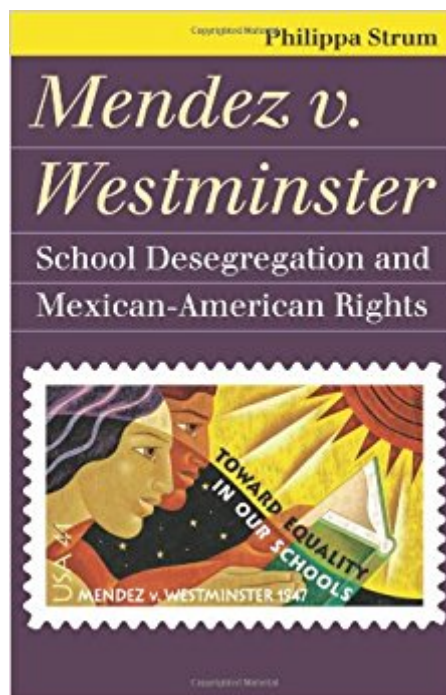




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Mendez V. Westminster: School Desegregation And Mexican-American Rights (Landmark Law Cases & American Society)



Synopsis

While *Brown v. Board of Education* remains much more famous, *Mendez v. Westminster School District* (1947) was actually the first case in which segregation in education was successfully challenged in federal court. Finally giving Mendez its due, Philippa Strum provides a concise and compelling account of its legal issues and legacy, while retaining its essential human face: that of Mexican Americans unwilling to accept second-class citizenship. In 1945 Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez, California farmers, sent their children off to the local school, only to be told that the youngsters would have to attend a separate facility reserved for Mexican Americans. In response the Mendezes and other aggrieved parents from nearby school districts went to federal court to challenge the segregation. Uniquely, they did not claim racial discrimination, since Mexicans were legally considered white, but rather discrimination based on ancestry and supposed "language deficiency" that denied their children their Fourteenth Amendment rights to equal protection under the law. In 1945 Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez, California farmers, sent their children off to the local school, only to be told that the youngsters would have to attend a separate facility reserved for Mexican Americans. In response the Mendezes and other aggrieved parents from nearby school districts went to federal court to challenge the segregation. Uniquely, they did not claim racial discrimination, since Mexicans were legally considered white, but rather discrimination based on ancestry and supposed "language deficiency" that denied their children their Fourteenth Amendment rights to equal protection under the law. Strum tells how, thanks to attorney David Marcus's carefully crafted arguments, federal district court judge Paul McCormick came to support the plaintiffs on the grounds that the social, psychological, and pedagogical costs of segregated education were damaging to Mexican-American children. The school districts claimed that federal courts had no jurisdiction over education, but the Ninth Circuit upheld McCormick's decision, ruling that the schools' actions violated California law. The appeal to the Ninth Circuit was supported by amicus briefs from leading civil liberties organizations, including the NAACP, which a few years later would adapt the arguments of Mendez in representing the plaintiffs in *Brown*. Strum effectively weaves together narrative and analysis with personality portraits to create a highly readable and accessible story, allowing us to hear the voices of all the protagonists. She also presents the issues evenhandedly, effectively balancing her presentation of arguments by both the plaintiffs and the schools that sought to continue the segregation of Mexican-American students. Ultimately, Mendez highlights how Mexican Americans took the lead to secure their civil rights and demonstrates how organization, courage, and persistence in the Mexican-American communities could overcome the racism of the school boards. Their inspiring example is particularly timely given the current

controversies over immigration and the growing national interest in Latino life.

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Customer Reviews

“Mendez v. Westminster plays an underappreciated role in the struggle for civil rights in the United States. Strum brings the people and debates of the case vividly to life, particularly the dedication of the Latino parents at the center of the case who fought for equal education for their children in public schools. . . . Reminds us of the key part that Latinos have played, together with African-Americans, in the continuing battles for civil rights for all Americans in the United States.”—Michael Jones-Correa, author of *Between Two Nations: The Political Predicament of Latinos in New York City* and coauthor of *Making It Home: Latino Lives in America*

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This exceptionally well-written, engaging, and fact-filled book traces the Mendez's Herculean efforts

against the Boards of Education and their determination at confronting racism and putting an end to segregation in elementary schools in Southern California. The book exposes the conspiracy of multiple school districts' exclusionary policies imposed on Americans of Mexican ancestry for 25 years up to the 40's when the case was brought before the Ninth Circuit of Appeals. In addition, it presents the racist notions practiced and held by Anglo-Saxons towards the general populace of Americans of Mexican ancestry. More importantly, it was a catalyst for all the elite civil rights organizations to weigh in on the case and shows how this landmark decision was used in the arguments for the Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954. David Marcus carried the burden of this case and deserves the credit for his intelligence, sensitivity, and deftly molded arguments against segregation then legal across the nation.

Excellent reading - an important case that is often overlooked. Highly recommend it!

The book was very informative, objective and accurate. I loved the cover as it shows a large picture of the stamp issued in honor of this trial and the families. I used it for a very successful report I gave at the college.

Book was for a friend. He is very happy with book. Story direct, concise and to the point. This is the only book on this topic on the market? G. Olmos

A very detailed account of an amazing and historical landmark case that had been buried and forgotten for decades. Beautifully written!

This is an excellent book on several levels. First, it is well written and engaging. Second, it covers the Mendez v. Westminster case very well. Third, the book shows that Mendez v. Westminster is a clear precursor to Brown v. Board of Education. The book shows very clearly that Mendez v. Westminster is an important case in American civil rights. It is unfortunate that the case is not remembered better. The opinion of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals reads as if the judge were planning for Plessy v. Ferguson to be overturned. If you are interested in Mexican American civil rights or in African American civil rights, you should read this book.

I'll admit that I had not ever heard of this case and was not looking forward to reading this book. But the author did a fantastic job in showing how the Mendez case was related to other major civil rights

cases. I am better for reading this book.

Just what my Daughter needed for her College Class. Great Book, great price, fast shipping, great seller. Will use this seller again. Thanks

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