

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH NEWSLETTER



STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS....

This newsletter was inspired by the 2018 Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA) Annual Convention. One of the main themes of this year's HNBA convention was recognizing the legacy of Latino pioneers within the legal profession.

La Voz would like to recognize and honor Nevada's very own Latino pioneers. La Voz interviewed several of Nevada's top legal professionals to ask them about their experiences as Latino pioneers.

La Voz thanks these featured leaders for paving the way for future generations in the legal field. In the words of the Honorable Chief Judge Navarro, "It is important to be the first but even more important to not be the last."

La Voz hopes this newsletter will serve to both honor Nevada's Latino giants and inspire us all to continue to create a diverse and strong legal community in Nevada. To all aspiring legal professionals: ¡si se puede! (Yes, you can!)

FEATURED LATINO LEADERS

Senator Catherine
Cortez-Masto

Federal Chief Judge
Gloria Navarro

State Senator Yvanna
Cancela

State Assemblyman
Edgar Flores

Dean Frank D. Durand,
*William S. Boyd School of
Law*

Professor Sylvia Lazos,
*William S. Boyd School of
Law*

Professor Ruben Garcia,
*William S. Boyd School of
Law*

Marisa Rodriguez,
Associate Attorney at
*Weinberg Wheeler
Hudgins Gunn & Dial, LLC*

Mayra Salinas-Menjivar,
Attorney at the *UNLV
Immigration Clinic*



SENATOR CATHERINE CORTEZ-MASTO

Senator Cortez-Masto was born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada. Her father was the head of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority and later served as a Clark County Commissioner. Senator Cortez-Masto graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno, with a degree in finance and after obtained her Juris Doctor degree from Gonzaga School of Law. Throughout her legal and political career, the Senator clerked for Judge Michael J. Wendell, served as Assistant U.S. Attorney, Assistant County Manager for Clark County, Nevada Attorney General, and is now the first Latina U.S. Senator.

What inspired you to join the legal profession?

My parents inspired me to join the legal profession. Both my mother and father taught me the importance of giving back to my community and civic engagement.

Who were your legal mentors and role models?

My parents were my first role models and mentors. When I began my legal career, I was a clerk for Judge Michael Wendell right out of law school. He was a wonderful mentor. He was respectful, impartial, and had great judicial temperament. He was the epitome of what a judge should be. Later in my career, Frankie Sue Del Papa, who was the first woman elected as the Nevada Attorney General, became one of my mentors and I eventually followed her footsteps becoming Attorney General a few years later.

What has been your greatest professional challenge?

I have faced many challenges along my career, but the one I think we all need to face is fear. We must find the courage to work through our fears. When I was Attorney General, I took on the important issue of sex trafficking. It was a big challenge to break up the sex trafficking rings throughout the state, but the key was getting all the stakeholders to work together. Together, we got legislation passed to make sex trafficking a crime at the state level which enabled state and local officials to work with federal prosecutors to attain justice for sex trafficking victims.

What has been the best advice you've received?

The best advice I ever received was from my father, who was a County Commissioner for sixteen years. He constantly reminded me of the importance of being honest with all constituents. He told me to honestly tell people my reasons for voting for or against a particular issue.

What are the biggest challenges facing the Latino community?

People often try to present the idea that the Latino community is different from the general community, but the truth is that Latinos care about the same issues all Americans care about. They want a strong economy, quality education, and affordable healthcare. We currently live in an environment with strong anti-immigrant sentiments, which stem from this fear of the "other." This fear is based on inaccurate stereotypes and is dangerous to our community.

FEDERAL CHIEF JUDGE GLORIA NAVARRO

Federal Chief Judge Gloria Maria Navarro is of Cuban descent and grew up in Las Vegas. She attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas for her Bachelor's degree and Arizona State University for her Juris Doctor degree. In 2009, she was nominated by President Obama to become a federal judge for the District of Nevada and a year later was unanimously confirmed by the U.S. Senate. In 2014, Judge Navarro became Chief Judge of the Federal District of Nevada.

Chief Judge Navarro has always been active in her community. She received several accolades for her service including: Pro Bono Public Lawyer of the Year and the Louis Wiener Pro Bono Service Award. Additionally, the Chief Judge is a Past-President of the Latino Bar Association where she assisted La Voz to launch the Huellas mentorship program. Chief Judge Navarro explains, "I thought Huellas was a great idea because everyone needs advice about what to do from people who have already done what you want to do. Huellas is all about people helping future generations overcome issues older generations have faced."

What inspired you to join the legal profession?

I joined the legal profession because helping others has always been something that I liked to do and felt comfortable doing. I was the first in my family born here in the U.S. Adapting to American culture was very easy for me, but for my family it wasn't as easy. I helped my family navigate American culture and life by interpreting for them when needed. I would read important legal letters, and often find solutions for adult problems at a young age. Eventually, someone told me I should go to law school and become an attorney.

Who were your legal mentors and role models?

To be honest, my mentors found me. I was always a teacher's pet. I was always interested in learning more so people offered me advice because they knew I was receptive to it. Judge Phillip M. Pro and Franny Forsman, for example were great mentors. They were eager to help me. I was also involved in the Latino Bar Association (LBA). Back then, the LBA was much smaller. The LBA was a great opportunity for networking and finding emotional support.

What has been your greatest professional challenge?

My greatest challenge has been balancing my family and my career. Ruth Bader Ginsburg said the most important career decision is who you marry. I couldn't agree more. My husband has been my greatest supporter. He encourages me. He had a working mom so I think he has always understood how to help a working wife balance her career and family. I was fortunate to get help from my mother and husband. My mother took care of our kids and when either my husband, who worked in private practice, or I had long days we would find ways to accommodate for one another.

What has been the best advice you've received?

Kevin Kelly from the now defunct firm, Kelly & Sullivan, Ltd gave me the best advice right after a preliminary hearing I had when I was still a young attorney. The judge who presided over that preliminary hearing told me I was good but that I needed to be meaner, louder, and more indignant in court.

Kevin told me not to follow that advice. He told me that I don't need to be fake to be a good attorney. Instead, he told me that to have a long career, you must build a good reputation. Your word is your word. You should never lie. If you suspect something isn't right, get to the bottom of it.

What are the biggest challenges facing the Latino community?

I think the challenges today are different from what they were before. Before, the problem was more socioeconomic, but today these issues are more political. Even so, I think that like all Americans, Latinos worry about having access to a good education and quality job training.



STATE SENATOR YVANNA CANCELA

State Senator Cancela is of Cuban descent and graduated from Northwestern University with a degree in communication studies. She moved to Las Vegas in 2010 to work as a field organizer for Senator Harry Reid's re-election campaign. She then became the political director at UNITE HERE's Local 226, the Culinary Workers Union; the state's largest labor union. In 2016, State Senator Cancela was appointed to Nevada's 10th State Senate district seat and became the first Latina to ever serve in the Chamber. Additionally, State Senator Cancela is currently a student at the Boyd School of Law.

What inspired you to join the legal profession?

It wasn't just one person. The number of people I've met whose lives were affected by the legal system, and who did not have the resources to navigate the issues they had to confront - that was what inspired me to go to law school.

Who are your mentors/ role models?

Larry Scott Deatherage (RIP), D. Taylor, and Tick Segerblom.

What has been the greatest challenge you faced in your professional career?

I've been very lucky to do work that allows me to live my values and follow my heart. The hard part about that is being able to separate your professional and personal life, and to not internalize the negativity when difficult situations occur.

What has been the best advice you have received?

Do not make decisions based on what other people think. Listen to your gut.

How has your culture influenced your perspective on the legal community?

I am a Latina. I am rooted in family, community, and addressing their needs. I see the needs in my community are vast. In general, navigating the legal system is difficult. People need an advocate. When one person has a family issue, it's everyone's problem. It's important to think about how a legal advocate can change a family's life.



STATE ASSEMBLYMAN EDGAR FLORES

Assemblyman Flores grew up in Las Vegas and attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas both for his Bachelor's and Juris Doctor degree. He worked for the Latin Chamber of Commerce during his time as a student.

After his admission to the Nevada Bar, Assemblyman Flores worked for a local immigration firm and later opened his own firm with a fellow Boyd alum. In 2014, Assemblyman Flores ran for the Nevada State Assembly district 28 seat and won. He has since served in two regular and two special legislative sessions. He hopes to serve his district again after this upcoming election.

What inspired you to join the legal profession?

When I was a child I was the translator for my family; my parents did not speak English. I was having adult conversations at a very young age. I felt a tremendous sense of responsibility. Specifically, I remember an occasion on which I was translating for a family going through a rough time, but it wasn't enough. Then, I knew I wanted to be a lawyer because lawyers have the ability to understand the law, to speak on behalf of people, and to help them. My family experienced family separation through deportation and that motivated me to practice immigration law.

Who were your mentors and role models in law school?

My role models and mentors in law school were Judge Vega, Professor Lazos, Professor Correales, Otto Merida, and Victoria Napoles. I thank them all!

What has been the greatest challenge you faced in your professional career?

Probably balancing both the emotional and business aspects of immigration law. Often times, these interests don't coincide. It can be difficult to run a successful business when you have the mentality of saving lives and clients are sometimes unable to pay.

What has been the best advice you have received?

The best advice I have received is to stay true to myself. When you go into law school you meet people who think differently than you do and it's possible to be jaded and forget the original ambition that got you to law school. However, remaining true to yourself will keep you grounded.

What do you think are the biggest challenges the Latino community faces today?

I think the Latino community faces three major challenges—education, access to capital and the mentorship pipeline. First, education is a challenge because the needs of ELL students are not being met. We must create a framework that addresses the needs of these students. Second, access to capital is a challenge because despite our community's ambition and entrepreneurial spirit, a lack of resources prevents people from taking their dreams to the next level. Lastly, I believe we have not created enough networks for our community. We must use the "Huellas" mentality in all sectors—from running for office to opening a business. As community members, it is our responsibility to walk each other to the next step.



DEAN FRANK D. DURAND

Dean Durand is originally from New Mexico. He graduated with a degree in Economics from the University of New Mexico. Dean Durand obtained his Juris Doctor degree from Stanford Law School, where he was a member of the Stanford Latino Law Student Association. After law school, he became an associate with Sherman and Howard in Denver, Colorado. Dean Durand then decided to change his career and enter into higher education administration. From 1991 to 1997, he was Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at George Washington University Law School in Washington, D.C. Then in 1998, he joined the Boyd School of Law administration, serving as Assistant Dean for Admissions and Financial Aid. He later took on the position of Dean for Student Advancement and is now Boyd's Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

What inspired you to become a Dean?

I was in law practice for not even a year, and it became clear that I was not for it, and it was not for me. After a great deal of reflection, I concluded that working in a higher education setting was the way to go. I applied for many, many jobs and received many, many "thanks, but no thanks" letters in response. Undeterred, I kept after it and finally landed the position of Deputy Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at the George Washington University Law School. That's where it started.

Who are your mentors/ role models?

I am so a blend of my Mom and Dad; they were and are my role models in life. In terms of professional mentors, I'll mention two. The first—Liz Baldizan was my Dean of Students as an undergrad at the University of New Mexico (Go, Lobos!) and later, ironically, my colleague here at UNLV. When I decided to leave practice and pursue higher education administration, she was my first call for guidance on what to do.

Her guidance was spot on, and I'm forever in her debt. The second—Professor Rick Brown was one of Boyd's founding faculty members. He was remarkably wise and intelligent but always gracious and unassuming. I'm not equipped to live up to Rick's example, but I aspire to it daily.

What has been the greatest challenge you faced in your professional career?

When I became the Deputy Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at GW Law, I was 27 and looked like I was 19. Establishing credibility in my position with those scrappy east coast law students was a challenge.

What has been the best advice you have received?

The aforementioned Rick Brown once said to me, "We don't always get things right." I try not to be so arrogant or stubborn as to think there's no chance I could be wrong in my approach to a particular situation.

What do you like to do for fun?

I love bowling... and there was a time when I was pretty good at it! Any sport you can play while enjoying a hot dog and a beverage is in my wheelhouse.

How has your culture influenced your perspective on the legal community?

Though I went to a fancy schmancy law school, I am and always will be a kid from the South Valley of Albuquerque, the predominantly Latino, lower socioeconomic area where I grew up. Haughty attorneys who talk down to others bother me. Hard-working attorneys who serve real people with real problems have my respect.



PROFESSOR SYLVIA LAZOS

Sylvia Lazos is the Justice Myron Leavitt Professor at William S. Boyd School of Law, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, where she has served since 2002. Her areas of specialty are Constitutional Law, Education Reform, and critical race theory.

Her research has dealt with the importance of diversity in the judiciary, and how to incorporate norms of diversity into constitutional principles. Her articles have been published in the country's top law reviews. She graduated from University of Michigan Law School, cum laude, where she served on the Michigan Law Review and received the award as outstanding student leader of her class. She received her M.A. and B.A., magna cum laude, in Economics from St. Mary's University in San Antonio.

Professor Lazos is an active community leader in education reform. Professor Lazos is one of the state's top experts in ELL policy and closing the achievement gap. She has worked with the Clark County School District, the Nevada Legislature, and other community organizations to address the achievement gap and, more funding for English Language Learners (ELL) and literacy programs. She was also instrumental in bringing legal challenge against universal vouchers, in *Lopez v Schwarz*, where Nevada Supreme Court held these to be unconstitutional.

What inspired you to join the legal profession?

I wanted to be an advocate for others. A lawyer is an advocate for the disempowered in the pursuit of justice. This has been a guiding principle in my work since I left private practice. This principle is particularly important in legal education.

Who were your mentors and role models in law school?

Elizabeth Warren. She was my commercial transactions professor at the University of Michigan Law School. One of the things I took away from her was an understanding of law at the macro level; as a group of systems. On a personal level, she encouraged me to become a law professor. Overall, Cesar Chavez is a good role model for all lawyers. He was selfless, he had a collective vision, a clear sense of justice and was persistent through to his goals.

What has been the greatest challenge you faced in your professional career?

Discrimination. Sometimes, colleagues or superiors do not intend to discriminate against you but they might not be used to how a minority expresses him/herself; or they may find certain values to be outside of conventional norms.

I think every minority attorney has to understand that he or she will encounter discrimination in their professional career. Just as Justice Sonia Sotomayor describes in her memoir: part of the task of legal education for minorities is to teach them how to handle discrimination in a positive way.

What has been the best advice you have received?

I have been fortunate to have had many friends who have been successful in leadership. I have learned a great deal from colleagues in terms of taking a wider perspective and understanding why actions I believe to be wrong may make sense to a person who holds those views. Perspective taking is an important part of leadership.

What do you think are the biggest challenges the Latino community faces today?

First, the education system. Latino students need an education system that provides them equal opportunities to succeed. Second, Latino millennials have to develop the habit of voting and making sure their voices are heard in every election. Unless we do that we won't be able to influence policy so that it is fair to every member of our community.



PROFESSOR RUBEN GARCIA

Professor Ruben Garcia is the Associate Dean for Faculty Development and Research and Professor of Law at Boyd School of Law. He has previously held academic appointments at California Western School of Law in San Diego; UC Davis School of Law, University of Wisconsin Law School, and the University of San Diego. Professor Garcia worked as an attorney for public and private sector unions and employees in the Los Angeles area. He received his Juris Doctor degree from UCLA School of Law and has a Master of Laws (L.L.M.) degree from the University of Wisconsin Law School. His scholarship has appeared in *Hastings Law Journal*, *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* and the *Florida State University Law Review*, among others.

What inspired you to join the legal profession?

Growing up when I was about twelve years old, my dad had employment problems. He had been with a company for thirty-seven years and had to change his career path for the rest of his life in the middle of a recession. It struck me as odd, someone who had given so much can be treated that way. Growing up I realized that the legal doctrine was responsible for it. Even if you have rights, in theory enforcing them is different—we have to constantly work to make those rights more real.

Who were your mentors and role models in law school?

In college, I worked for a law professor who studied immigration law. His ability to do research and policy discussions about immigration law inspired me (especially because I grew up in Texas) to be interested in immigration.

What has been the greatest challenge you faced in your professional career?

Getting this job. Feeling like you are part of a national community and knowing that it's not only building a reputation in your school and community but also nationally. You realize how many people are aware of you and what you do. You realize you have to work hard to keep your national reputation and to stay connected with colleagues on a national level.

What has been the best advice you have received?

Since early on, I was very fortunate to have good mentorship with a lawyer I worked with. He gave me advice about writing. Specifically, how to write for a judge who does not have a lot of time; how important it is to be as direct and to the point as possible.

What do you think are the biggest challenges the Latino community faces today?

In this era, the kind of hate speech that occurs is a big challenge. However, a lot of it is familiar; we had periods like this before Proposition 187 in California in the 90s. During that time, it was not about immigration but about race/ethnicity and the changing demographics in the country. Immigration is a huge challenge, but has to be taken into perspective with a lot of other issues. The Latino community faces many larger issues—education, housing, and healthcare get overseen. We have a tendency to focus everything Latino on immigration. There are other issues that need to be addressed as well such as anti-discrimination and civil rights.



MARISA RODRIGUEZ, ASSOCIATE AT WEINBERG WHEELER HUDGINS GUNN & DIAL, LLC

Marisa Rodriguez is an Associate Attorney at Weinberg Wheeler Hudgins Gunn & Dial, LLC concentrating in all phases of complex commercial litigation, including construction, premises liability, product liability, labor and employment, transportation and catastrophic injury. She graduated *cum laude* from Boyd School of Law in 2013. She served as judicial Law Clerk to the Honorable Susan W. Scann of the Eighth Judicial District Court. Marisa is the President- Elect of the Las Vegas Latino Bar Association and Deputy Regional XIV President for the Hispanic National Bar Association.

What inspired you to join the legal profession?

I always wanted to be an attorney. I am first generation. My parents didn't speak English so I was an advocate from a very young age. I learned early on that I liked the advocate role, not just in language but in culture also. I saw myself in a profession where I could continue to do that.

Who were your mentors and role models in law school?

1. Candace Clark, if it wasn't for her I wouldn't have gone to law school. She guided me through the application process.
2. Nancy Rapaport—she was an interim dean, was very nice, and took the time to meet with me to talk about classes. She helped me while I was studying for the bar. She always had very candid advice for me.
3. Professor Stempel—he scared me; he was very challenging and always expected you to preform your best. He took the time to meet with me more than once. He's passionate about what he teaches.

What was the greatest obstacle you faced in law school?

I really enjoyed law school. The biggest obstacle for me was the gap between college and law school and relearning how to be a student.

What has been the greatest challenge you faced in your professional career?

As a new associate, you need to invest a lot of time building a reputation within the firm. I found myself neglecting everything outside of work, I had no outlets. It was hard finding a good balance between working hard and taking care of myself.

What has been the best advice you have received?

When you do an assignment for a partner don't send them half completed work to ask them what they think. Instead, submit a finished product, pretend no one is going to review your work, pretend no one is going to look at it.

What do you think are the biggest challenges the Latino community faces today?

The fact that we are underrepresented on all levels of the legal field. We need more associates, partners and judges.



**MAYRA SALINAS-MENJIVAR,
ATTORNEY AT THE
UNLV
IMMIGRATION
CLINIC**

Mayra Salinas-Menjivar is the University Legal Services Fellow, Attorney for the UNLV Law Immigration Clinic. She graduated from the Boyd School of Law in 2017. As a student attorney in the Immigration Clinic, she handled complex asylum, bond and deportation defense litigation in three states.

She was a member of the American Bar Association Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar Council. Mayra was also a Circuit Governor for the ABA Law Student Division's 14th Circuit. Currently, Mayra is Deputy Regional XIV President for the Hispanic National Bar Association.

What inspired you to join the legal profession?

I went through the legal system and immigrated myself; after that experience, I realized that a lot of people need help. Also, I worked at a law firm before law school. I worked there for five years as a paralegal while I was an undergraduate. I worked on death penalty cases. I enjoyed the work and the writing, it was fun and interesting for me. I then decided to go to law school even though originally I wanted to be a stock broker.

Who were your mentors and role models in law school?

(1) My old boss, she was an intense, driven, and strong woman. (2) A friend who worked in the firm I worked at; he was really good at his job. He is an example of the attorney I want to be. He knows a lot about his area of practice and analyzes the issues in question to change the law. (3) Marisa Rodriguez, I want to be her when I grow up. Marisa manages her time so wisely.

What has been the greatest challenge you faced in your professional career?

Actually feeling like I am an attorney and the transition from student to attorney. There is no magic change that makes you feel capable that you have the right answer and the right advice to give. The weight is much heavier as an attorney.

What has been the best advice you have received?

From Marisa: I was applying to a job, but I kept saying I didn't have any experience in the field. She said that you don't have to worry about you don't have, instead worry about what you bring to the table. She told me I was capable and that I would put in the work to get there. She made me realize that as a new attorney I had energy and commitment to bring to the table.

What do you think are the biggest challenges the Latino community faces today?

Generally, we tend to have issues with unity. The word "Latino" is really broad and sometimes there is trouble bringing everyone together. Also, immigration is a big problem because of the animosity toward the Latino community given the current rhetoric.



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La Voz would like to honor its diversity and culture with the flag display below. The flags exhibit the many Latin American countries our members represent. From Mexico to Central and South America, our culture brings us together to celebrate our accomplishments. Together, we we can continue opening doors for our community.

