

# JOVITA IDÁR

## (1885-1946)

Teacher, journalist and political activist



EDITOR'S NOTE: "If a Woman Stands at the Door You Can't Go," *Una Sola Mexicana*, Jovita's story, April 1914 was published in *La Voz de Esperanza* in September 1999 where Yolanda Chávez Leyva, Chicana professor at UTSA, detailed what happened that fateful day when Jovita Idar stood up to the Texas Rangers. They ultimately destroyed the family's print shop but not Jovita's spirit. Her story as detailed in *Esperanza's Museo del Westside* website follows:

Teacher, journalist and political activist Jovita Idár praised women's suffrage in her father's weekly newspaper in Laredo, *La Crónica*, where she connected the vote to long standing demands for Mexican American civil rights. She was part of a family that spoke out against the educational and social discrimination that ethnic Mexicans faced in Texas. While she is most well known for her work in Laredo, she spent the last half of her life in San Antonio's Westside, where she continued to advocate for women's rights, civil rights, and provided education, food and clothing to her community.

Jovita Idár was born in Laredo in 1885. Her father, Nicasio Idar, was born in Port Isabel, Texas, and her mother Jovita Vivero was from San Luis Potosi, Mexico. They met on the border, married and had nine children. Nicasio worked as a yardmaster in the railroad yards of Nuevo Leon, where he organized workers in the city of Acambaro. According to his son Aquilino, in 1890 Nicasio formed the first union of railroad workers in Mexico, *La Orden Suprema de Empleados Ferrocarrileros Mexicanos*. Nicasio was able to leave railroad work and he eventually became publisher of the newspaper *La Crónica* in Laredo. The newspaper featured stories on the struggles of ethnic Mexicans, including educational and social discrimination, the loss of Mexican culture and the Spanish language, and lynchings. Three of his children—Clemente, Jovita and Eduardo, would continue to advocate for human and civil rights through journalism.

As a young girl, Jovita benefited from growing up in a



Jovita Idar was honored in multiple ways in 2023 as part of National Hispanic Heritage Month in San Antonio.

middle class family with access to a good education. She attended the Laredo Seminary, where she learned English, and was also educated at the Domínguez Institute, where she was mentored by Professor Simón G. Domínguez. Jovita was trained as a teacher, earning her teaching certificate in 1903. She then taught in a small town called Los Ojuelos, in southwestern Webb County. She was angered by the lack of resources and poor classroom conditions, and also with the curriculum that did not educate Mexican children about their history and heritage. She also published a weekly bilingual educational magazine called *El Estudiante*.

Eventually Jovita resigned in order to become a journalist, where she felt she could encourage more social change. She began to work at *La Crónica* with her family. The family faced significant danger because of their activism. Jovita's brother Federico was assassinated, and her brother Clemente received death threats.

In spite of these challenges, the Idárs continued their social justice work. In 1911, after

the brutal lynching of 14 year old Antonio Gómez in Thorn-dale Texas, her family organized *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*, a conference to discuss the multiple grievances of ethnic Mexicans. This organization is credited with launching the Mexican American civil rights movement. Jovita helped create *La Liga Femenil Mexicanista*, an organization that advocated for women's suffrage, provided food, clothing and education for poor children, and hosted literary and theatrical productions to raise money for the community. This league is one of the earliest known

**"Mexican children in Texas need an education.... There is no other means to do it but ourselves, so that we are not devalued and humiliated by the strangers who surround us."**

— Jovita Idár, "Por la Raza: *La Niñez Mexicana en Texas*," *La Crónica*, August 10, 1911

efforts of Mexican American women to unite for social and political causes. Jovita became the league's first president. She consistently advocated for women's rights.

In 1914, as the Mexican Revolution erupted in Nuevo Laredo, Jovita and her friend Leonor Villegas de Magnón joined a nursing unit, La Cruz Blanca. They smuggled wounded soldiers across the border for medical assistance. They also traveled into northern Mexico with revolutionary troops and established medical brigades. After her service, Jovita returned to journalism and joined the staff of *El Progreso*. She would sometimes write under two pseudonyms: A. V. Negra (Black Bird) or Astrea, the Greek goddess of justice. When the paper published an editorial protesting President Woodrow



**UTSA, The U.S. Mint & the National Women's History Museum sponsored the Jovita Idar Quarter Release Celebration on September 14th honoring Jovita Idar's historical impact with the release of her commemorative quarter, the ninth coin in the American Women Quarters™ Program.**

transferred the operations of *Evolución* to her brother Eduardo. In San Antonio she worked as a translator for Spanish speaking patients at the Robert B. Green county hospital. She was also an English teacher and tutor. She taught immigrant communities to read and write, and helped undocumented workers obtain naturalization papers.

Jovita also became active in the Democratic Party, serving as a precinct judge, which was extremely rare for a Mexican American woman. She also established a free kindergarten. She continued writing as well, writing

**“Working women know their rights and proudly rise to face the struggle. The hour of their degradation has passed... They are no longer men's servants but their equals, their partners.”**

— Jovita Idár in “*Debejamos trabajar*,” *La Crónica*, December 7, 1911



Jovita Idár at *El Progreso* newspaper, 1914 [postcard]  
Jovita Idár was a writer at *El Progreso* newspaper, Laredo, TX, 1914

Wilson's dispatch of United States troops to the border, Texas Rangers arrived to close them down. Idár defiantly stood in front of them, daring them to knock her down. The Rangers left, but returned the next day, sack- ing the offices and smashing the print- ing press.

*La Cronica* shut down after Nica- sio Idár's death in 1914. Two years later, Idár started her own newspaper, *Evolución*. In 1917 she married Bartolo

articles in Italian for *La Voce de la Patria*, a San Antonio Italian language newspaper. She was particularly active as a member of La Trinidad Methodist Church. She served as conference president of the United Methodist Women and co-edited *El Heraldo Cristiano*, a publication of the Rio Grande Con- ference of the Methodist Church. While Jovita was always an advocate for women's rights, her writing also reflected the concept of maternal Christian authority. Her articles in *El Heraldo* spoke to women of their special respon- sibility as Christian mothers, and put particular emphasis on a mother's role in educating their children at home. Jovita Idár died in San Antonio in 1946, at the age of 61.

Juárez. Three years later they moved to San Antonio, and she

## Museo Del Westside

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a project of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center

Celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month by visiting the Museo del West- side's online exhibit of mujeres from San Antonio's Westside who made his- tory like Emma Tenayuca and Jovita Idar; those that shined in the cultural arts like Lydia Mendoza and Las Tesoros de San Antonio and mujeres who worked to improved their work places, their barrios and their schools at [www.museodelwestside.org](http://www.museodelwestside.org)