

Uvalde: A Legacy Of Colonialism In Texas

by Rodolfo Rosales, Ph.D.

This panel presented at the 2022 LULAC National Convention was in honor of the community of Uvalde where the death of their 19 children and two of their dedicated teachers occurred. I know that I speak for most Tejanos that the Uvalde tragedy strikes deep into our hearts and souls. Moreover, given the promiscuous access and ownership of guns, the tragedy in Uvalde was unavoidable depending on anyone who for whatever reason they harbor to kill innocent children. What is more painful is that we are faced with a policy made by the conservative leaders whose goal is to undermine the self determination of communities and the elimination of the Constitutional protection of privacy that is found, according to most constitutional scholars, in the ninth amendment:

The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

1917 when they were given citizenship but not the right to vote; for Asians, it was the Chinese who were first brought to the US as cheap labor in the construction of railroads to the west but not allowed to bring their families nor own property. From an historical perspective, it underscores the brutal intent of the colonization that was undertaken to establish this nation as a white nation as it took different forms and shapes throughout the land and throughout history.

The goal of this panel is to refocus on the neglect of education in Texas and in particular the virtual suppression of education in poor communities which tend to be Tejano and which is hidden below the tragedy that has occurred. Today, if we do not address it we will continue to live under a policy that takes rights away, does not protect or extend them; that aims at erasing history, does not tell it; destroys identity, does not reaffirm it

To begin the story of Texas, we must go back to the nineteenth century when the imperial ambitions of the US in the Southwest, (referred to as “Manifest Destiny”) set the US on a course leading to the Mexican American War. In this context the historical narrative of Mexicans in the Southwest, both US



Credit: Sam Owens / San Antonio Express-News

A memorial at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, honors the 19 children and two teachers slain in a shooting massacre May 24.

- † Makenna Lee Elrod, 10
- † Layla Salazar, 11
- † Maranda Mathis, 11
- † Nevaeh Bravo, 10
- † Jose Manuel Flores Jr., 10
- † Xavier Lopez, 10
- † Tess Marie Mata, 10
- † Rojelio Torres, 10
- † Eliahna “Ellie” Amyah Garcia, 9
- † Eliahna A. Torres, 10
- † Annabell Guadalupe Rodriguez, 10
- † Jackie Cazares, 9
- † Uzziyah Garcia, 10
- † Jayce Carmelo Luevanos, 10
- † Maitte Yuleana Rodriguez, 10
- † Jaiilah Nicole Silguero, 10
- † Amerie Jo Garza, 10
- † Alexandria “Lexi” Aniyah Rubio, 10
- † Alithia Ramirez, 10
- † Irma Garcia, 48
- † Eva Mireles, 44

What we face today is the rise of a white supremacy movement that has infested the Republican party. This is not something that was brought on by Trump. What we must realize is that white supremacy is a legacy that we have inherited from a brutal past of conquest, colonization, and genocide which was not only institutionalized but was practiced in the highest courts of our nation. For Native Americans it was a genocidal conflict that ended in reservations, most no better than concentration camps; the first Black community was brought over in 1619 as chattel slavery, then after a bitter civil war that ended slavery in 1865, their labor was controlled through a Jim Crow Order which was a virtual apartheid system that lasted through the 1950s; for Puerto Ricans it was through a process of disenfranchisement dating back to

citizens and nationals from Mexico, is set in an historical context where White settlers rushed into the ceded territories from Nuevo Mexico to California. Texas, at this time, was an independent republic who then opted to be annexed to the United States. This set the stage for a violent clash over land by white settlers and long-established Tejano communities.

A virtual race war was waged reaching its peak between 1910 and 1920. More important this was a race war that involved local actors from town to town and region to region. This is important to note because it tells us a bit about the colonization that was established by the white settlers. The period between 1910 and 1920 was a particularly brutal period when Tejanos were criminalized and harshly policed by an intersecting regime of

vigilantes, state police, local police, and army soldiers exacerbating the exclusion of the Tejano community throughout Texas. The violence was over land, but it was also a cultural genocidal clash between White settlers who insisted upon establishing their property rights and narrative over and to the exclusion of the long-established Tejano communities.

By the 1920s thousands of Mexican/Tejanos had been killed by White ranchers, the infamous Texas Rangers (called “los Rinches” by those familiar with their brutality), and federal troops. The result was a system of colonization that was institutionalized from small town to small town, including Uvalde, to include segregated communities in the larger cities. Historically, this isolated the Tejano from civil society and made it very efficient to exclude their community from an equal education. By localizing the method of colonization, by putting the power in the hands of local settlers. It also isolated Tejano communities from each other undermining any possible political mobilization. More importantly, it imbedded a white supremacy that has lasted to this day.

The intense violence against Mexican American communities has led to a monolithic view of these communities as dirty Mexicans, greasers, lazy, criminal as well as the characterization of immigrants as invaders, making it easier to exclude them without further ado. Segregation continues, with entire towns segregated from quality education and decent health care, and it was not until 1969 that the Texas Law banning Spanish in Public Schools expired. For Tejanos the legacy has been, as La India Maria stated “ni de aquí, ni de allá.”

Bringing us to the present, the segregation of schools continues unabated. Does this mean that we do not have our share of doctors, professors, teachers, nurses, business professionals? We do but at what expense? As well, in the midst of this turmoil one of the ways that Tejano communities resisted was to establish mutualist societies to ensure that their children were taught about their culture and their history. This legacy has been well documented by Guadalupe San Miguel.

However, it does mean that those families that are caught in the web of this institutionalized colonialism are left with little or no resources to further their education. This institutionalization is reflected in the poor school districts that dominate the Texas

landscape. Through the 21st century, school districts throughout Texas have been dominated by White landowners in their schemes of elections to control school boards with the state board of education ensuring an education that minimizes or outright erases the history of Blacks and Tejanos throughout Texas.

Sadly, in the order of human communities, diversity has not been seen as a human condition but that of a hierarchical order of privilege. In the United States we are faced with the challenge that diversity does not mean hierarchy or privilege but of the full potential of humanity – indeed, not so different for the rest of plant and animal life on the planet.

In Texas, then, we must address this hierarchy of privilege by dislodging the colonial network that exists to maintain a status quo that we inherit from the past. In conclusion the dislodging of this colonial order occurs in two key places. The first is the community where we can build a sensitivity to each other in the celebration of our culture and well-being. The second occurs in the classroom with teachers who are trained and retrained to teach to the community and not to a corporate order, to politically educate community persons to engage in school board politics, to challenge a state board that is dominated by White elites, and to elect political representatives who stand by an agenda of education that is and from the community.

At the risk of sounding ridiculous, a free and open education is key to the freedom of the mind, to the unshackling of an imagination that can lead to a profound human future.



Dr. Rodolfo Rosales was one of the panelists at presentation honoring Uvalde at Lulac's 2022 National Convention.

BIO: Rodolfo Rosales born and raised in San Antonio, Texas received his BA from St. Mary's University and his MA from Trinity University. He went on to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor to receive his Ph.D. As a member of the Ford Foundation Fellows, he is a Senior Scholar at the Ford Foundation/National ReC. He was appointed to the faculty in the Political Science Department at the University of Texas at San Antonio where he is now retired as an Associate Professor. Dr. Rosales' studies have focused on community empowerment and will debut his fourth book as editor of Making Citizenship Work: Culture and Community. Social and Political Thought Series (Routledge Press, August 24, 2022).



A Panel on Uvalde and Our Struggle for a More Perfect Union: A Call to Civic Engagement.

The Panel was presented on the 29th of July at the LULAC national convention in honor of the tragedy in Uvalde. In this panel the legacy of colonization was addressed in the distribution of educational opportunities to communities of color in Texas. Colonization means that it is not simply individual racial discrimination but the exclusion of communities; the erasure of a people in the teaching of history as well as the quality of teaching afforded because of lack of resources along community lines. Dr. Rosales focused on the legacy of colonization in Texas. Dr. Emilio Zamora measured the costs of being poor and Mexican in Texas during the 20th century. Dr. Angela Valenzuela ended the session by offering a review of current legislative proposals. In this issue of La Voz we included Dr. Rosales presentation. View all the panel presentations posted at: bit.ly/FB-angelaV