A Class Action:
The Grassroots Struggle for School Desegregation in California

You are cordially invited to lease the exhibit.
Since early September 2011, groups of school children, parents, teachers, college students, and many other individuals have been traveling to the heart of Santa Ana to experience a 2,000-square-foot exhibit entitled *A Class Action: The Grassroots Struggle for School Desegregation in California*. Their comments always include the exclamation “I never knew that this happened right here in Southern California!”

This case, known as *Mendez v. Westminster* for short, originated in Orange County in the mid 1940s and was settled in the Los Angeles Federal Appeals Court in 1947. It was initiated by five families of Mexican backgrounds whose children were sent to separate “Mexican” schools and denied access to “white” schools.

The initial ruling on the case ruled in favor of desegregation based on two legal points:

- “separate but equal” was unconstitutional
- “Mexicans” were white

Key figures in this case were Thurgood Marshall and Earl Warren.
Our Mission

To explore, communicate, and celebrate how people learn.

Vision

We create exhibits and events to educate communities about the learning process and the role and importance of education in a democratic society. Our goal is to raise social awareness of how education shapes our children, to build respect for the teaching profession, to promote citizens to action, and to inspire change in educators.

We have established a positive record of successful exhibits and inventive leadership in a unique niche within the museum world.
Offered in conjunction with 
A Class Action

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11 Suggested events/public programming
   including activities and games

12 Marketing template art
   programs/invitations/banners/posters/gallery guides

This dynamic 2,000-square-foot exhibit was created by the Museum of Teaching and Learning (MOTAL) in collaboration with many individuals, especially from The Old Orange County Courthouse (OCParks), The Center for Oral History (COPH) at CSU Fullerton, the Orange County Department of Education, and Fullerton College.

Gonzalo Mendez, Jr., one of the children involved in the court case, was intimately involved in putting the exhibit together. His sister Sylvia Mendez was awarded the Medal of Freedom in 2010 for her work in communicating the story of integration throughout the nation. Members of all the involved families have visited, shared their stories, and even shared artifacts saved from the 1940s.
A Class Action Exhibit Design

Wall murals containing text/graphics/photographs

32 large decal panels, with applied main text and quotation panels
An Unfinished Legacy

Ideas to remember:
The fight left a powerful legacy, but desegregation was a difficult and still unfinished process.

Question to consider:
What will you do about the injustice you see in the world today? What will be your legacy?

Lessons in Inequality

Ideas to remember:
The reasons for “Mexican schools” were complex, but they failed to offer equal education.

Question to consider:
What would it have been like to go to a segregated “Mexican school”?

Mendez et al. v. Westminster School District et al.

Ideas to remember:
The courtroom battle produced the most important legal victory in the fight against segregation the nation had ever known.

Question to consider:
If you were a plaintiff, defendant, witness, attorney, civil rights advocate, or judge involved in this case, what would you have said?

An American Community

Ideas to remember:
The strength of Orange County’s Mexican American community provided a foundation for the fight against segregated schools.

Question to consider:
If you were a member of this community during the 1940s, what would have been important to you?

Orange County before World War II

Ideas to remember:
The fight against school segregation began when Orange County’s diverse population was shaped by agriculture.

Question to consider:
What was Orange County like before the 1940s?

A Class Action Exhibit Layout

Exhibit layout and floorplan, with freestanding box panel construction plans
Recognizing Injustice

Mexican American parents throughout Orange County knew that segregated schools were unjust.

The struggle for school desegregation began in October 1943 when two women, Rebecca Sanchez and Frances Garcia, denounced Santa Ana’s Mexican schools as discriminatory. The School Board promised to study the issue, but a year of inaction prompted William and Virginia Guzmán to hire a local attorney and confront the Board again in November 1944. Thirty parents and members of the Latin American Voters League joined them. The Board asked for additional time to study the issue.

Gonzalo and Felicita Méndez moved from Santa Ana to Westminster in 1943. Gonzalo’s sister tried to enroll the Méndez children in the nearby Westminster School, but the administrator said they had to go to the Mexican school. Gonzalo and Felicita complied, but they also consulted a local attorney and prepared for a fight. In September 1944 they appeared before the Westminster School Board with other parents and several members of the Latin American Voters League. They submitted a petition calling for desegregation. The Board said it would be too expensive.

When Lorenzo and Josefina Ramírez moved from Whittier to El Modena in November 1944, the superintendent refused to allow their children to attend the white school. They decided to fight. Parents in El Modena connected them with other parents and civil rights advocates protesting segregation in Santa Ana, Westminster, and Garden Grove.

“Larry [Ramírez] was very good at speaking English and ... formulating concepts and ideas and just getting things going. You needed someone like that, outspoken. Someone who wasn’t afraid to start making a few waves and afraid that the establishment would come back and pound him. He wasn’t afraid.” — Dan Gomez (1991)

The fight against school segregation in Los Angeles also began in 1943. Manuel Ruiz, chairman of the Los Angeles Citizens’ Committee for Latin American Youth, began to lobby for a repeal of state laws sanctioning school segregation. By 1945 he had convinced California Governor Earl Warren to sign any school desegregation legislation that reached his desk.
Photographs printed directly to wall panels or mounted to gator board and mounted on panels

Courtesy of Placentia History Room, Placentia Public Library.

Image courtesy of the Ramírez family.

Photo courtesy of Orange County Mexican American Historical Society.
A Class Action
Most Artifacts

Most case and freestanding artifacts, depending upon availability. Label descriptions included; display cases not included.

Furnishings include:
• Classroom desks and chairs
• Courtroom chairs
A Class Action
OnCell Recordings

OnCell recordings and script in Spanish and English

Oral History
Listening Station
Recordings held at the Center for Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton

Track 1
Marianne Morales discusses segregation in public swimming pools (2004)
OH 3523

Track 2
Samuel Romero explains the unity of the Logan Barrio (2010)
OH 4055.1

Track 3
Samuel Romero recalls Mexican American patriotism during World War II (2010)
OH 4055.2

Track 4
Arletta Kelly talks about the aptitude of her Mexican American students (1971)
OH 48b

Track 5
James Allen discusses his grandmother’s views on his Cuban heritage (2011)
OH 4792

Track 1
Maria Solis Martinez recalls speaking Spanish and English at Delhi School (2001)
OH 2967

Track 2
Virginia Guzmán shares her reasons for keeping her son out of a Mexican school (2011)
OH 4883

Track 3
Virginia Guzmán discusses the barriers between Mexican American and Anglo children (2011)
OH 4883

Track 4
Alex Maldonado recalls having inefficient school supplies in segregated schools (2011)
OH 4885

Track 5
Alex Maldonado speaks about ineffective writing implements at Hoover School (2011)
OH 4885

Track 1
Samuel Romero discusses discrimination in housing after the Mendez et al. case (2010)
OH 4055.3

Track 2
James Allen reflects on a legacy of discrimination against Latinos (2011)
OH 4792

Track 3
Sylvia Mendez discusses the impact of the Mendez et al. case (2001)
OH 957

Track 4
Samuel Romero discusses the impact of the Mendez et al. case (2010)
OH 4055.3

Track 5
James Allen discusses activism in Orange County in the 1960s and 1970s (2011)
OH 4792
In 1945 the Mendez, Guzman, Palomino, Estrada, and Ramirez families led a movement to integrate Orange County elementary schools.

They succeeded.
A Class Action

Mexican School exhibit

An adjunct exhibit featuring photographs and oral histories featuring former students of the California Mexican schools
A Class Action

Docent Support

Docent training materials/script/tips for success

Guidelines for Docs:

Discussion Points:

- Use learning styles of students: Auditory, Visual, Kinesthetic, Combination
- Flexible use of script
- Know the BIG IDEA for each section
- Memorize transition sentences
- Arrange students so that all can see
- Taking charge of the tour
- Eye Contact
- Ask questions to engage students
- How to handle questions not on topic
- How to respond to incorrect answers
- Be aware of time

Four Types of TOERS:

1. Self-guided: with a small brochure
2. Cell-Phone technology: curricular to do the stations
3. Junior Docent 3:00 Tours for Youth and School Groups
4. Traditional School Tours: 10:00 Tours
5. 2-hour long

FIRST = movie 30 minutes—Documentary by Erica Bennett
Jury Room
15-20 minutes—courtroom procedure—What goes on; who would say this quiz? (Example: Order is the Court! The various positions
20 minutes activity to travel downstairs to see “Memories of Mexican School”

Early agricultural California
9.50 sack of oranges — ten pounds is heavy
Villa Park estate is available for use to handle
Minimum wage 43 cents; pay was LOW
Two dollars a day pay—was that less than minimum wage? 8 hours day?

In the Kitchen
Salaries were low; people bought large amounts
bought supplies in bulk. Large sacks of flour, beans, rice
list of chores on the wall
calendar on wall with the year 1943 (?)
growing your own cornmeal — with a morte

In the Classroom
Have a lesson on the board
Students seated at desks and
Old books — what would they have been reading?

Docent Training Workshop Part 1

4:00-4:15 Welcome and Introduction
4:15-4:45 Section I—Orange County Before World War II
4:45-4:50 Break
4:50-5:45—Section II—An American Community
5:45-6:00—Snack Break
6:00-6:45—Section III—Lessons in Inequality
6:45-7:00 Wrap-up and Next Steps

Lawyer for Defendants

Defendant

Lawyer for Plaintiffs

Plaintiff

Judge
A Class Action
Classroom Materials

Pre- and postvisit classroom materials for elementary and secondary students

LESSON 3
WORD STUDY MATCHUP

Students will:
1. Use word cards with a partner to guess about the meaning of vocabulary words such as vista and bonanza.
2. Rewatch the video to listen for the vocabulary words and try to decipher their meaning in context.
3. After viewing the video a second time, revisit their guesses with their partner and rearrange their cards to match words or phrases and their meaning.

California English-Language Arts Curriculum Content Standards:
- Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words in a text relevant to a grade four topic or subject area.
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 4 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
- Use context (e.g., definitions, examples, or restatements in text) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

Materials:
- Internet access to website with ABC’s Vista L.A. video clip (5.55 min): http://abclocal.go.com/kabc/video?id=7154744, word study cards, word study quiz, students’ story notes from Lesson 2

1. What year did World War II start?________ How many years did World War II last?________
2. Describe what happened to Japanese families living in California during World War II.
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
What event do you think triggered the decision to do this?
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
3. Why was the Bracero program created?
________________________________________________________________
4. What development came first—computers or freeways?
_______________________________________________
5. Why do you think lawmakers decide that freeways were needed in California?
____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

A 1940s Timeline

- In 1941, U.S. grows to support the Bracero Program allowing Mexican citizens to enter the U.S. temporarily to work for low wages.
- In 1941, the United States enters World War II against Germany, Italy, and Japan.
- In 1942, individuals of Japanese descent are sent to internment camps.
- In 1947, California votes to create a statewide freeway system.
- In 1948, Chuck Yeager flies a test plane faster than the speed of sound in 1947.
- In 1949, Japan surrenders and WORLD WAR II ends in 1945.
- The first electronic computer is built in 1943.
- The Bracero program ends in 1945.
- The United States in 1941 writes World War II against Germany, Italy, Japan, et al.

To be used with Lesson 3, Word Study Matchup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legacy</th>
<th>School Board</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrated School</td>
<td>Class Action Lawsuit</td>
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<td>Injustice</td>
<td>Brown v. Board of Education</td>
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<td>Mendez et al. v. Westminster et al.</td>
<td>Separate Is Not Equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Segregate</td>
<td>Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court of Appeals</td>
<td>Legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et al.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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# Calendar of Events

**Saturday, September 24** 10 AM - 4 PM  
**Smithsonian Museum Day**

**Friday, October 14, 2011, 7 - 9 PM**  
**Screening of Heart of Loneliness: The Bracero Program**
Gil Gonzalez and Vivian Price discuss the film with audience members.

**Wednesday, October 19** 11:45 AM  
**Annual Meeting: Old Courthouse Museum Society**
“Ask a Barber” with Bob & Paul Benitez

**Thursday, November 17, 7 PM**  
**Screening of Mendez v. Westminster: Families for Equality**
Film by Erica Bennett

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**Monday, November 19** 11 AM - 4 PM  
**Screening of California School Segregation: the Neglected History of the Lemon Grove Incident**
Film clips and discussion of the significant 1931 case. Students of Mexican descent were required to attend a separate but unequal school, known as “The Barn.” Mike Madrid, PhD, & Christina Luna, EdD will comment.

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**Thursday, November 17, 7 PM**  
**Screening of Mendez vs. Westminster: Para Todos los Niños**
Documentary film by Sandy Robie. Discussion following screening.

**Helping Our Children to Succeed**
Outstanding Orange County projects share their secrets to educational success for families.

**Panel Discussion: Reflections on Mexican American History in Southern California**
Scholars gather in lively discussion.

**Memories of Integrated Schools**
with Gonzalo Mendez, Jr. and other children of the 1940s desegregation.

**Closing Reception & Celebration**
Join the crowd for a journey back in time, with great food, music from the 1940s, and special speakers and activities.

**Family Day for the Public**
Enjoy learning and activities with our field trip schools such as El Sol School, Santa Ana. Bring your cellphone!
The exhibition explores the meaning of the landmark court case *Mendez et al. v Westminster et al.* which brought an end to school segregation in this state and paved the way for the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The exhibition will feature gallery guides, banners, templates, and marketing materials to promote the event.