



ST. MARY'S
UNIVERSITY

The Scholar: St. Mary's Law Review on Race
and Social Justice

Volume 5 | Number 2

Article 1

3-1-2003

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Recommended Citation

Alma L. Lopez, *Dedication to Representative Irma Rangel: May 15, 1931 - March 18, 2003.*, 5 THE SCHOLAR (2003).

Available at: <https://commons.stmarytx.edu/thescholar/vol5/iss2/1>

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DEDICATION

DEDICATION TO REPRESENTATIVE IRMA RANGEL: MAY 15, 1931 – MARCH 18, 2003

CHIEF JUSTICE ALMA L. LÓPEZ†

Irma Rangel was truly a pioneer. In 1977, she was the first Mexican-American woman to be elected to the Texas House of Representatives, and she was the first woman to serve as chair of the Mexican-American Legislative Caucus. Additionally, she was the first Mexican-American to serve as chair of the House Committee on Higher Education.

Representative Rangel was born on May 15, 1931, in Kingsville, Texas. Her parents encouraged her and her two sisters to always have compassion for people who were less able and less fortunate than themselves. Rep. Rangel's father was a former cotton picker and once took her and her sisters to work in the cotton fields for a week. The experience made a powerful impact on the Rangel sisters, and they never forgot what it was like to work in the fields. This taught her never to take anything for granted, and that some need help to succeed. Rep. Rangel was always available to give that help. Her beloved sister, Minnie, became a pharmacist and her beloved sister, Olga, became a teacher. Rep. Rangel also became a teacher, an attorney, and a state representative without equal.

Representative Rangel earned her degree in business from Texas A&I University in 1951. She taught for several years in South Texas, California, and Venezuela. Though satisfied with her profession, she decided to pursue her lifelong dream of becoming a lawyer. At age thirty-five, Rep. Rangel entered into St. Mary's School of Law. From 1969 to 1971, Irma

† Chief Justice, Texas Fourth Court of Appeals; B.A., 1965, St. Mary's University; J.D., 1969, St. Mary's University School of Law. Chief Justice López is the first Hispanic woman to serve as a chief justice. In 1993, Chief Justice López was appointed by Governor Ann Richards to serve an unexpired term on the Fourth Court of Appeals. She was elected to full term on the Fourth Court of Appeals in 1994.

became one of the first Hispanic female law clerks for Federal District Judge Adrian Spears, and after her clerkship, she became one of the first Hispanic female assistant district attorneys in Texas with the Nueces County District Attorney's Office.

She then returned to her hometown of Kingsville where she opened her own law practice and was the only Hispanic female attorney in Kingsville. In 1993, she closed her successful law practice in order to serve her district as a full-time legislator.

Rep. Rangel always stood up to the biggest leaders in state government to defend those who were unable to defend themselves. She was a true champion of higher education and often fought hard to secure adequate funding for institutions.

Prior to her death, Rep. Rangel authored a bill passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor that created and provided funding for a new School of Pharmacy at Texas A&M, Kingsville. This will be the first professional school in South Texas. Rep. Rangel called the creation of the pharmacy school a historic occasion and said it was a huge step forward for education in Texas. There is presently a bill pending to name the School of Pharmacy after Rep. Rangel.

Rep. Rangel was a true champion for Hispanics. She knew that education was the great equalizer and therefore, education was the only way for Hispanics to become a part of the American dream. She believed with all her heart and soul that given the opportunity Hispanics could and would succeed as she did. She left a legacy for us all and I can still hear her say, "Mijita, we have so much to do." Irmita, my wonderful friend whom I miss so much, your influence and energy will allow many to follow in your footsteps. Your work is done; the rest of us will carry on for you.