

ARTURO V. RAMIREZ:

Representative of the Poor & Underprivileged



Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family

By Marco A. Córdova

Arturo V. Ramirez: Representative of the Poor & Underprivileged

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Book cover picture courtesy of the Ramirez family

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Associate Professor / The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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I would also like to extend my appreciation to the Ramirez family for the opportunity to carry out this project.

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Dedication

We would like to dedicate this project and offer special thanks to Mr. Arturo Ramírez, who, although no longer with us, continues to inspire by his example and dedication to the community he served over the course of his life.

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Introduction

Arturo Ramirez dedicated his life to the Valley. He died less than ten miles from where he was born in Alamo, Texas. From the time he got his GED at age 19 to the day of his death at age 70, Ramirez worked tirelessly to improve life in the Valley's colonias.

Instead of moving away when he had a nice job, Ramirez stayed in his community and did what he could to make it better. Sometimes he had to take big risks, like when he faced off against fearsome Texas Rangers while joining farmworkers in a workplace strike. Other times he had to handle enormous responsibilities, like when the government awarded him millions of dollars to build water pipes in colonias when he was only 25 years old.

But throughout it all, Ramirez proved that anyone can transform their community with ingenuity and a good work ethic. For example, he needed the permission of many property owners to run water pipes under their land to bring water to colonias. What did Arturo Ramirez do? He spent days and weeks going door-to-door, pleading with people to give him permission to use their land for the water pipes. It took a long time, but eventually his hard work paid off. When he finished building all the water pipes, over 3,500 families had fresh water in their homes. They finally had clean water for drinking, bathing, and washing clothes.

Arturo Ramirez is an inspiration not only for what he did, but how he did it. He was willing to work with anyone who would help his community, even people many colonia families disliked. He became city manager of Alamo in the 1990s when the state legislature gave them money to improve colonia life. It did not matter to him that Alamo and other cities in the Valley had refused to help colonias for decades. When Alamo was ready to help, Arturo Ramirez was ready to work with them. Similarly, he had a working relationship with Othal Brand, the wealthy onion grower and mayor of McAllen who infamously covered up police beatings of Mexican-Americans. Though many despised Brand, Ramirez was willing to cooperate with him when they agreed on an issue.

Many people in the Valley do not know that colonias are unique communities. They have faced challenges that would be unimaginable for most communities in the United States. Solving unique problems requires unique problem solvers. There are few people in the Valley who have done as much to solve colonia problems as Arturo Ramirez. It is important to remember, though, that he did not possess special powers. All he had was the drive to fix problems he saw in his community, regardless of what it took.

May this book inspire others to have the same drive.

Parker Abt

Historian of Colonias in the Valley

ONE

MI FAMILIA

In 1948, important world news and events were developing. Among them, the first post war prefab housing to solve housing shortages were starting to appear both in Europe and the USA. Small constructions could be built quickly to accommodate the growing need and were cheap to build and for people to buy. The quality was not great but they did enable the post war baby boom by providing young couples with a home to start their family.

In Europe the cold war took a new turn when the Soviet Union blockaded West Berlin in Germany on June 24th and the US countered with an 11-month airlift of food and supplies.

Indian independence activist Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated at the age of 78 during January. The assassination took place outside of the Birla House in New Delhi where Gandhi was set to attend a prayer meeting. In May the independent Jewish state of Israel was created in Palestine by the United Nations. The creation of Israel marked the first time in 2,000 years that an independent Jewish state had existed.

The Summer Olympics, also known as the Games of the XIV Olympiad, come to an end in August. The games were held in London, England and were the first games in twelve

years due to World War II. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10th in Paris. The document, while not legally binding, laid the foundation of basic human rights upon which subsequent treaties and declarations were based.

Meanwhile, that same year on Friday February 13, Arturo Ramirez was born in San Juan, Texas to Porfirio Ramirez and Francisca Villanueva. Ramirez had five brothers and two sisters. Efren Ramirez, Ricardo Ramirez, Porfirio Ramirez, Miguel Ramirez who lives in Denver Colorado, Hortencia Ramirez, Damian Enrique, Gloria Anna Ramirez who lives in Dallas, Texas. The majority of his family worked as farm workers.

In 1940, Ramirez grandparents arrived in Reynosa, Tamaulipas from San Francisco del Rincón Guanajuato, and San Antonio de las Alazanas, Coahuila, México. His grandfather was an immigrant contracted by a railroad development company in Kansas City, Kansas.

Ramirez's father, Porfirio Ramirez, was born in San Francisco del Rincón Guanajuato in 1911, and arrived directly in Kansas City at the age of three. After Porfirio's grandmother passed away he was overpowered by negative emotions and decided to leave behind his Kansas City home at the age of 13. This was on account of the fact his grandfather Damian had decided to marry another woman and had started to devote the rest of his life to his new family.

“My dad abandoned his father because he could not get along with his step brothers,” he stated.

Ramirez’s father traveled throughout the entire Southwest working in different farms until he finally decided to settle in south Texas, specifically in San Juan. His father worked as a farmer and herding cattle for several ranches in south Texas, and entered into a partnership with Lawrence Haggard to operate a small ranch and the Haggard Auction House in Pharr, Texas, where he worked herding livestock from La Gloria, San Isidro, and other small rural communities to sell in the auction house.

Ramirez’s mother, Fransisca Villanueva, was born in 1917 in Alamo, Texas. Ms. Villanueva worked as house keeper for several families in and around Alamo.

Ramirez’s mother Francisca Villanueva married Porfirio Ramirez at the age of 17 in Saint Joseph Catholic Church in Alamo, where they built a small Hut made up of cotton reeds along a small canal north of the city, where they began their life together.

After marriage, Ramirez’s parents traveled to several locations to work as farm workers. The Ramirez family migrated with uncle Manuel Perez to work in the potato fields in Alliance, and Scottsbluff, Nebraska for five years. They worked in the cucumber fields in Greeley, Colorado. In the sugar beet fields in Mile City, Montana. In the soy beans field in Wopaca and Wautoma, Wisconsin. Hillsborough, Illinois in the tomato fields.

Taken by their parents they traveled to other small towns in and around Mile City.

“I remember, collecting rocks and petrified wood around Yellow Stone River during a field dig tour in a prehistoric dinosaur fossils museum north of Mile City, near Canada,” Ramirez mentioned.

They also visited the Black Foot Native American tribes and hunted deer, antelope and pheasant with them. During that time, while working in Wisconsin, they visited the Black Hills, the Devil’s Tower, Mount Rushmore, and the Little Bighorn Battle Field in South Dakota.



Mrs. Francisca Villanueva & Mr. Porfirio Ramirez

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family



Arturo Ramirez during his adolescence years. He loved working in the fields, and playing pranks on others.

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family

“During migrating season, we were housed either in a chicken coop, under a tarp, or in a caboose rail road car,” Ramirez attested.



From left to right: Ricardo, Porfirio, Miguel, Hortencia, and Arturo Ramirez.

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family

Curious by nature, Ramirez searched for antique items to add them their home. He built equipment to produce stone jewelry. He built a rock tumbler, a polisher, and a rock cutter rock saw. He learned wood work and leather works to manufacture cabinets, belts and other items made of leather. He developed a passion for garage sales, auctions and state sales. He learned this activity through his father.

“While migrating, my dad would purchase rifles to hunt game. We would go hunting in the states we worked

in the fields. I remember my mother cooked rabbit, pheasant, and deer we killed,” he said.

They worked in the cotton fields in Wellington, Paducah, Childress, El Campo, Lubbock and Eagle Pass, Texas.



From left to right: Ricardo, Efrain, Arturo, and Bonifacio Castor.

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family

After finishing their migrant journey, they returned to the Valley to continue with his education and working in their small five-acre farm located in Earling Road. north of San Juan, Texas. They also worked in the farms owned by local farmers such as Frances Roby and Franck Rob repairing irrigation canals, hoeing fields, and other manual

work. They farmed his father five- acre farm raising crops such as cotton, radishes, carrots, tomatoes and corn.

He remembered his family raising a variety of farm livestock, such as: peacocks, geese, bantam, rabbits, goats, cows, pigs and ducks to sell in the livestock sales. They bought bales of hay from the *bodegas*, Johnson grass and hog weed to feed their livestock.



The Ramirez during a family photo-shoot in Reynosa.

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family



Mr. Porfirio Ramirez, feeding his chickens in Alamo, Texas.

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family

He recalled working in the farms owned by Dimas Estevis, Arnoldo Cantu and Gilbert Medina, where he worked picking cotton, onions, carrots, tomatoes, and other vegetables. At these farms he learned to operate a tractor and a cotton picking machine, landing this opportunity to work for the Valley Spray Company in San Juan, Texas; where he operated an insecticide tractor truck.

Ramirez's mother worked in a nursery in Pharr, Texas, where she learned to make new plants to produce a variety of fruit trees. She raised several grapes, apples, figs, cactus pears, grape fruits, oranges, sugarcane and pecan trees. She developed a large grape vineyard with different types

of grapes, which included, lady's finger grapes, concord grapes and Spanish Grapes.

Ramirez attended Buell Elementary School, Henry Ford Elementary School, and finally Jefferson Junior High School in Pharr-San Juan-Alamo School District.

"I went to see the PSJA School District Superintendent to tell him that I was dropping out of school, because I was harassed by my teachers. They mistreated me, they pulled my hair, and pinched my arms for speaking Spanish at Buell Elementary School in 1955," he mentioned.



From left to right: Efren, Porfirio II, Gloria Anna, Hortencia, Porfirio (Senior), Arturo, Miguel, Ricardo, and Damian Enrique Ramirez during Mrs. Francisca Ramirez – Villanueva funeral.

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family

After losing both parents, Francisca Villanueva of cancer in 1970, and Porfirio Ramirez of a heart attack in 1978, Arturo Ramirez and his siblings decided to sell their 5-acre farm with the help of his friend, Aida Salinas as attorney. After selling the small farm, the rest of the family left to live on their own. Both parents were buried in the City of San Juan, Texas Cemetery.

While working in local farms, he got involved with the local Catholic church and became interested in the priesthood. He applied to different seminary schools through the Catholic Oblates, the Franciscan and Jesuit order in San Antonio, Texas; to see if he could meet their basic entering requirements.

He learned about Catholicism through John Hart. He was a member of the Church Choir, and also taught Bible classes for 15 years in Saint John Catholic Church in San Juan, Texas. According to him, he was guiding individuals who were against the Catholic doctrine.

Considering that his stunning priesthood intent toward the priesthood did not work out as he expected, he decided to register in a Texas Region One training workshop, focused on south Texas educational opportunities.

“The Region One Education Service Center is part of a state-wide system of 20 regional education service centers created by the Texas Legislature to assist school districts across the state. Located in Edinburg, Texas,” Ramirez said.

After the educational workshop, he decided to enroll in a training program called the High School Equivalency Program. The purpose of the High School Equivalency Program (HSEP) was to prepare eligible students to pass the high school equivalency exams instead of earning a high school diploma.

He was sent to El Paso, Texas by Manuel Lopez, an Edcouch- Elsa educator, for one year, to earn his GED Certificate and a computer training program.

While studying in El Paso, Ramirez became involved in the Chicano Movement. He participated with a group called No-Mas, from El Paso, Texas. He got involved in bringing a Chicano action against Anglos that were hurting children in Sierra Blanca, a small West Texas town in the U.S. – Mexico border.

“Affected families engaged in a student school boycott with support of the Social Action Commission of the Catholic Diocese of El Paso. It was a dispute centered around the beating of two Mexican-American students, better education and lack of Mexican-American representation in the school system,” he remembered.

According to Ramirez, Chicano leaders, Reies Lopez Tijerina, Luis Salazar, Mike Escotrillas, himself and many others, somehow managed to have the Texas Education Agency remove educational certificates from Anglos who had broken children’s’ limbs during school hours in Sierra Blanca, Texas.

“I worked many times in different projects with Reies Lopez Tijerina,” he remarked.

As reported by Lorena Oropeza, Reies Lopez Tijerina, led a struggle in the 60s and 70s to restore New Mexican land grants to the descendants of their Spanish colonial and Mexican owners. As a vocal spokesman for the rights of Hispanics and Mexican Americans, he became a major figure of the early Chicano Movement, along with Cesar Chavez of California, Corky Gonzales of Colorado, and José Angel Gutiérrez of Texas. Lopez Tijerina became famous internationally for his June 5, 1967-armed raid on the Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico courthouse, one of the most dramatic events in the long struggle of Hispanic people to regain their lands from Anglo landowners and the US government.

In 1971, Ramirez moved back to the Rio Grande Valley to continue his education at Pan American University, now The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, to receive a Bachelor’s degree in History.

“I never finished my degree, because I was purposely failed as a reprisal for expressing my opinions freely,” Ramirez stated.

In the Rio Grande Valley, he continued working with Antonio Orendain, Reynaldo de la Cruz, alfredo de Avila, and Alejandro Moreno in many community events to bring about social justice.

Two

EL MOVIMIENTO

The Rio Grande Valley awakening began with the Starr County Melon Strike. It was a dispute between farmworkers and La Casita melon farm owners in 1966 and 1967, and included what has come to be called the “La Marcha,” where hundreds of men, women, and children in Starr County organized with the United Farm Workers to demand fair wages; participants walked to the state Capitol in Austin.



Picture courtesy of The Texas Observer Archives / www.texasobserver.org

According to a local newspaper, in May 1966, Eugene Nelson, author, organizer, and worker for the National Farm Workers' Association (later the United Farm Workers), arrived in the Rio Grande Valley. He organized local farmworkers into the Independent Workers' Association, based in Rio Grande City, Starr County.

He then led them in a strike of the melon fields in June. After June 1, a conflict developed, in which Nelson and his predominantly Mexican-American union would picket, and then Rangers and local police would arrest the protestors. This march led Texas to adopt its first minimum wage statewide and ignited the Chicano Movement in Texas.

During those tumultuous moments, Arturo Ramirez was hired as Assistant Director for Colonias Del Valle, Inc. and met Ms. Irma Gonzalez in 1972, in one of many charity community action meetings developed by the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas. In August 27, 1976 they married and had two children: Gerardo Xavier and Luis Alberto.



**Mrs. Irma Gonzalez & Mr. Arturo Ramirez
Wedding Ceremony (1976)**

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family

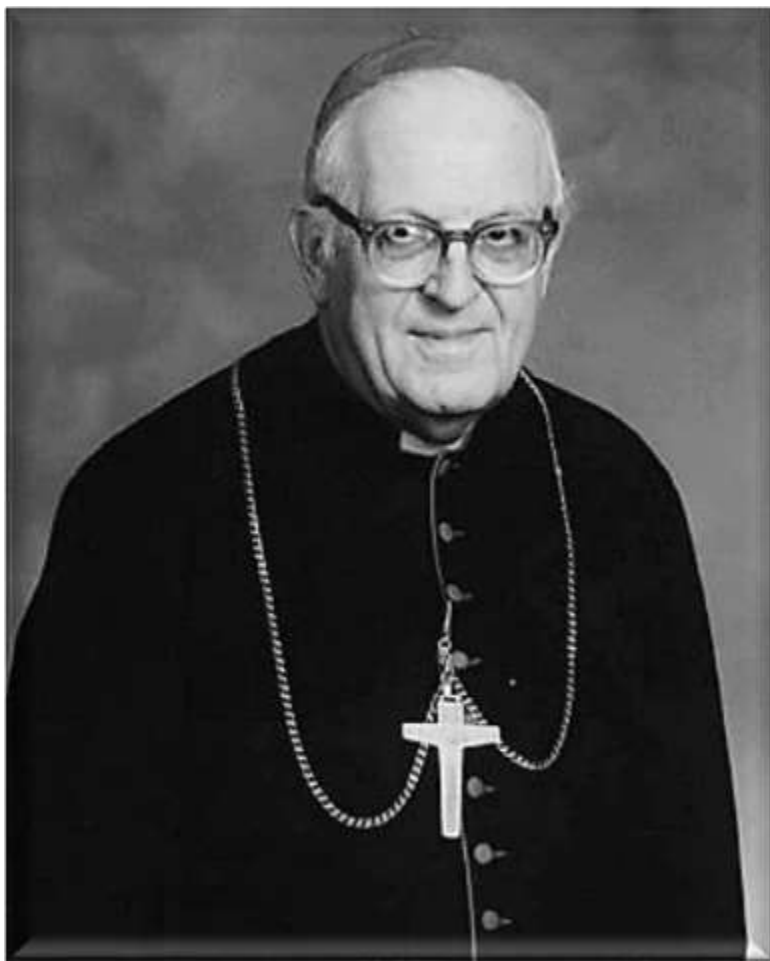
Colonias Del Valle, Inc. was established in September, 1967 in San Juan, Texas after Hurricane Beulah devastated the Rio Grande Valley area. It was the first community organization in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Colonias Del Valle was the forefront of social change at that time. It was the first organization that began the establishment of the food stamp program. It served as a local community action agency representing the poor, and developed two work study programs to assist the needy youth. It was also responsible for creating the O.I.C. Manpower Training Center which trained low income individuals to find jobs, and two potable water systems to provide water for colonias.

This organization provided technical assistance to emergent community organizations, and became instrumental in combating discrimination in school districts in the Rio Grande Valley.

Ramirez was in charge of the coordination of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), while attending Pan American University and working with catholic Bishop John J. Fitzpatrick and Fathers John Hart and Mike Allen.

He hired Juan Ledesma as the MAYO supervisor for Hidalgo County and Arturo Treto Garza to supervise Cameron and Willacy County.



Bishop John J. Fitzpatrick

Picture courtesy of The Roman Catholic Diocese of Brownsville, Texas

John J. Fitzpatrick served as bishop of Brownsville from 1971 until his retirement in 1991. An important feature of his tenure was attention to the rights and dignity of immigrants entering into the United States from Mexico and South America, and was also highly supportive of the United Farm Workers Union.



Family Serviced by Colonias Del Valle, Inc. (1970)

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family



Colonias Del Valle leadership calling to a meeting for Colonia Nueva potable water project. (1972)

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family



Alejandro Moreno, Jr.
Executive Director



Trinidad Pina, Asst.
Dir. & Program Writer



Francisco G. Gonzalez
Economic Developer



Xavier Ramirez, Dir.
Water Research Proj.



Arturo Ramirez; Dir.
Social Services



Marcos Garcia, Socia
Services Worker



Aurelia Negrete
Executive Secretary

Staff of
COLONIAS DEL VALLE, INC.



Lou Ann Starck
Secretary

Colonias Del Valle, Inc. Initial staff

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family

As stated by Francisco A. Rosales, MAYO addressed issues effecting youth in local school districts. They were trained to bring social changes in the cities and county governments.

The Mexican-American Youth Organization was a civil rights organization formed in March 1967 in San Antonio, Texas to fight for Mexican-American rights.

In the 60s, Mexican-Americans were powerless, impoverished and constituted some 40 percent of San Antonio population. It was the initiative of five young students: Jose Angel Gutierrez, Mario Compean, William "Willie" Velasquez, Ignacio Perez, and Juan Patlan. All were graduate or undergraduate students at Saint Mary's, a small liberal arts college in San Antonio (now Saint Mary's University).

MAYO and its political organization, La Raza Unida Party, played an important part in Texas history during the late 60's and early 70's. They were a part of the larger Chicano movement in the United States, and played a role in bringing about civil rights for Mexican-Americans.

Ramirez had youth trained by VISTA Volunteers such as Efrain Fernandez, Mark Winchester among others to bring social changes in the Rio Grande Valley communities. VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), was a national service program designed to alleviate poverty. President John F. Kennedy originated this idea for VISTA, which was founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1965. Under President Lyndon B. Johnson's Economic

Opportunity Act of 1964 as the domestic version of the Peace Corps.

Initially, the program increased employment opportunities for conscientious people who felt they could contribute tangibly to the War on Poverty. Volunteers served in communities throughout the U.S., focusing on enriching educational programs and vocational training for the nation's underprivileged classes.

School walkouts were a major part of MAYO's approach to achieving equality for Mexican Americans. They staged walkouts at least 18 times, which helped enable Mexican Americans to take over seats on Texas school boards. The major walkouts were in Crystal City, Kingsville, Edgewood, and Lanier High Schools in San Antonio, Weslaco, and Edcouch-Elsa in the Rio Grande Valley.

MAYO members were involved in the Edcouch-Elsa ISD to bring changes regarding discrimination in the school district. The Edcouch Elsa School District had a youth walkout that ended in a strike picket that resulted in an estimated of 1,000 Edcouch Elsa School District students moved to the La Joya School District to finish their high school graduation.

On November 14, 1968, a number of Mexican-American student protesters led by Hector Ramirez stormed out of the classrooms chanting "Walkout! Walkout!", thus igniting a massive student boycott of Edcouch-Elsa High School.

“Participants included people like Efrain Fernandez, Javier Ramirez, Gilberto Garcia, Narciso Aleman, Leo J. Leo, former mayor of La Joya, and Antonio Orendain. We brought together attorneys from Texas Rural Legal Aid, and attorneys from the United Farmworkers Union to represent the youth and their families against the school district,” Ramirez recalled.

It was a nonviolent school boycott by 192 Mexican-American students that flung open the doors of their classrooms and left the school in protest. For three days these students, who made up almost 30 percent of the student body, marched up and down the school's sidewalk, carrying signs that read, "We want better education."

These Mexican-American students were fed up with the Edcouch-Elsa School Board's unwillingness to listen to their demands, and tired of the policies that afforded Anglos more opportunities than Mexican-American students.

The youth together with their families fought in the Texas District Court. We worked with youth to bring about change to the school district and bring new board members and attorneys.

While action was taking place in the courtroom, Mr. Leo J. Leo, who was president of school board, gave the expelled/suspended students the opportunity to prove the Edcouch-Elsa school board and administrators wrong by offering them the chance to attend classes at La Joya High School, in La Joya, Texas.

MAYO members Remigio and Juanita Portales worked with supervisor Juan Ledesma to bring changes to McAllen ISD under Superintendent Rodney Cathey.

This school walkout was the first major Chicano student protest in south Texas, and was a product of the 1960s Chicano movement.

“The MAYO organization fought against discrimination in the City of Pharr Mayor R. S. Bow Administration,” Ramirez said.

On February 6, 1971, the city was divided along economic and ethnic lines, with Caucasians living south of the railroad tracks and Mexican and African-Americans on the north side.

The day began as a peaceful gathering of about 30 people in front of the police station to protest the city’s inequalities and, more specifically, the police department’s harsh treatment of its Mexican-American residents, but the gathering grew that night to about 200 to 300 angry protesters.

Efrain Fernandez, one of the leaders of the Mexican-American Youth organization, had left the protest earlier in the afternoon to attend a meeting in Mercedes, Texas. He came back to the protest around 6 p.m. to find the once peaceful protest had become violent.

Making matters worse, Mayor R.S. Bowe called in reinforcements from neighboring cities McAllen and Edinburg, the Texas Rangers and the Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office, and an estimated 100 police officers came to pacify the riot. Police and firefighters sprayed high-pressure firehoses on marchers and used tear gas against them. In response, residents began throwing bottles and bricks.

Police opened fire, and Alfonso Loredó Flores, 22, was killed. Flores had not taken part in the riot. He was a bystander who came out of Stanley Ramos' barber shop, where he was getting his haircut, to see what the commotion was.

The fallout from the riots came months later, with Mayor Bowe and Chief Alfredo C. Ramirez resigning; however, the deputy who killed the young man, Robert Johnson, was acquitted two years later of negligent homicide.

Mayor R.S. Bowe resigned and A.C. "Beto" Jaime, a 34-year-old certified accountant was elected as the city's first Mexican-American mayor.

The 1971 Pharr Riot represented a turning point in the Rio Grande Valley, when Mexican-Americans, the majority population, became more fully integrated, politically, socially and economically, into American life. The Mexican-American Youth Organization (MAYO) organization was credited for its help in creating change, and did well at getting voters registered in South Texas.

Arturo Ramirez was also an active participant in the Anti-Vietnam War Movement. He mobilized local community members against the war, and persuaded them to become conscientious objectors at the draft board.

The Vietnam War was a long, costly armed conflict that pitted the communist regime of North Vietnam and its southern allies, known as the Viet Cong, against South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States. More than 3 million people, including 58,000 Americans, were killed in the conflict.

This war generated the most tenacious anti-war movement in U.S. history, beginning with the start of the bombing of North Vietnam in 1964 and the introduction of combat troops the following year.

Students, government officials, labor unions, church groups and middle-class families increasingly opposed the war in a nonviolent manner as it climaxed in 1968, forcing a gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces. Anti-war activities, particularly large-scale resistance to military conscription, forced an end to U.S. combat operation in Vietnam and a suspension of the draft by January 1973.

“I chose to apply for a conscientious objector status during the height of the Vietnam War. I prepared my conscientious objector petition to my draft board and it was approved. I refused to participate in the draft board. I continued to fight against the Vietnam War. I got letters of support from Bishop John Fitzpatrick and other local advocates,” Ramirez mentioned.

According to the U.S. Selective Service System, a conscientious objector is one who is opposed to serving in the armed forces and/or bearing arms on the grounds of moral or religious principles.

Besides working as MAYO program director under Colonias del Valle, Inc; Arturo Ramirez worked with The American GI Forum, La Raza Unida Party, The League of United Latin American Citizens, The National Council of La Raza, and The United Farmworkers Union.

Three

CEO

Rural, unincorporated communities have long existed in South Texas. In the early part of this century, small rural communities of Mexicans farmed around the large ranches in South Texas as labor camps where men, women, and children would contract for work in ranching and rail road construction. The residents of these settlements were all of Mexican origin; many were U.S. citizens or became citizens.

These residents lived isolated from the economic and politic mainstream, their alienation reinforced by the prejudice and racism of the dominant Anglo culture. As long as population densities remained low, these communities did not need sophisticated water and water waste systems.

During the 60s, colonias began to proliferate in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, clustering around incorporated cities.

One of the first efforts to bring about change through political action in the Lower Rio Grande Valley centered around working conditions, rather than housing and health conditions in the colonias. Farmworkers, the principal residents of colonias, started to organize through the United Farm Workers Union during the Starr County strike in the 1960s.

Colonias del Valle, Inc., founded in 1967, as a response to Hurricane Beulah, which caused widespread flooding in the Lower Rio Grande Valley colonias. In addition to acting as social service agency and conduit to for distributing commodities to the poor, Colonias del Valle, became a political advocate for colonia residents.

Under Alex Moreno the first Executive Director, the main goal was to acquire a water supply in the region. Since individual wells were not a safe source of water and the existing water supply corporations in the Lower Rio Grande Valley were largely unwilling to serve colonias, the best option was to create their own water supply corporations. One of Colonias del Valle's initial efforts in 1971 was to bring water to *Colonia La Seca* south of Donna in Hidalgo County.

Through the additional efforts of Catholic parishes, U.S. Representative Eligio "Kika" de la Garza, and Colonias del Valle, more than half a dozen water supply corporations were established between the 60s and 70s. Among these new water supply corporations, which relied on the Farmers Home Administration for funding, was the Military Highway Water Supply Corporation. Formed by Arturo Ramirez in 1973, the corporation was designed principally to serve the many colonias around the Military Highway.

In 1991, Ramirez joined and served for many years as a Board member of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) representing Grassroots

Organizations throughout the three-county region of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties.

“Through the Grassroots Organizations representation, Ramirez exhibited heart felt compassion, integrity, and dedication for improving the quality of life for all within the region focusing on those most in need,” former Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council executive director Ken Jones declared.

His dedication and actions earned him region-wide respect and was unanimously supported by the (LRGVDC) membership to serve in several officer positions and ultimately serving as the organization’s president from 2008 to 2009. Ramirez served on the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) board of directors from 1991 right up until his death, in May 2018.

On November 1993, Arturo Ramirez established The Center for Economic Opportunities, Inc. (CEO), a (501-c3) non-profit corporation in San Juan, Texas.

CEO's founding Board of Directors were; Rolando Espinoza, President, Fernando Gomez, Vice-President, Lucio Duque, Secretary/Treasurer, Patricia Pichardo, Mary Moreno and Eduardo Cabrera; Board Members. Mr. Arturo Ramirez, served as the Executive Director/CEO of the non-profit corporation. CEO's main mission is to improve the quality of life for rural low-income farm-worker families through community and economic development initiatives accomplished by successfully training them.

Arturo V. Ramirez



**Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council
President 2008-2009**

Picture courtesy of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council



Norma G. Garcia was recognized with a plaque presented by newly elected Board President Arturo Ramirez at the June LRGVDC Board of Directors meeting. (2008)

Picture courtesy of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council



LRGVDC president Arturo Ramirez presents a plaque of appreciation to retiring Board Member Dr. J. Gilbert Leal. (2008)

Picture courtesy of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council

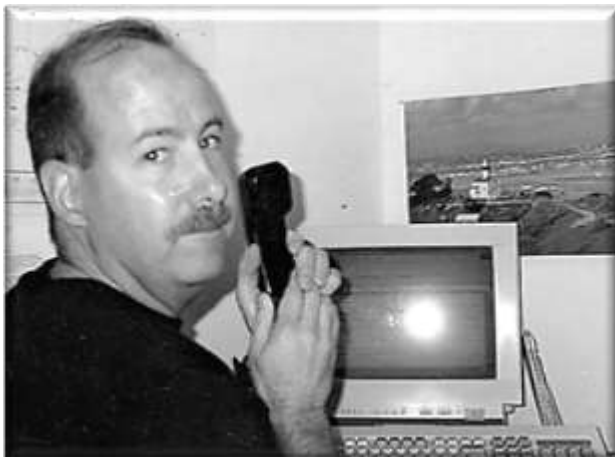
Those involved in CEO activities utilize CEO as the vehicle to bring human, financial and material resources to address the identified socio-economic problems of the area's poor and lesson the suffering poverty inflicts on its innocent victims.



From left to right: Guadalupe Gonzalez, Jorge Alaniz, an unidentified lady, and Mrs. Amanda Gonzalez during a CEO meeting.

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family

CEO's proposal calls for initiatives that will empower the poor by providing them vital information through training that will lead them to economic self-sufficiency. Their economic independence affords them the opportunity to break their dependency on public assistance for basic necessities.



Mark Winchester, a VISTA volunteer for CEO.

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family

CEO has committed its resources to address the needs of the rural farm-worker families, their children and their at-risk youth.

Ramirez dedicated his life as a Director at The Center for Economic Opportunities among other non-profit organizations.

Friends & Achievements



**Arturo Ramirez with one of his great supporters,
Congressman Eligio “Kika” de la Garza II.**

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family



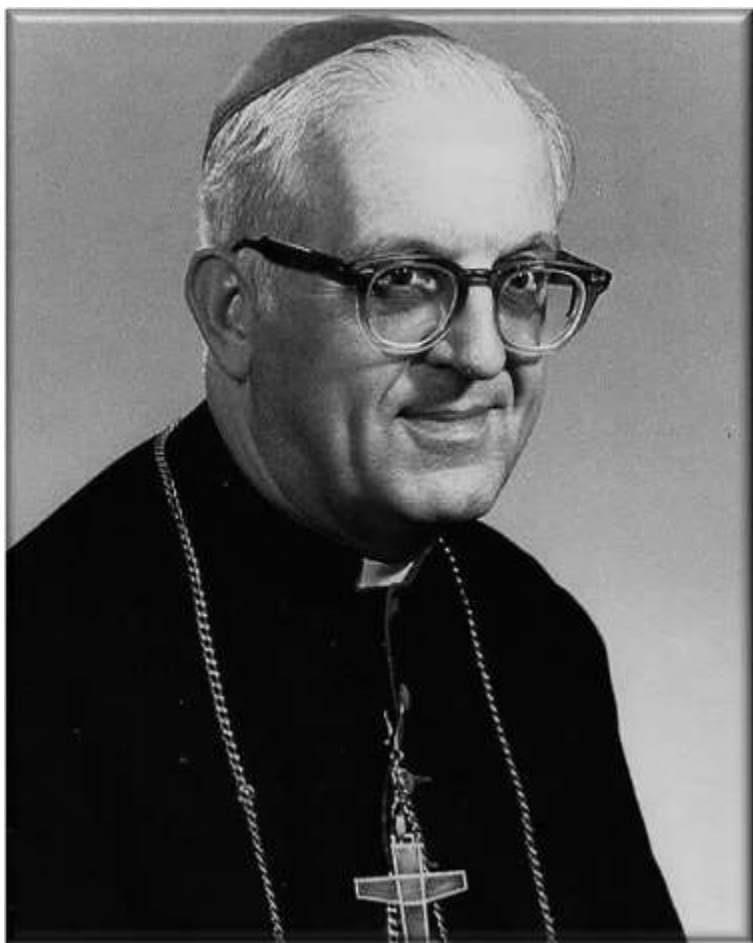
Judge Aida Salinas-Flores
Former 398th State District Court Judge

Picture courtesy of Aida Salinas-Flores



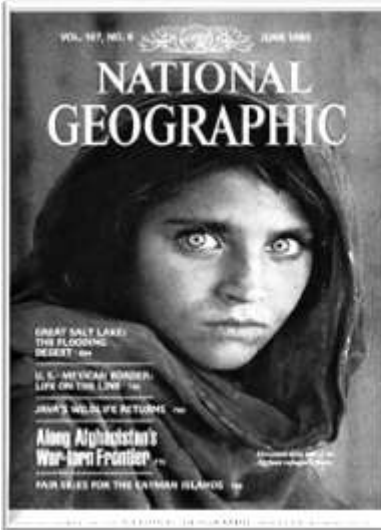
**Former Lower Rio Grande Valley Development
Council executive director Ken Jones**

Picture courtesy of the Rio Grande Guardian/Steve Taylor



Bishop John Joseph Fitzpatrick
Third Bishop of Brownsville
May 27, 1971 - November 30, 1991

Picture courtesy of The Roman Catholic Diocese of Brownsville, Texas



Imperial Valley (below) are overwhelmingly Mexican. Farm lobbies in these two states, source of nearly half of U. S. fruit and vegetable crops, helped defeat last year's proposed immigration reforms. Once a jaded hand, Arturo Ramirez (above) upgraded the

American dream by wresting success from good works. Distressed by Brownsville housing developments that lacked water—the homes of many Mexican-Americans—he built from scratch a nonprofit corporation that now supplies water to 5,500 homes.

Arturo Ramirez appeared in the inside pages of one of the most iconic 1985 National Geographic Magazines, The Afghan Girl.

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family



**Receiving the Winthrop Rockefeller Freedom Award
The White House 1982.**

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family



Arturo Ramirez with colleagues at the White House in 1982.

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family



**Mr. Domingo and Mrs. Angelita Gonzalez,
Arturo Ramirez parents-in law**

Courtesy of the Ramirez family



**Mrs. Francisca and Mr. Porfirio Ramirez,
Arturo Ramirez parents**

Courtesy of the Ramirez family



Mrs. Irma and Mr. Arturo Ramirez

Courtesy of the Ramirez family



**From left to right: Luis Alberto, Gerardo Xavier, and
Mr. Arturo and Mrs. Irma Ramirez.
The Ramirez-Gonzalez family.**

Courtesy of the Ramirez family



Arturo and his sister Hortencia

Picture courtesy of the Ramirez family



Arturo Ramirez became engaged in improving infrastructure conditions after Hurricane Beulah in 1967. The storm highlighted the extensive needs in the region, including the lack of paved streets, basic infrastructure, and standard mortgage financing systems.

Ramirez encouraged community organizations to focus on economic development, and housing needs in rural areas.

“

My name is Efrain Fernandez. Arturo was a sweet but at the same time a ferociously brave person, who would jump into action even in the face of danger. Right after the unfortunate Pharr Riot of 1971, some friends from the United Farm Workers recommended that for the safety of my wife and child and also for my own safety, I should stay at someone's house for the sake of myself and my family's safety. That night, as I was sitting in Arturo's living room in the company of my wife and child and Arturo and his wife, Arturo's spouse detected that there were some intruders hiding in the bushes of Arturo's yard. Arturo Ramirez did not hesitate. He angrily yelled " A si!". He then quickly bolted to his closet and retrieved a loaded rifle. He bolted outside and pointed at the would-be vigilantes. The vigilantes bolted and that was the end of that. GOD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU BRAVE LITTLE MAN. Your memory will always be in my heart.

”

July 31, 2018

TERMS:

Colonias: are substandard housing developments, often found along the Texas-Mexico border, where residents lack basic services such as drinking water, sewage treatment, and paved roads.

Chicano/a: A relatively recent term that has been appropriated by many Mexican descendants as unique and therefore reflective of their unique culture, though its first usage seems to have been discriminatory. The most likely source of the word is traced to the 1930 and 40s period, when poor, rural Mexicans, often native Americans, were imported to the US to provide cheap field labor, under an agreement of the governments of both countries. The term seems to have come into first use in the fields of California in derision of the inability of native Nahuatl speakers from Morelos state to refer to themselves as "Mexicanos," and instead spoke of themselves as "Mesheecanos," in accordance with the pronunciation rules of their language. An equivocal factor is that in vulgar Spanish it is common for Mexicans to use the "CH" conjunction in place of certain consonants in order to create a term of endearment. Whatever its origin, it was at first insulting to be identified by this name. The term was appropriated by Mexican-American activists who took part in the Brown Power movement of the 60s and 70s in the US southwest, and has now come into widespread usage. Among more "assimilated" Mexican-

Americans, the term still retains an unsavory connotation, particularly because it is preferred by political activists and by those who seek to create a new and fresh identity for their culture rather than to subsume it blandly under the guise of any mainstream culture.

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