijares: It took a lot of courage for them to stand up for the ... and I think that the sort of the resilient thing, in that the persistency that he demonstrated was based on the fact that he was frustrated, probably very angry that ... he was a business man so he was astute, in other words he understood ... and I think he understood also his rights as an American but he just felt, "there was something wrong with this".
- Jeff: So Gonzalo and Felicitas kept moving forward. Judge Paul J. [McCormick 00:12:09] called the case Mendez versus Westminster to order on July 5th, 1945. That morning Sylvia and Gonzalo Junior made the truck ride with their parents to the US district court in Los Angeles, as they would each morning of the trial.
- Sylvia: I remember going everyday and sitting in the front row and not ... absolutely not knowing what they were fighting for. I thought they were just fighting for me to get into the white school.
- Gonzalo jr: I don't even remember going.
- Sylvia: We all sat in the front row, Gonzalo. We all sat in the front row, and-
- Gonzalo jr: No wonder I hate courts.
- Sylvia: And we would sit there and at that time your parents, all they had to do is give you a look if you started wiggling or doing something. They didn't have to say be still or nothing, they just looked at you if you started to move and you just sit there and be quiet.
- Everyday that you went to court, that's why I tell the story that I didn't realize what they were fighting 'till I was 10 years old. At the time I thought they were just trying to get me into a beautiful school with a good playground.
- Jeff: Al Mijares describes the arguments made by the districts.
- Dr. Al Mijares: The school districts were using ... this body of knowledge that did not apply to approve of or to sanction the *de jure* segregation. You know, segregation by law that occurs in the lives of these students. They're saying, number one their language was a problem and yet these kids were all born here and they all spoke English. And you know they tried to claim, "Well, they're Spanish speakers", or they speak Spanglish and the language was an issue which was just not true 'cause the kids all spoke perfect english.
- Others have said, "Well, they have cultural differences, that make them hard to fit in". In fact, many argued that it was in their interest that we did this, that we would provide services for them. In fact, they didn't provide services for them, these are some of the most beat up, poverty stricken schools you'd find that were definitely in need of many resources. Others have even argued ... like in the book the Mexican-American child which was written right around their time, argued ... I think in the late 50s, mid-late 50s ...argued that it was an issue of cognition, like they didn't learn as well as the others kids or they would not become tomorrow's leaders so we had to kinda of teach them their role ... kind of stuff.
- And then I read the superintendent at the time, the Westminster said, "Well, they have a hygiene problem". The hygiene is not the same as the, you know the white children. So I

mean is just this stuff that was horrifying to think about today. Because you have to build a theory upon why you do what you do. And that's what they were thinking, and Gonzalo challenged all of that.

- Jeff: [Ron Wenkart 00:15:06], Chief Counsel for the Orange County Department of Education and one of the leading school attorneys in California, describes the outcome of the trial.
- Ron Wenkart: The district court made some very specific findings about the harm of segregation, the distinctions that are made between citizens solely because their ancestor quoting some prior cases that this US Supreme Court had ruled on.
- Jeff: David Marcus attacked the district's claim that the children had been segregated due to their educational needs and their language deficiencies. Marcus pointed out that the children in question were American citizens who spoke English fluently. These families were having their right to equal protection under the 14th Amendment to the Constitution violated.
- In Marcus's case brief, he referred to the four freedoms, championed by President Franklin Roosevelt. Here's FDR:
- Speaker 8: The first is freedom of speech and expression everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear.
- Jeff: Marcus wrote ...
- Speaker 9: Of what avail is our theory of democracy, if the principle of equal rights, of equal protections, and equal obligations are not practiced? Of what use of a four freedoms, if freedom is not allowed? Of what avail are the thousands upon thousands of lives of Mexican-Americans who sacrificed their all for their country and this great war of freedom, if freedom of education is denied them? Of what avail is our education, if the system that propounds it denied equality of all?
- Jeff: Judge McCormick ultimately agreed. It took him seven months to complete his written opinion issued on February 18th, 1946. McCormick ordered the Orange County district to stop segregating their students. The district appealed the case but on April 14th, 1947, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal unanimously upheld Judge McCormick's position. Laying the groundwork for the Brown versus the Board of Education case that would come seven years later.
- Ron Wenkart: I think the judge looked at the cases and felt that ... there was no basis for discriminating under the 14th amendment, despite Plessy versus Ferguson which was still the law, and despite the fact that Brown versus Board of Education hadn't been decided yet, I think the judge and the Ninth Circuit both felt that the 14th amendment said equal protection under the laws means you cannot treat people differently on the basis of race. And you cannot put Mexican-Americans into an inferior school and there was no doubt that it was an inferior school although they argued separate but equal, the court just rejected that out of hand. And so, I think both the judge and the district court and the court of appeals felt strongly that the 14th amendment meant what it said, equal protection under the law and that you cannot segregate Mexican-Americans students into an inferior school. I think that

was the argument that carried the day and I think that was an argument that [Thurgood Marshall 00:18:46] made strongly in Brown versus Board of Education, that separate but equal is not equal.

Jeff: In a wonderful historical convergence on the very next day, [Jackie Robinson 00:18:56] played his first game for the Brooklyn Dodgers and broke the color barrier in major league baseball. The key to understanding both these events, is the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution. So what exactly is the 14th amendment? We hear lawyers referred to it but what is it say? And how does it apply to cases like this one? To understand that we have to go back to the civil war.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans died in the battle to reaffirm the core principal of the United States. Abraham Lincoln declared freedom for enslaved people by issuing the emancipation proclamation in 1863. But Lincoln was afraid that this change of the affirmation of equal right for all Americans would be temporary if they're not enshrined in the constitution. So Lincoln and his ally advocated for amendments to the constitution. There were three, the 13th amendment permanently outlawing slavery was ratify in 1865, the year of Lincoln's assassination. The 14th amendment took longer to ratify. Lincoln's allies pushed it forward against the objection of President Andrew Johnson. Here's section 1 of the 14th amendment, read by Justice [Eileen Moore 00:20:04] from the 4th District Court of Appeals in Orange County.

Eileen Moore: All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Jeff: The 14 amendment was finally ratified in 1868. The 15th amendment establishing the right to vote for all citizens was ratified in 1870. For a few years after the civil war during this period known as reconstruction, African-Americans took advantage of new political and educational opportunities but it didn't last.

Ron Wenkart: Now the reality of course, the historical reality is that we passed the 13th amendment, the 14th amendment and the 15th amendment but they were largely unenforced for many years until the 1950s, after World War II. You know we did, there was a civil rights act of 1886, which has been on the books all these years but when you go back in history and look at how many lawsuits were filed under that law, very few until the 1950s.

Jeff: Prejudiced against Americans of African ancestry led to a new oppression and the imposition of segregation, often accompany by horrific violence like that perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan. The klan even had a significant presence in Orange County well in the 20th century.

People of many ethnicities were subjected to discriminatory practices. California law for example excluded Native Americans and students of Chinese and Japanese origin from so called whites schools. But here in the 1940s, Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez and their three children were challenging all those years of discrimination segregation and they were going back to the 14th amendment beyond Plessy versus Ferguson to recover Lincoln vision of liberty and justice for all and they won. Sylvia Mendez finally got to attend Westminster school.

- Sylvia: When Judge McCormick and the Superior Court of Los Angeles stated that separate was not equal, the first person that ever said that, first judge, that they went ahead with a first judgment in Westminster and then integrated us. They integrated us in Westminster and what they did was they put the older kids in the old school, Mexican school and they put the younger kids in the white school and I remember I have a picture, I'll show it to you in a little bit, right there I have it, right there Gonzalo, you in the white school and ... and we went to the white school.
- Jeff: They didn't stay in Westminster long though, they had leased the farm from a Japanese-American family that had been relocated to an internment camp during the war.
- Sylvia: The war ends and the [Munemitsus 00:23:04] come back and they are so nice to us that they allow us to stay there and live with them while we're growing the last crop of asparagus so we could have enough money to move out and my dad buy another Cantina. Because my father, even though they were making, my mother made a statement that one time they were making like a thousand a day because of the ... the crop in the ... army was taking and they needed all this. But even then, they didn't have any money left because so ... and so when the Munemitsus came back they were, couldn't left to, for to ... let us stay there and live with them and grow that last crop asparagus and finish packing the tomatoes that we had gotten from mister ... you know we had rented a lease from Mr. [Blue 00:23:52] this other parcel of land and send all that to market and then we move back to Santa Ana.
- Jeff: The Munemitsus family and the Mendez family worked together to save the farm, then the Mendez children went to Santa Ana schools but this time they went to what ended up to now been an all white school.
- Sylvia: So when we came back to Santa Ana and the school board had appealed it and said "Just because Judge McCormick says separate is not equal, we're not go with it, we're gonna appeal it to Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and we're right in the middle of the appeals when we come back to Santa Ana and my dad goes and tell whoever the superintendent school was at that time. He told him, "I'm taking my children to the white schools even though we're in appeal". And he takes us to the school-
- Gonzalo jr: He took us to the school across the street from floral park which is an all white school and it was [Jefferson 00:24:46] Elementary and it's not there anymore. And he took us and enroll us in there and we were the only wh ... Mexican kids in that school and not ... and all the elementary kids from floral park which was predominantly white at that time were going to that school so we're thrown in to this school with nothing but white kids.
- Sylvia: So, the teachers said as I walk in to school, I walk in to my classroom and he said, "This is Ms. Sylvia Mendez, everybody say hi", and everybody said hi and we had been in an integrated school in Westminster already because Westminster had integrated us so I thought it was gonna be the same so, I walked in there and everybody said, "Hi, Sylvia", and the school bell rings and we go out for recess and when I get out to recess, this little white boy comes ... "What are you doing here? You're a Mexican don't you know Mexicans are not suppose to be here? What are you doing here, you shouldn't even be here?". All this time I had to gone to court everyday, thought I was listening and never realizing what they were fighting for, 'cause when that little boy said that to me, I start crying and crying. I went in to the school and talk to the teachers, crying and crying and then I went home.

I told my mother I'm not going back to that school, they don't want us in that school they don't want Mexicans in that school and my mom says, "Sylvia, you were in court everyday, don't you realize what we were fighting?", "Yes, so that we can get to that beautiful school in Westminster", she says, "No Sylvia, that's not what we were fighting, we were fighting because under God we're all equal and you belong at that school just like everybody else belongs to that school and that's what we were fighting for. Because you're just as good as that little white boy and yes you gonna go back to school", and yes I went back to school and I told the students and guess what I discovered? I discovered that everybody's not born with bigotry, with hatred in their heart, because before you know it we were all being invited to their homes, to their parties and we grew up in integrated schools in Santa Ana.

- Jeff: Sylvia and Gonzalo Junior went on to attend fully integrated Santa Ana High School, where Gonzalo Junior is still active with the alumni association. From there Sylvia went on to a nursing school. Time was not easy, she and the whole family had to make major sacrifices. These sacrifices took their toll on Gonzalo Senior. He died young in 1964.
- Dr. Al Mijares: Some argue that it may have hastened his own death, 'cause he died at age 51 and even back then that was young.
- Jeff: After the case was decided, people quickly forgot about it.
- Gonzalo jr: After we won the case, we didn't, nobody really talked about it.
- Sylvia: My dad said ... my mother said, she tried to tell people and they won't believe her.
- Gonzalo jr: Nobody [crosstalk 00:27:30] you just stop talking about it.
- Sylvia: So when he was dying, I went ... we both went on to college and everything and I went on to become assistant nurse and director of a hospital. You know I went on and became a nurse and so [inaudible 00:27:44] real sick, we moved here. We've been in this house for 47 years and I remember my mom would say, "Sylvia, nobody knows about this case, you need to ...", everybody needs to go out and talk about it, so what happened was that my niece went around and did that petition to get the school named after my mother and father.
- Jeff: Dr. Al Mijares was Superintendent of the Santa Ana unified school district at that time.
- Dr. Al Mijares: The board agreed that it should be name after Gonzalo Mendez and later his wife's name was considered, so we ended up designating the school as the Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez School.
- Jeff: Sylvia speaks to students at Mendez Intermediate several times a year. Encouraging them to be the next generations of leaders in Orange County and she speaks at school and colleges and universities across the country, spreading the message about courage and justice. The impact of Mendez versus Westminster went far beyond Orange County. This is Justice Eileen Moore.
- Eileen Moore: That the time, that the Ninth Circuit decision came down, [Earl Warren 00:28:49] was Governor of California, so this is 1947, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal affirmed Judge McCormick and kept the injunction in place, two months later then Governor Earl Warren signed a bill outlawing segregation in all of California's school and that was the first time that any state in our union outlaw segregation in its school.

- Jeff: Mendez laid the ground work for Brown versus the Board of Education.
- Eileen Moore: In 1953, Brown versus the Board of Education was argued before the United States Supreme Court but one of the Justices died, was the Chief Justice and President Eisenhower appointed Governor Earl Warren to be the new Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court and Earl Warren is the one that actually authored the opinion of Brown versus the Board of Education. So we had Earl Warren from being Attorney General, to being the Governor, to being the Chief of Justice of the United States Supreme Court.
- Thurgood Marshall was amicus curiae or friend of the court in the Mendez case and he's the one that argued Brown versus Board of Education. He wrote the brief for it and he argued it, both times in '53 and '54.
- Jeff: You might also know that 13 years later in 1967, Thurgood Marshall was appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States, two years before Earl Warren retired. When the court of appeal was built in Santa Ana in 2009, Justice Moore commissioned a painting of the Mendez case to hang permanently at the foyer of the court. You can see it there today.
- So the Mendez family changed the world, they made America a better place for all of us. So how can we now follow in the footsteps of the Mendez families? Let me suggest three ways, first we can celebrate our diversity.
- Dr. Al Mijares : We're so much stronger when we are diverse, when you have diversity in all levels, makes us all stronger and better, more enriched.
- Jeff: While we've made tremendous progress toward a more inclusive society since the battle fought by the Mendez family 70 years ago, this is a vital to reaffirm the importance of diversity.
- Second, we can champion a universal free inclusive public education available to all students. The Mendez family had to fight for this opportunity so have millions of other Americans over the past two centuries. You hear more about them in future episodes of the Deeper Learning podcast.
- Dr. Al Mijares: I think it's changed the perception of many people, lot of the business people in this community care ... most of them if not all of 'em ... care about the education of our students, because you know we're all in this together. What happens in the center affects the northern part, the southern part of the county and if we don't work as brothers and sisters, we'll all be affected.
- Jeff: Third, we can live out our American ideals, we hold these truths to be self evident that all people are created equal, that they're endowed by their creator with a certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Here's Sylvia's vision.
- Sylvia: Gonzalo and I went to speak ... at Orange Coast County and his yellow little boy said, "There's no ... what do you mean about American dream?". I was telling him about of the American dream, how we can make our own American dream, he says, "There's no such thing as the American dream", I say, "Yes, there is. I am the product of the American dream. You just have to fight hard, I remember when my parents lost all their money and how he had to go out and work and I would go to a cannery on 1st street, [inaudible 00:32:45] and work from 3 to 11 at night packing peaches and then get up in the morning and go to Orange Coast college at 7 o'clock to my nursing school, that's how I became a

registered nurse by working. I mean, we didn't have loans ... or student loans or scholarship that we can get at that time, so you have to fight and you have to study and you have to make sure that whatever it is that you want there's nothing that can stop you.

Jeff: We face many challenges in America, but Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez and their children points us in the right direction back to our core principals.

Dr. Al Mijares: What has made America so great has to be diversity, we had an amazing constitution, the leader of this country at his birth was phenomenal, ordained by God in my opinion, sovereignly led really. And ... but what we did was we pretty much created a country where anybody can come and embrace the American ideals and take your place and it brought in different languages and cultures and I think that's the genius of this great country. So we have to understand that today, cases like the Mendez do provide a template of what we should not do and what we should do.

Jeff: Thanks for joining us for the Deeper Learning podcast. Exploring stories like this one helps us think more deeply about life, learning and education. We'd love to hear your thoughts. You can reach us at communications@ocde.us. If you enjoy this episode, please share it with a friend. You can find all the resources on this episode including an image of the Mendez painting at newsroom.ocde.us. The Deeper Learning podcast is the production of the Orange County Department of Education. Thanks to our county superintendent, Dr. Al Mijares, Justice Eileen Moore, Chief Counsel Ron Wenkart and to our podcast team [Ian Hannigan 00:34:58], Laura Watson, [Greg Lamers 00:35:01], [Daru Sisavath 00:35:01], and [Shane Klein 00:35:03] and to [Sandra Robbie 00:35:04] from Chapman University and special thanks to Sylvia Mendez and Gonzalo Mendez Junior. We'll see you next time on the Deeper Learning podcast.

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