

Mendez v. Westminster

Breaking Barriers

By: Natalia Ahtziri López

Senior Division

Individual Documentary

Process Paper: 500 words

Process Paper

500 words

I first learned about Mendez V. Westminster when my mom read me “Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation” by Duncan Tonatiuh. This book narrates the true story of Sylvia Mendez and the efforts of her parents to pursue litigation which would lead to the desegregation of children of color in the Orange County School District in Southern California in the 1940s. The efforts of the Mendez family, together with other Latino families, were able to give their children, and many more, a chance at a better education and future. Over time, I became more and more interested in the Civil Rights Movement, more specifically as it related to the educational system of the United States and how it has affected Mexican-Americans. As I continued learning, I steadily became more interested in how Latinos contributed to the educational Civil Rights Movement.

I was inspired to pursue this topic as my History Day project when I met Sylvia Mendez on September 5th, 2019 at Utah State University. I had done research about her case in the past and understood how fortunate I was to have an opportunity to listen to her speak. I began conducting my research by expanding on my initial knowledge of the case. For the initial stages of research, I used a majority of online resources to construct the visual pieces of my documentary. Through these resources, I was able to expand on the significance this case had on the history of Mexican Americans. As I progressed in my research and had completed my script and voice over, I found several documentaries that provided me with a greater understanding of the education system for Latinos in

the 1940's. As I began to arrange images, I used iMovies and Adobe Audition as my main editing softwares.

I am immensely grateful to both Syliva Mendez and Professor Mariesela Martinez-Cola for allowing me to interview them for my documentary. Syliva Mendez was gracious enough to provide me with an interview on the day she came to visit Utah State University. Through her interview, I was able to further understand what the Mendez family was working towards. USU Professor Martinez-Cola provided me with a greater understanding of the context surrounding Mendez V. Westminster. I was able to further understand the social stigmatization that Mexican Americans faced in the 1940's while also learning more about the goals of the lawyers and the support of several Civil Rights organizations such as the NAACP.

The legacy and impact her family made on the U.S. educational system is historic and fits with this year's theme of Breaking Barriers. If it wasn't for her parents, Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez, who shattered the race barrier, children of color in Ms. Mendez's generation would not have been able to get the education they needed to pursue a college degree and break the cycle of poverty.

Cited Works

Primary Sources

Mendez, Sylvia. "Breaking Barriers: Sylvia Mendez." Ed. Lopez, Natalia 2019.

Interview conducted at Utah State University on September 5th, 2019 at the USU Taggart Student Center, 2nd floor. The interview was conducted by Natalia Lopez and focused on the history and legacy of Mendez V Westminster.

Administration, The U.S. National Archives and Records. "Mendez V. Westminster School District." 2019. Web.

A collection of Images provided by the National Archives. These images are official documents pertaining to the Mendez case. These images were used as part of the images seen in my documentary when I mention the filing of documents.

Mendez, et al v. Westminster, et al Archive. "A selection of images from the Mendez, et al. v. Westminster, et al. Archive." A very unit selection of images and documents highlighting the history of Mendez's case. I utilized important images in my documentary.

Meraji, Shereen Marisol. "Before 'Brown V. Board,' Mendez Fought California's Segregated Schools." *NPR Utah Public Radio*, 6 May 2014, www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/05/16/312555636/before-brown-v-board-mendez-fought-californias-segregated-schools. Accessed 7 Sept. 2017. What I learned from this audio clip was about the story of the Mendez family and how seven years before "Brown vs the board of education" they were one of the first cases that stated separate but equal is never equal. The Mendez family had to send their children to a separate school for "colored" children instead of the closer and nicer all-white school. Little Sylvia Mendez and her siblings where the reason why her parents, Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez, along with other latino parents took up a action class lawsuit against four Orange county school districts and won

Secondary Sources

Blanco, María. "The Lasting Impact of Mendez V. Westminster in the Struggle for Desegregation." *American Immigration Council*. 2010. Web. January 18, 2020.

An article by Maria Blanco who writes about the history of the Mendez case. She writes about how the Mendez case provided important evidence to Brown V Board of Education as well as the context surrounding the case. This article was used as a reference for the context of the case in my script.

Benson, Sonia, et al. "Brown V. Board of Education." *UXL Encyclopedia of U.S. History*, vol. 1, Detroit, UXL, 2009, pp. 194-98. *Student Resources in Context*
link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3048900086/SUIC?u=pioneer&xid=50639a1a.
Accessed 25 Sept. 2019. This is an overview of the brown v board case that led to the desecration of most schools across America though of course, we are still trying to reach the goal that the court set for us.

Bricks Before Brown v. Board of Education: A Comparative, Historical Study of Race, Class, and Gender in Chinese American, Native American, and Mexican American School Desegregation Cases, 1885-1947 Martinez-Cola, Marisela (Spring 2018)
<https://etd.library.emory.edu/concern/etds/9306sz292?locale=zh>
A break down of Brown v. Board of Education specifically how it affected other minorities. This paper also covers more of the impact of Brown throughout America rather than solely focusing on the effect in the south. This paper was a reference to the impact of Brown and how it contributed to desegregation.

"Brown Foundation." *Gale Student Resources in Context*, Detroit, Gale, 2017.
link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/PC4205130135/SUIC?u=pioneer&xid=89ac6b9f.
Accessed 5 Oct. 2019. The official web site of Brown v board has lots of information but so far i've only used some pictures from the site. The pictures used were from the museum that they had set up in Monroe school. The pictures all had all been set out around the basic theme of the brown v board case with added extras from other times in the civil rights movement. The picture I used was of a quote said by Mr. Brown.

Constitutional Rights Foundation. "Mendez V Westminster: Paving the Way to School Desegregation." 2007. Web. This source is a detailed account of what occurred during the Mendez proceedings. It provides me with the insight of what occurred in an orderly manner and includes information that other sources neglect. This was a particularly helpful source and was a major influence on my script.

Courts, Administrative Office of the U.S. "Background - Mendez V. Westminster Re Enactment." Federal Judiciary. Web. February 23, 2020.
A web page summarizing the main points of the Mendez case. The web page also explains how Sylvia Mendez received the medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama. This was one of the first sources I accessed while researching for my documentary.

"Desegregation of Little Rock Central High School." *Gale Student Resources in Context*, Detroit, Gale, 1 Sept. 1957.
link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/PC4205130165/SUIC?u=pioneer&xid=dffdf88e.
Accessed 26 Sept. 2019 an image showing the unfair balance between schools and how the army had to step in to let nine African American students go to an all anglo high school

Foundation, Sylvia Mendez. "Mendez V Westminster History." Sylvia Mendez Web. February 23, 2020. A paper going into depth on Mendez V Westminster. The information in this paper is more analytical and focuses more on the narrative aspect of the case rather than just providing a cohesive line by line timeline. This sources was helpful in providing me with a good tone reference.

Gallardo, Alex. "Mendez Vs. Segregation: 70 Years Later, Famed Case 'Isn't Just About Mexicans. It's About Everybody Coming Together'." *Los Angeles Times* 2009. Print. An article focusing on the present impact of the Mendez case and how Sylvia has played a role in. This article outlines the significant changes that were brought to the education system. This was helpful by providing a point of view on the impact.

Hayer, Rosanna, Skyler Gallivan, Lydia Staires, Cailin Vizzo, Alicia Wallenta "Mendez V. Westminster: The Case That Changed History
A great source that provides me with more information than a regular source. It explained more about the life of the Mendez family while they were arguing the case rather than focusing on what happened in the courtroom. This was helpful by providing me a good starting point to what was going on in the Mendez's family's lives.

Klein, Rebecca. "Latino School Segregation: The Big Education Problem That No One Is Talking About." *Huffington Post*, 26 Oct. 2015, www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/latino-school-segregation_us_561d70a5e4b050c6c4a341 Accessed 29 Sept. 2019 An article talking about the impact of the Mendez Case in California and in latino heavy neighborhoods. This article focuses on how the Mendez case impacts the neighborhoods of California without diving too deep into the issue. This provides me with a simple explanation of the impact and reduces the complicated issues surrounding the Case.

Martínez-Cola, Marisela. "Sylvia Mendez's Legacy." Ed. Lopez, Natalia 2020. Interview conducted on February 13th, 2020 on the campus of Utah State University by Natalia Lopez. Dr.Martínez-Cola is a USU Assistant Professor in Sociology who also has a degree in law. Some of her scholarly work focuses on Mendez V Westminster.

Martinez-Cola, Marisela. "Visibly Invisible: TribalCrit and Native American Segregated Schooling." October 30, 2019. The author utilizes story-telling and comparative historical cases to explain the Native American case. It analyzes the court opinions to argue that these cases are more than racial projects. It also explains how these cases are about colonizing racial court projects.

Martinez-Cola, Marisela. "Sympathetic Symbols, Social Movements, and School Desegregation." 28 December 2017. An article that explains social movements and the impact it had on society. The author utilizes a theory to explain images and their significance. The author compares the images of Chinese-American case with the

Mexican-american and shows its differences and similarities.

Marisela Martinez-Cola, with, Rocco English, Jennifer Min, Jonathan Peraza, Jamesetta Tambah, Christina Yebuah. "When Pedagogy Is Painful: Teaching in Tumultuous Times." January 24, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X17754120>. This article addresses the teacher's experience in the classroom when he/she teaches topics on race and ethnicity. The article offers pedagogical strategies on how to teach difficult issues. It also focuses on the emotions, teachers experience when they bring up difficult topics.

Robbie, Sandra. "Mendez V. Westminster: Desegregating California's Schools." WGBH Educational Foundation 2002. Web. January 19, 2020. A short documentary published by Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) where I was able to access rare footage regarding Mendez v. Westminster's case. The short documentary is 8 minutes long and it provides a summary of the case.

Roos, David. "The Mendez Family Fought School Segregation 8 Years before Brown V. Board of Ed." *History Stories*. A&E Television Networks 2019. Web2020. David Roos contrasts the segregation that was occurring in California i.e Mendez case with the "Jim Crow" South. The article provides a summary of how the Mendez family played a key role in the legal fight against segregation. It provides links to more information regarding the Mendez case.

Soundtrack

All music I used throughout the documentary.

Sánchez, Rafael. "Adelita." *Hasta Cuando*. The Mexican Guitar: Classic Atmosphere From Spain. Indie. November 29, 2019.

Iturri, Rafael. "Norteña." *Veinte Grandes Exitos con Guitarra Clásica Española*. July 14, 2011.

Iturri, Rafael. "Nocturno." *Veinte Grandes Exitos con Guitarra Clásica Española*. July 14, 2011.