PIONEER OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS

ALONSO S. PERALES

CYNTHIA E. OROZCO

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Recovering the past, creating the future

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Dedicated to Adela Sloss-Vento

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Acknowledgements

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This effort would have been considerably more difficult without three books already written on Perales. In 1977 elder civil rights leader Adela Sloss-Vento wrote his biography. She was Perales' ally, a major activist from 1927 to 1990 and became an acquaintance of mine in 1978. After Perales died in 1960 she spent decades trying to get the public and LULAC to recognize Perales' legacy. Her quest is revealed in my book *Agent of Change* published in January 2020.

Historian Richard A. Garcia's book on San Antonio in the 1930s provided the first insight into Perales' ideology and offered significant detail about the city's Mexican origin populace. Thirdly, in 2012 Arte Público Press published conference papers about Perales organized by the University of Houston's Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage Program and attorney/scholar Michael A. Olivas. Numerous scholars contributed original essays on Perales including Olivas,

Benjamín Márquez, Joseph Orbock Medina, Lupe S. Salinas, Aaron E. Sánchez, George A. Martínez, Mario T. García, Virginia Marie Raymond, Norma Adelfa Moulton, Donna M. Kabalen de Bichara, F. Arturo Rosales; and Emilio Zamora. It is rare when a Chicana scholar can benefit from insight from other Latino scholars on a biography. Contributors tackled Perales from the vantage point of specific disciplines and topics. Salinas and Olivas addressed him as an attorney. García saw Perales as a political Catholic. Zamora showed Perales' work in international diplomacy while Raymond revealed Perales' anti-communist ideology and his criticism of the Catholic Church. Medina raised issues about a singular vision of Mexican-American civil rights; Sánchez addressed issues of citizenship and belonging. Literary scholar Moulton focused on letters written by ordinary people victimized by racial discrimination. Kabalen de Bichara focused on Perales' letters and one of his books and his deconstructed sytems of thought while Martínez addressed Perales' anti-racism work from a critical race perspective. My contribution to Olivas' book detailed Perales' LULAC work in the 1930s and an expanded version appears here in chapter 11.

I thank a number of archives and libraries including Special Collections, M.D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston where the Perales papers are housed; University of Texas at Austin Dolph Briscoe Center for American History; Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin; James Jernigan Library at Texas A&M University in Kingsville; Cushing Library at Texas A&M University at College Station; Institute of Texan Cultures of San Antonio; Center for Southwest Research at the University of New Mexico; Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley; Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA; and the National Archives in Washington, DC. The Texana Room in the San Antonio Public Library also proved useful. Graduate student Manny Grajales helped with research at Texas A&M University in College Station. At the University of Houston I thank Christian Kelleher, Lisa Cruces and Imelda Cervantes.

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My journey as a young historian began at age 20 as a sophomore in a class with Victor Nelson Cisneros when I wrote a thirty-page research paper with ninety-nine footnotes. I especially thank the belated Adela Sloss-Vento of Edinburg who shared her papers with me in 1979 when I was a young historian. Likewise, she contacted Marta Pérez Perales so she might permit me use her husband's papers in 1979 from which I wrote my senior honors thesis completed in 1980. This allowed me to detail Perales' activities in the 1920s. In 2009 the University of Houston obtained the Perales papers. Dr. Arnoldo Carlos Vento kindly shared the Sloss-Vento papers located in Austin from 2012 to 2016. Historian J. Gilberto Quezada and Elaine Ayala of the *San Antonio Express* also assisted.

The following institutions provided research and travel support: Arte Público Press, Eastern New Mexico University, Ruidoso and Eastern New Mexico University, Portales. I also thank work-study student Paula Gómez. Halen Anderson proved a skillful assistant and I thank Teresa Palomo Acosta and Judge Lupe Salinas for their insight on several chapters. Marta and Raimundo Perales, children of Perales, also helped as did niece Araceli Pérez Davis and Blanca E. Perales.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. My mother, Aurora E. Orozco was a Dreamer in the 1920s, community leader, LULACer, writer and orator. I also thank my father Primitivo, a Mexican immigrant bootmaker. My sister Meta Orozco shared her home with me in Houston while sister Sylvia Orozco, the founder and director of Mexic-Arte museum, did so in Austin. I also thank husband Leo Martínez. Finally, I thank son Lucky, a wonderful dog and family member, always allowed and cherished.

Ruidoso, New Mexico C.E.O.
Fall 2021

List of Abbreviations

ACSSP American Council of Spanish-Speaking Persons (Southwest & Chicago)

AFL American Federation of Labor (national)

AGIF American G.I. Forum (national)

AHA Alianza Hispano Americana (national)

ANMA Associacion Nacional Mexico Americana (New Mexico)

CCC Civilian Conservation Corps (national)

CIO Congress of Industrial Organization (national)

CSO Community Service Organization (California, Arizona)

FEPC Federal Employment Practices Commission (national)

GGL Good Government League (San Antonio)

GNC Good Neighbor Commission (Texas)

LAC Latin American Citizens League (South Texas, especially the Valley)

LULAC League of United Latin American Citizens (national)

MALDEF Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (national)

MAYO Mexican American Youth Organization (Texas)

OKA Order Knights of America (San Antonio)

OSA Order Sons of America (San Antonio and South Texas)

OST Order Sons of Texas (San Antonio)

PAPA Pan American Progressive Association (San Antonio)

PASSO Political Association of Spanish Speaking Organization (Southwest)

PART Pan American Round Table (Texas)

RUP Raza Unida Party (Texas, New Mexico, Midwest)

SIL School Improvement League (San Antonio)

TFW Texas Farm Workers (Texas)

UFW United Farm Workers (national)

WPA Works Progress Administration (national)

Foreword

Nearly a decade ago, when the United Census Bureau announced the findings of its latest decennial count, many Americans greeted the news of explosive growth within the Latino community with concern and curiosity. What would the "Hispanicization" of our country mean for America's future? What, they wondered, were Latinos all about? For those who still wonder—or who simply want to better understand how the promise of America moves from a dream nearer to reality—the story of Alonso S. Perales is a must read. Born just before the turn of the 20th century and orphaned at age six, Perales lived a hard-scrabble life as a young man in the small town of Alice, Texas, before serving in the United States Army during World War I, graduating from college and law school, pushing for civil rights as a lawyer and activist, and authoring books and opinion columns. Indeed, Perales demonstrated the very values that propelled our democracy forward: love of country, a willingness to work hard, and commitment to equality and the rule of law.

Few have done as much as Perales to make the promise of America real for Mexican-Americans. He understood the power of community-building and the urgency of pushing his fellow Americans to work toward justice for all, so that our nation could one day live up to its highest ideals. As principal founder of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and its third president, Perales created and helped build an organization nearly unmatched in its advocacy for Mexican-American and broader Latino advancement across generations. Perales was foundational to Latino civil rights in San Antonio, Texas, and the United States. As Latinos seeking the American Dream confronted one hurdle after another, from segregation and disenfran-

chisement to economic injustice and nativist immigration laws, LULAC stood at the vanguard of empowerment, as it does today.

In many ways, Perales exemplified the best of service to others. He was also human—and a politician—and therefore flawed and complex. Historian Cynthia E. Orozco compellingly explores Perales' life in full, to take the measure of a man whose life's work added up to hard-won progress for the Mexican-American community he so loved and dedicated his life to fighting for.

Tucked below the headlines of the 2010 census was another figure. Almost a quarter of children under eighteen in our country are Latino. America's destiny and the destiny of the Latino community have never been more intertwined. Fortunately, generations of Latinos stand on Perales' shoulders: young men and women who've earned a higher education, served our country overseas, started their own businesses, shepherded scientific breakthroughs, and broken barriers at city halls, state capitols and in the halls of Congress.

One January day in the not too distant future, a Latino or Latina will be sworn in as President of the United States. That moment will not only make history, it will also be a moment of celebration, and a time to give thanks to so many pioneers who helped bring it to fruition. May Alonso S. Perales's name be spoken that day.

Julián Castro
Former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
June 2020

Introduction

The Defender of La Raza
Five decades of a vibrant voice
In Texas courts you hear
And before Congress resonates constantly
Wants to defend huge freedoms
Against unfair bigots
That impurgatory of people's rights
His harmony and bravery breaks union
The voice proclaims the fraternity
To all the men of America
That happiness can be wrought
Of the righteousness of Homer's justice
On the lips of Alonso S. Perales
Against the treacherous nestling malice
In the calling voice lights
Of equity in the Mexican soul
That with skillful alacrity defends
The Indo-Hispano-American Raza.[1]

Prof. Manuel Urbina, San Antonio

This book argues that Alonso S. Perales was one of the most significant Latinos in the United States leaving a civic, political, educational and intellectual legacy unmatched by few others. He was an elite but a man of his own making. As a civil rights activist, he founded the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in 1929, not only one of the oldest Latino civic associations in the United States but one of the most effective. In civic engagement, no one

matches his call for the racial uplift of La Raza. In politics, he helped initiate serious efforts at political empowerment of Mexican Americans and Latinos through the voting box in the 1930s long before Willie Veslásquez did so in San Antonio, Texas in the 1970s. Perales sought to pass Texas state and federal legislation banning racial discrimination. He collaborated with Senator Dennis Chávez as the lone Latino in Congress in the 1940s, and pressed for the Federal Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), a federal employment anti-discrimination agency during World War II and before today's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. He also helped elect Henry B. González as a Mexican American in the Texas legislature and who would become the first Tejano in Congress. In education, Perales fought for school desegregation across Texas and initiated a mass movement for more and better public schools for Mexican-descent people in San Antonio. As a public intellectual, he in effect defined "Mexican Americanism," an emerging identity and political philosophy, spreading and living this ideology for over four decades.

Perales' history pertains to Latinos, not just people of Mexican descent. He did so as a US diplomat in Latin America; as a civil rights activist fighting discrimination against Latinos and Latin Americans in the United States; and also by serving Nicaraguan Americans as a Consul General for Nicaragua in the United States in the 1940s and 50s. Perales may have been the first Latino diplomat in US history. Few Latinos had connections to Latin American politics and policies, outside of their respective home countries if born outside of the United States.

There was no other more significant Mexican American in the United States in the twentieth century than Alonso S. Perales. His daughter noted, "He had a vision; he had a dream. I want to say he was like Martin Luther King—but he preceded Martin Luther King."[2] Wife Marta noted "Lider nació, y nada pudo contener su marcha, por que los hombres que nacen para eso, vienen al mundo uno cada siglo."[3] (He was born a leader and nothing could stop his march because he was born for this. Leaders come around once a century.)

His contemporary Professor Benjamin Cuellar Sr. called him, "El Paladín de la Raza" (The Knight of la Raza).[4]

Historian Emilio Zamora also spoke to his historical significance: "I honestly believe that Perales is the most important Mexican-American leader of the 20th century" and also calling him "the most active proponent of civil rights legislation for Mexicans living within the United States.[5] Historian Joseph Orbock Medina noted, "Perales rightfully occupies a prominent place in Mexican-American history as perhaps the foremost proponent of Latino racial pride."[6] Judge/scholar Lupe Salinas concluded, "All Latinos, not just Mexican-descent persons, owe Alonso S. Perales, this illustrious person, an incredible and immeasurable appreciation for making life a better one for Latinos in the United States."[7] This is not an overstatement since Perales founded LULAC, the most important Latino civil rights organization in the 20th century. He was its principal founder and intellectual father.[8] This book will also show that Perales was a "transformative, controversial, and complex" man as several scholars have commented.[9]

Forgotten

Despite these characterizations, Perales has largely been forgotten. He was praised and honored a few times during his lifetime. Coactivist Adela Sloss-Vento of San Juan and Edinburg, Texas, a woman, recognized his genius during his lifetime and without her we would have known little about him. Yet, he was also publicly criticized. He was attacked not only by white racists but also by Mexican journalists in Texas and Mexican-American civic leaders and allies who disagreed with his ideas or methods. After his death in 1960 he was unknown to Chicano movement activists of the late 1960s and maligned by Chicano historians as late as the 2010s.

Perales was born in 1898 and died in 1960. He was an attorney, US diplomat, public intellectual, the principal founder of LULAC, and major civil rights leader. He died before LULAC had a permanent national office and before the field of Chicano history in the academy existed. In 1960 there were likely two professionally trained Mexican-American historians in the United States. Dr. Ernesto Galarza and his-

torian Dr. Carlos E. Castañeda of the University of Texas at Austin was Perales' co-activist and best friend but, unfortunately, died in 1958 before Perales passed.

Forgotten and Remembered

Let us briefly examine how Perales was appreciated over the decades. He congratulated the editors of San Antonio's new children's monthly magazine *Alma Latina* and subsequently in April 1932, this LULAC monthly publication "for the interests of the Latin American children," featured his picture on the cover.[10] *LULAC News* reported on Perales in "Who's Who in the Lulac" (Aug. 1931) and "S.A. Club Banquets Brother Perales" (January 1933). A poem in his honor also appeared in May 1934. Sloss-Vento recognized Perales' significance as early as the 1930s.[11] She penned "The League of United Latin Americans by Its Founder, Attorney Alonso S. Perales" for *La Prensa*, the only statewide Spanish-language newspaper in Texas and wrote a similar essay for *LULAC News*.[12] She had begun her activism in 1927 when she graduated from Pharr-San Juan High as a twenty-six year old and introduced herself to Perales.[13]

Perales himself sought to document his contributions to the League and tell his version of LULAC's founding in volume two of *En Defensa de Mi Raza* in 1937. Ben Garza, the first national president of LULAC, died in 1937 and as a result the League began to reflect on its history and founders. Despite this documentation Garza would be called the "Father of LULAC," even being referred to as such by LULAC co-founder M.C. Gonzales, one of eleven key founders.[14] It is not clear if he gave Garza this title to spite Perales or to honor the deceased Garza.

When Perales published his book *En Defensa de Mi Raza* he included writing by other activists, intellectuals, and friends. Castañeda noted, "Atty. Alonso S. Perales rightfully can be called the defender of our Race. He has not been the only one, but among those who in the last years have been disturbed by serious problems, no one has done more than he."[15] Castañeda also referred to his "vision of a prophet."[16]

In the 1940s a few community members acknowledged Perales. A *calavera*, a Day of the Dead poem, was written about him; it read:

From the beginning
A symbol of correction
with powerful words
said with conviction
A Tejano patriot
who defended the Mexicano
in any given moment
He was a mover and man of ideas
A powerful man, a 100%
in the court, in a fight.[17]

Perales was the subject of other lauding *calaveras* in this decade.[18]

In the 1950s Perales received his proudest accolade, a merit of achievement from Spain. News magazine *Revista Latino-Americano* of Mission, Texas dedicated an entire issue to him including essays by co-activists Sloss-Vento and J. Luz Sáenz. Sáenz referred to him as a "gladiator."[19] Sloss-Vento also penned an article to *La Prensa* of San Antonio in March 1952 about the award and his "noble struggle."[20] Likewise, in 1952 he was named Outstanding Latin American in Texas by the University of Texas Latino Student Alba Club, advised by both Castañeda and Dr. George I. Sánchez.[21] Perales received yet another award from Spain in 1952 as "Titular Member of the Institute of Hispanic Culture."[22]

Finally, in 1960 as another decade passed, San Antonio LULAC also honored him, months before he died in May. In San Antonio in 1960 Fort Worth rancher/oilman Jack Danciger said, "I hope the people of San Antonio will in the near future set aside one day at 'La Villita' to honor his name."[23] The *Encyclopedia of American Biography* contacted wife Marta Perales but no article resulted.[24] Downtown LULAC Council No. 363 also honored him at its founders' banquet in 1962.[25]

When Perales' body was moved to Alice, Texas *La Verdad* journalist Santos de la Paz of Corpus Christi proposed "Perales Park" "with gardens, playground equipment for children, benches for the repose of visitors, and most important, in the middle of it, a monument in memory of such a great defender and excelling Mexican-American."[26] He said, "we should go ahead with the idea of donating one, but one in honor of this town's son who brought great honor to it with his many merits." Sloss-Vento, probably added the additional thought on the park: ". . . such a great defender and excelling Mexican-American. . . this dream can and should become a reality."[27] Though Perales' compadre Fortino Treviño and his wife reported over $2,200 collected, it never transpired.[28] In 1969 Alice resident Rafael Treviño and twenty others tried to get Alice High named after the hometown boy but others, mostly European Americans, sought to honor writer J. Frank Dobie instead and the school board simply decided on Alice High.[29] The board, probably Anglo-dominant, ignored the petition with 3,000 signatures.[30] San Antonio LULAC, and especially Luis Alvarado (a son-in-law of Perales' co-activist Sáenz) of Council 2, also sought to bring attetion to Perales throughout the years.[31]

By the 1970s few had ever heard of Perales.[32] In 1974, the persistent Sloss-Vento brought his name to the attention of national LULAC but without success.[33] Marta Perales wrote national LULAC president about "a room full of manuscripts of a lifetime dedication."[34] IMAGE, a San Antonio Mexican-American organization, honored Perales that year and Arno Press with its Chicano historian editorial board reissued his book *Are We Good Neighbors?*[35] In 1975 San Antonio Chicano activists discovered Perales' legacy; *Chicano Times* wrote a short biographical article based on talks with wife Marta titled "Who Was Alonso Perales?[36] The *Times* noted "the verifiable treasure of old newspapers, clippings, letters and other documentation, even tapes of the work that occupied Mr. Perales' lifetime work."[37] In 1977 school leaders inaugurated the Alonso S. Perales School on the West side in San Antonio with Congressman Henry B. González as keynote speaker. Nephew Dr. Alonso M. Perales wrote a

short bio for the program which noted "Mexican American children and youth of this country who will soon become adults, and as they witness our efforts, will ask us for an accounting of our labor for the Mexican American cause."[38] At the dedication ceremony, Perales' fellow LULAC Council 16 member from the 1930s Charles Albidress Sr. said, "Many of you here today are wondering who the late Alonso S. Perales was and why he is being honored here today."[39]

Across the decades Sloss-Vento made the most effort to acknowledge Perales' legacy. In 1977 she self-published the biography *Alonso S. Perales: His Struggle for the Rights of Mexican-Americans*. Unfortunately, because she wrote outside of traditional academic history circles and because she was an elder woman, her book did not have the impact it should have; today World Catalog.org shows only forty-six libraries own a copy.[40] She sought to establish that Perales and not Ben Garza was the true founder of LULAC.[41]

I heard of Perales in 1978 when I was a sophomore at the University of Texas at Austin (UTA) and wrote a research paper. My topic was the origins of LULAC. UTA libraries had Perales' books and even more fortuitous, I was fortunate to be a work/study student at the Center for Mexican American Studies where Dr. Arnoldo Vento, son of Sloss-Vento, learned of my work. He told me about his mother's book. She allowed me to visit and use her archives in Edinburg, Texas. She urged me to visit Perales' wife hoping that I could give Perales and co-activists Sáenz and J.T. Canales their due as other LULAC founders. She wrote a letter of introduction for me and Marta Perales accepted my request to visit. She was friendly and gracious, and gave me access to Perales' papers located in the house. (Other archives were located in the garage.) In 1980 I completed my senior honors thesis, using Perales'1920s documents as well as Sloss-Vento's.[42] When I attended the national LULAC conference in Houston in 1979, the League's 50th anniversary, much more was made of first president Ben Garza than Perales, the second president. Most were unaware that Garza was the first president only because Perales orchestrated this choice.[43]

Perales was largely forgotten in the 1980s but saw sporadic recognition in the 1990s. In 1989 historian Richard A. Garcia revived Perales when he wrote the insightful *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class* about San Antonio; it was the first to place Perales in historical context though without access to Perales' papers. In 1990 Marta Perales sought and received recognition for her husband at the national LULAC convention in Albuquerque which I attended. In the early 1990s as a UCLA graduate student writing my dissertation and as Research Associate for the *New Handbook of Texas* I wrote a short bio about Perales for the Texas encyclopedia which was published in 1996.[44] In 1994 Erasmo Figueroa of San Antonio tried to create a LULAC Scholarship Foundation in Perales' honor.[45] And in 1999 Perales was honored during LULAC Week in Alice.[46]

In 2000 Araceli Pérez Davis, Marta Perales' niece, resurrected Perales in *El Mesteño*, a popular South Texas history and culture magazine.[47] In 2003 Josh Gottheimer included him in *Ripples of Hope: Great American Civil Right Speeches* but the same year the *San Antonio News* reported "Unsung Hero of Civil Rights 'Father of LULAC' a Fading Memory.[48] In 2003 reporter Hector Saldaña noted, "Perales' story rests in dozens of moldy boxes once coveted by his widow, a high-strung former opera singer who in later years vacillated between guarding that packaged legacy and threatening to burn the entire lot, says Perales' nephew."[49] A Texas Historical marker was erected in Jim Wells county in 2003.[50] In 2008 historian Mario T. García addressed Perales as a Catholic.[51]

In 2009 after Marta Perales' death, the Perales' children finally chose to place the Perales papers with the US Hispanic Literary Heritage Program at the University of Houston and have now been available to scholars. The Program organized a Perales conference and Michael A. Olivas, scholar and attorney, edited the conference volume. My chapter noted, "The year is 2012 and we still know little about Alonso S. Perales, activist, civil rights leader, lawyer, US diplomat, author, columnist, orator, teacher, publisher, and translator. Historians and political scientists have overlooked, minimized, and misunderstood him despite the fact that he was one of the most important

Mexican American activists/public intellectuals in the United States in the 20th century."[52]

Perales was well aware of his own significance and prized his archives. On his death bed he cried worrying about his papers and legacy. His books, *En Defensa de Mi Raza* (1936-37) and *Are We Good Neighbors?* (1948) might have kept his memory alive but they were self-published in limited editions. Perales had reason to cry. In 1960 mainstream libraries neglected Mexican-American history, including elites. Even in the 1970s no one was preserving LULAC materials even though it was a middle-class organization and most of its documents in English. It was not until 1980 that LULAC national president Ruben Bonilla created the LULAC Archive at the University of Texas at Austin.

Several historians and librarians tried to get the Perales papers into a profesional repository before 2009.[53] Chicano academics and librarians tried to get the Perales family to donate/sell the papers in the early 1970s. In 1972 Professor Jose Limón of UTA inquired about the papers suggesting they "will eventually result in a published biography of the life of Alonso S. Perales."[54] Perhaps Marta did not respond because in 1970 her lawyer sent Manuel Bernal of San Antonio a demand letter asking for "all of the literary material and tapes that were intrusted (sic) to you by Mrs. Alonzo S. Perales."[55] A 1979 letter by Professor Donna R. Tobias said that she understood the collection was going to UTA.[56] In 1981 Elvira Chavaria, Mexican-American Studies librarian at the UTA Benson Latin American Collection, wrote the Perales family about the papers.[57] In 1982 historian Mario T. García also wrote Marta Perales. In 1988 UTA's Benson's Margo Gutiérrez, tried to get the archives informing widow Perales that the Dr. Carlos E. Castañeda and Dr. George I. Sánchez papers were at UTA.[58] In 2001 Gutiérrez noted, "they [the papers] have suffered severe deterioration due to pests, humidity, dust, etc." And that the "bulk of the papes are in a garage that has no doors and is exposed to the elements, in crushed cardboard boxes with no or ill-fitting lids. . . . It's a crying shame."[59]

In 2002 national LULAC held its annual convention in San Antonio where I ran into Perales' daughter, Marta Perales Carrizales. She visited the LULAC history booth organized by Benny Martínez of Goliad. I introduced myself, noting that I had visited her mother and the archives in the late 70s. She gasped, "¡La niña, la niña. Eres la niña!" (The girl. The girl. You are that girl!) (Indeed, I was a young woman scholar in the making). She suggested I visit with her and brother Raimundo at the family home. I advised the family that their father's papers belonged in a professional archive and suggested they request immediate archival processing and a public conference.

Unfortunately, some materials deteroriated or were lost since wife Marta did not release the papers during her lifetime of ninety-nine years. For instance, the tapes alluded to by *Chicano Times* in 1975 did not survive. There are no sound recordings in the collection though Perales was an orator and radio guest. Sloss-Vento even bought him a tape-recorder so he could document his speeches. Moreover, the Perales family allowed San Antonio-newspaperman, printer and activist Rómulo Munguía to sift through materials to decide what to remove.

Munguía was an advocate for Mexican-descent workers; in the late 30s he changed a Catholic newspaper to become a pro-worker, pro-union paper with the subtitle "La Voz: Periódico de Justicia y Accion Social."[60] And his daughter Mary had married Perales' adopted son Raimundo.

The University of Texas Press published my book *No Mexicans, Women or Dogs Allowed, The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* in 2009 where I detailed the rise of LULAC referring to it as part of a broader social movement that started independently of Perales'actions. I detailed the work of Perales and ten other founders.

Once the University of Houston's Recovery Program obtained the archive, over 11,000 items (not pages) had to be organized and processed into fourteen boxes. Olivas and the Program organized a public conference with an edited volume, *In Defense of My People, Alonso S. Perales and the Development of Mexican-American Public Intellectuals*, published.[61] Scholar George A. Martinez noted Perales'

lack of name recognition by the general public. He wrote, "For some reason, Alonso S. Perales has not achieved the fame of other Mexican Americans who have been important in the effort to secure the rights of Mexican Americans."[62] Ironically, attorney Gus Garcia, one of Perales' protégées, has received more acclaim from the general public, though this can in part be attributed to a Supreme Court win as well as the fact that he was a tragic figure as an alcoholic dying on a park bench.[63]

Brandon Mila's master's thesis in history on Perales in 2013 also helped highlight Perales' contributions. He was the first scholar independent of the conference to assess Perales' early life and also revised some of my findings in *No Mexicans*.[64] In 2015 historian Richard A. Garcia dared to write that "Alonso S. Perales was the most famous American of Mexican descent from the 1920s until his death in 1960."[65] While he is still not "famous," he was most important along with US Senator Dennis Chávez once called "the lone voice for Mexican rights in Washington between the 1930s and 1950s."[66] (Chávez and Congressman Antonio Fernández were both New Mexican LULACers.) Another sign of the lack of recognition for Perales was San Antonio's city tricentennial celebration and publications in 2018 when I was still the only person pronouncing his name.[67]

Attacked

Despite Perales' numerous contributions he was criticized by Mexicans in the United States, Mexican Americans, and Euro Texans. A light criticism appeared as early as 1931 when a LULAC poem called him a "regular Cotorra" (female parrot.)[68] He was also attacked by the entire political spectrum—conservatives, liberals and radicals. Mexican journalist Carlos Basañez Rocha of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas called him a racist and a false prophet in the 1920s.[69] San Antonio communist labor organizer Emma Tenayuca of the 1930s told me he was a "nut." And in the 1950s Dr. George I. Sánchez called him "a pathetic figure, a psycho-neurotic with delusions of grandeur."[70] A comical poster of "Sharyland" (between Mission and McAllen, Texas) in the 1950s also mocked Perales likely because he

supported conservative Allan Shivers for governor and not liberal Ralph Yarborough.[71] A flyer titled "Ya Llegó el Circo Perales" (The Perales Circus has arrived) and signed "The Committee" was perhaps the lowest assault towards him because of his pro-Shivers sentiment, likely a flyer produced by media-savvy Ed Idar Jr. of the American G.I. Forum, another Mexican-American civil rights organization.[72] The poster mocked "Clown Perales" for supporting state representative Allan Shivers for governor and allegedly "speaking against the idea of the Mexican-Texans be given representation."[73] His wife Marta wrote that there were "Judases of our own descent. Those who were envious of him made his life much harder and more difficult."[74]

Perales was also attacked by Euro-Texans, blacklisted and spied on by the US government. In the 1940s Euro-Texan congressman/mayor Maury Maverick called Perales an "agitator by trade."[75] In the 1940s during World War II he was also spied upon by the federal government likely because he and LULAC representatives had regular contact with the Mexican government during the war.[76] He was also attacked by William Blocker, US Consul in Reynosa. He was blackballed from obtaining employment in the US government or military during this war and in the 1950s he was labeled a communist.[77]

After his death in the 1960s, Chicano scholars across the decades also criticized Perales. In the 1970s they criticized LULAC (and by extension, Perales) charging it with assimilation, middle-class bias and anti-Mexican sentiment.[78] Judge/scholar Lupe Salinas noted anti-LULAC analysis prevalent in Chicano history suggesting that LULAC had "malevolent goals; having middle class objectives and overlooking the needs of the Mexican American workers; seeking assimilation into the United States mainstream at the expense of their Mexican background; claiming to be white at the expense of African Americans; and possessing an anti-Mexican immigrant sentiment." In the 2000s LULAC (and Perales) were charged with conservative principles as well. Likewise, I pointed to LULAC and Perales' exclusion of women from 1929 to 1933 and its marginalization of women in separate ladies chapters from 1933 to 1970.[79]

In the midst of these charges, still other scholars began to provide more nuanced analyses. They typically used LULAC archives, other sources and/or read LULAC sources more carefully. These historians incuded Richard A. Garcia, Mario T. García, Arnoldo de León, Guadalupe San Miguel, Thomas Kreneck, Craig Kaplowitz, Emilio Zamora, Thomas Guglielmo, Matthew Gritter and Gabriela González.

Terminology

This book will make extended use of racial/ethnic terminology. The question of identity is key to this study and readers must understand the politics of naming before proceeding.

Identities, both by insiders and outsiders, are important. This study mentions how outsiders named the Mexican-origin community through racial formation and racialization, two concepts critical in understanding racial identity. Scholars Michael Omi and Howard Winant define "racial formation" as the "process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings."[80]

In the 1920s when Perales was a young adult, "whites," "Mexicans," "México Texanos," "Americans" and "La Raza" were common identities. The 1920s witnessed a new era in how the Mexican-origin people were being imagined, defined and constructed both by whites and on their own. The meaning of "Mexican" in the United States changed from the 1910s to the 1920s with a "Mexican race" being constructed and becoming synonymous with immigrant. After the 1920s the dominant community continued to call all of La Raza "Mexican" despite citizenship or class. During World War II the term "Latin American" began to appear to describe Mexican-descent people in the United States and by the late 1960s the term "Mexican American" appeared in US discourse to describe United States citizens of Mexican descent. Perales used all these terms with pride.

Racialization, "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group," is another important concept used here.[81] Understanding the use of "Mexi-

can" as a racialized imaginary in the United States is key to this study. As the "Mexican race" and "Mexicans" were being defined in a different way, a new paradigm—the "Mexican problem"—emerged. The LULAC organization and Perales' life project was a response to the "the Mexican problem"—a paradigm EuroAmericans created to racialize and subordinate La Raza. Hereafter, when this study employs the term "Mexican" in quotes it is to denote racialization—racist and essentialized EuroAmerican perceptions of La Raza. The labeling of La Raza as a homogeneous Mexican problem was synonymous with EuroAmericans' appropriation of "Americanness" for themselves. The early 1910s saw the dominant society defining "American" in a typically WASP way. Mexican immigrants were also part of this racialization.

The 1920s saw this community referred to as "illegal aliens" and the 1950s saw reference to "wetbacks," undocumented Mexican immigrants but which was also used pejoratively to the entire Mexican-descent community in the United States.

This book gives attention to how insiders (the Mexican descent community) named and defined themselves through self-identity, class formation, community formation, nationalism and citizenship. Self-reference and identity are both historically specific, reflecting a particular times in history. Variables of citizenship, class, birthplace, residence, language use, education and color influenced ethnic, racial and national identity. Social, cultural, political and ideological differences existed within the Mexican-origin community.[82] Gender also impacted identity within the Raza community.

While acknowledging the multiplicity and impermanency of identities, this study uses specific terms in specific ways. This research rejects the labeling of the entire community as "Mexican" or "Mexican American." I use "Mexican origin" and "Mexican descent" to denote a "common" group distinct from EuroAmericans. "EuroAmerican" will also be used and is synonymous with "white" and "American." Mexican will designate those born in Mexico, whose life experience was largely there, and who were citizens there. "Mexican" in quotes will designate the racialized imaginary.

Mexican Americans and Hybridity

The term "Mexican American" hardly existed in public discourse in the 1920s or 1930s and would only become mainstream in the late 60s. Still, its emergence represented a shift from a Spanish to an English cultural milieu and a shift by Mexican Americans in Texas from a regional identity to a national identity.[83] Mexican Americans had been citizens of the United States since 1848, but not until the twentieth century would a significant sector become true hybrids—Mexican and American. Public schools and military service fostered a hybridity now more American. The Mexican-American male middle class of the 1920s of which Perales was a major leader was the first truly bilingual, bicultural sector and which consciously asserted citizenship and membership in the United States.

The hybrid Mexican American was constructed by European Americans, Mexican Americans and Mexicans. The dominant society's evolving, shifting and contradictory relationship with La Raza included segregation and assimilation. European Americans fostered assimilation through the Americanization movement and English-only. On the other hand, European Americans also hindered incorporation of La Raza. Whites made La Raza an "other" by institutionalizing racial segregation, constructing the "Mexican problem" and establishing the Border Patrol in 1924. They also racialized La Raza by re-emphasizing the construct called the "Mexican race." Likewise, they homogenized La Raza by failing to acknowledge citizenship within the Mexican origin community, calling all of La Raza "Mexican." "Mexican" was part of the dominant society's racial discourse used to disempower; it was synonymous with "alien," "wetback," "non-citizen" and "un-American."

Racial formation also evolved in contradictory ways. While the dominant society fostered Mexican Americanization, European Americans also created a shifting, complex and contradictory racial imaginary. In 1920 the US census included La Raza as white but by 1930 it referred to the "Mexican race" for the first time, excluding La Raza from the category of "white."

At the same time, Mexican Americans played an active role in forming this "new race" of Mexican Americans. They helped form this "race," not biologically, but by constructing this identity and politic in a relational way with European Americans and Mexicans from Mexico as major points of reference. Both European Americans and Mexicans resisted change and were uncomfortable with this new development. Mexican immigrants complained when Mexican Americans began to emerge as a new sector within La Raza.

Mexican Americans embraced this new ethnic/national identity. "Mexican American" was not yet part of European American discourse; whites did not invent or promote the term. Middle-class Mexican Americans believed it accurately described their hybridity. As Latino scholar Félix Padilla has noted, "ethnic identity is not fixed and can constitute a strategy to attain the needs and wants of the group."[84] Indeed, Mexican Americans believed it necessary to affirm their Americanness by acknowledging US citizenship. They believed it moved European Americans away from racialization practices.

Those claiming this new identity, like Perales, challenged the binary, either/or identities of "Americans" versus "Mexicans." Activists sought to broaden and complicate these narrow categories so as to demand acceptance and respect for hybridity. Mexican Americans sought respect and acceptance of their difference from Mexicans in the United States. There was no one Mexican culture in the country. They tried to convince Mexicans in the United States that the empowerment of La Raza was connected to citizenship. Both European Americans and Mexican nationalists in the United States would be slow to accept plurality and difference.

"Mexican Americanization was well under way in Mexican communities by the end of the 1920s," historian Aaron E. Sánchez has observed.[85] Mexican Americans were neither Mexican nor American; they did not fit into narrow social constructions of "Mexican" or "American." At the same time, they were both American and Mexican. Keen to this peculiar condition emerging in the 1920s were several scholars: anthropologist Manuel Gamio of Mexico, political scientist Oliver Douglas Weeks; and economist Paul S. Taylor. Gamio

conducted ethnographic work in Texas in the 1920s. His "Relaciones entre Mexicanos, México-Texanos y Americanos" (Relations between Mexicans, México Texanos, and Americans) is the best discussion of the topic.[86] Weeks wrote of the Mexican Americanization of politics evident in the founding of LULAC. Paul S. Taylor's study of the Corpus Christi region showed, "the term Mexican-American is as yet little used . . . conscious of their American citizenship."[87] He added, "I have employed it here, however to denote a small but significant group in south Texas, which, as its members have become conscious of their American citizenship, has assumed this name."[88] Hybridity was part of the group identity of Mexican Americans. The impact of public schooling on La Raza was recognized by *La Crónica* newspaper in Laredo as early as 1911, if not earlier. The paper explained that Spanish proficiency was declining.[89] Educator William John Knox of San Antonio also saw hybridity through the English language, the public school and skilled occupations.[90]

Mexican Americans, hybrids, decided they could use US citizenship as strategy in the empowerment of La Raza. Perales was the first to truly articulate this plan.

La Raza

La Raza was a popular self-referent in the 1920s. The term "La Raza" first appeared in the United States in the 1850s but was popularized with the publication of José Vasconcelos' *La Raza Cósmica* in 1925 in Mexico, a book about that nation's racial mixture. The idea of La Raza was based on common culture based on language, religion and customs, real or imagined. In Texas, immigration from Mexico strengthened this cultural base.[91]

Scholar Frances Jerome Woods explained use of La Raza in San Antonio in the 1940s. She wrote as "a generic denomination by which he [or she] includes all Mexicans regardless of class differences or place of birth. This ethnic consciousness becomes intensified in those who live in a predominately Anglo or non-Latin society that regards Mexicans as culturally different, and for the most part, socially inferior. Sociologically, therefore, recognizable physical or cultural char-

acteristics do not per se indicate membership in an ethnic group. It is rather the identification of self with the group or the 'we-feeling' that is significant."[92] She added, "Pride in La Raza, which has persisted over generations, is at the basis of ethnic activities sponsored by Mexican leaders."[93] The term's use declined in the 1950s, perhaps due to more evident cultural differences between Mexican Americans and Mexicans, at least in Texas.

La Raza was an oppressed people within the United States but could also refer to "the people" in Mexico or other Latin American countries as well. Acknowledging its prevalent use in the early 20th century, historian Elliot Young has argued that La Raza was an idealized concept and not a homogeneous community with one vision since class was a major contradiction within it.

However, La Raza was an "imagined community" and useful transnational concept in which citizenship, class and gender differences were subordinate. Perales used it to refer to a community based on race and transnationalism across the US and Mexico border and even Latin America. For Perales, referring to La Raza was a way to speak of both Mexican Americans, Mexicans and Latinos. It was a way to ignore citizenship much like European Americans did. Perales referred to La Raza but also made distinctions by citizenship between Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Yet, Perales argued that those who were US citizens should claim the United States as their home and those without US citizenship still had rights here.

Latin Americans

"Latin American" is another key term used here. Due to the US Good Neighbor Policy of the 1930s the group reference "Latin American" becan to emerge in the 1930s and was popular in the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1920s the United States continued its tradition of "Pan-Americanism," better and friendly relations with Latin America though meek. In the 1930s President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the Good Neighbor Policy with Latin America and saw more Americans referring to Latinos in the United States as Latin Ameri-

cans. It was used to mean the same as "Hispanic" or "Latino" today, both specific to the United States or to peoples in the Américas.

"Latina" or "Latino," used to encompass all Hispanic peoples in the United States, became common in the 1980s though Perales occasionally used the term in the 1920s. "Chicana" or "Chicano" refers to the post-1963 Mexican-American people in the United States as reflective of the social movement called the Chicano movement which lasted until the late 1970s. Perales died in 1960 before the Chicano movement. "Tejano" refers to Mexican Americans in Texas.

Book Organization

This book is organized into four parts. Part I "Across Time" (chapters 1-13) is organized chronologically. Chapter 1 describes the Mexican colony of South Texas and especially San Antonio from 1910-1960. Most attention is given to the 1910-1930 period to explain conditions Perales began with. Later, other chapters address the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. Chapter 2 discusses Perales' early family life in Alice, Texas. Chapter 3 addresses his role in World War I. Chapter 4 focuses on Perales in the 1920s as he began his civil rights and public intellectual activism to combat the "Mexican problem." Chapter 5 deals with San Antonio's Mexican-American civil rights organizing which Perales sought to influence as well as his lecture tour through South Texas.

Chapter 6 touches on the Harlingen Convention of 1927 at which Perales and others addressed whether Mexican citizens should be permitted to join a new association. Chapter 7 examines the formation of the Latin American Citizens League (LAC) in the Valley. Chapter 8 summarizes Perales' role in founding LULAC in 1929. Chapter 9 examines the original LULAC constitution written in 1929 of which Perales played a role. Chapter 10 addresses his relations with LULAC from 1929 to 1960 as well as the persistence of the League. Chapters 11, 12 and 13 emphasize Perales' wide-ranging activism across the 1930s, 40s and 50s.

Part II "Public Impact" (chapters 14-17) addresses Perales' influence through various personas. Chapter 14 examines Perales as an attorney; Chapter 15 discusses him as a politico; and Chapter 16 treats

him as a public intellectual as he sought to place Latinos in US public consciousness.[94] Chapter 17 deals with Perales as a Pan-American ideologue in the United States as well as his diplomat work in Latin America. His role as Consul General for Nicaragua in the United States is also mentioned.

Part III "Private Lives" (chapters 18-22) examines Perales' private life. Chapter 18 looks at his religious sentiment while Chapter 19 seeks to delve into his character. Chapter 20 focuses on his family life, wife/widow Marta and nephew Dr. Alonso M. Perales. Chapter 21 investigates his friendships and adversaries while chapter 22 looks at his health and death.

Part IV "Perales on Trial" (chapters 23-24) weighs how several generations of historians and political scientists have interpreted Perales' and LULAC's role in Latino and Latina history especially in regard to race, class, citizenship, and gender. It also unveils Perales' and LULAC's contributions. Chapter 24 concludes with my thoughts on Perales' legacy.