

Teo Teeter Rangel

Mr. Greco

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Irma & David Rangel - The Real Mexican Narrative

Latino American immigrants are the United States' largest immigrant group and make up almost 20% of the total U.S. population. Despite the large population of Latinos in the U.S, many Americans know little about them and hold beliefs based on stereotypes rather than experience. Many Americans believe that these immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, contribute to worsening crime rates and are harmful to communities. Many others hold the belief that Latinos are taking the jobs that 'belong' to native-born Americans. Even those who support Latino immigration to the U.S, such as those who lean left on the political spectrum, are under the impression that Latinos take jobs that others don't want and that we should appreciate them because they do undesirable work for us. (Krogstad, et al.)

The reality is that immigrants from Latin America do not fit in any boxes or generalizations that we place them in. On the contrary, these individuals and families have impactful, unique, and far-reaching stories that have shaped many of the best aspects of our country. Irma Guadalupe Alarcon De Rangel and David Aristeo Rangel Guzman, a Mexican couple who have raised a family in the United States, have lived such a story—that of Latino immigrants from poor families in Tampico who are now living the American dream. They have reached educational heights and

experienced success in the States, proving that the stereotypical Latino immigration narratives are completely false.

Irma & David Rangel's story began at a middle school math competition. With many of Mexico's brightest pre-teens present, they both placed highly. The couple remember the event clearly, though with different recollections of the placements. David said Irma finished in 3rd while he made 5th place, while in Irma's memory she was able to make 5th place and David was 'below that.' However, despite developing fond memories of this event, they did not meet until several years later. Irma & David attended the same high school, where they gradually formed a relationship through academic competition. The two would constantly compete to one-up each other, striving to be the best at school.

They were also neighbors, with homes a short walk away from each other. In Mexico houses are always festive and filled with people from all over the community. It is customary for family members and other people in the neighborhood to walk into each other's houses and gather at the table to talk or eat. After they leave, new neighbors come in to do the same. In this way Mexican households are their own communities, filled with different people all there to spend time together. Living near each other, Irma and David were able to see each other all the time, and made the most of the social opportunities to start forming a relationship.

In their Junior year of high school, during an educational trip to the city of Merida, they spent time together enjoying the beautiful city and delicious sea-food. During these shared experiences they finally realized their feelings for each other, and took the step to become boyfriend

and girlfriend. A few years later, Irma was living in Monterrey with David while he attended the university Tecnológico de Monterrey. Meanwhile, Irma studied at the Tecnológico de Ciudad de Madero Tamaulipas. After five years as a couple, and nearing the end of their collegiate experience, the two decided to get married under the Catholic Church.

When David was nearing the end of his studies at Monterrey, he sought guidance from his professors about his future educationally. It had always been his intention to remain in Mexico and complete his education close to home. But many of his professors were graduates from a variety of American schools, and they recommended that David travel to the United States for graduate school. In particular, one professor had attended Stanford University and recommended that David do the same. This was the catalyst for their migration, and together Irma & David moved from Tampico to San Jose in order to attend the university. David remembers his professor's message clearly, especially his recommendation "to come here to the United States to open my horizons." In David's words, "I didn't know what that meant at the time, it took many years to figure out."

Irma & David's time in the U.S. was only intended to last the duration of graduate school, and afterwards they expected to return to their families in Mexico. But things did not go exactly as expected. By the time David had finished his education at Stanford and attained his Masters, he had several jobs lined up back home in Mexico. However, Mexico was undergoing a recession at this time, and one by one he received a call from each company saying unfortunately the position was no longer available. The couple decided to stay in the states for the time being, and fortunately

David was able to quickly find a quality job in San Jose. This influenced them to stay a little longer, but the idea was still to return to Mexico once the economy improved. However, every event that passed and positive memories in the U.S. left Irma & David thinking, “okay, we will stay a little longer.” But the eventual decision to remain long-term was not for their benefit.

Upon their arrival in the U.S. Irma gave birth to their daughter Maria. Soon after they had two more daughters, Irmita & Veronica, and finally their youngest, ‘little David.’ Although they would travel to Mexico every summer, their kids grew up completely in the states, and while Irma & David continued expecting to eventually return to Mexico, their kids considered San Jose to be their home and didn’t know otherwise. Irma recalls a specific instance in which she realized her kids felt at home in the U.S. They were visiting family in Tampico during the summer, and the Olympics were taking place at this time. Their nephews all cheered, ‘Mexico, Mexico!’ But their children all watched and cheered ‘USA, USA!’ Irma and David had always appreciated the early education their children received in the states, and after realizing how much their kids connected to the U.S, they decided to stay long-term.

Irma and David never intended to raise their kids or even live in the United States at all. However, what they came to see is that the country fit their needs. They reached the decision that remaining in San Jose was the best thing to do for their children, and would be the most ideal way to continue their lives. There was a simplicity to the decision, and for them it was nothing out of the ordinary. Yet if you explained this to many Americans, they would be surprised. A Latino family, with a stable community to return to in Mexico, is staying in the U.S. because they’re doing

well? Staying because of comfort not necessity? Unfortunately the common belief regarding latino immigrants - Mexicans being the most common nationality among these - is that they either harm the country or harm themselves.

To think that a Mexican family is working important, technology-based jobs and at the same time making the best choice for themselves is foreign to many Americans. Many consider Mexican immigrants to all be uneducated and lower class, and unfortunately many Mexicans are treated in accordance with this belief. Mexicans are viewed as “alien and low status,” and are used as scapegoats and vents to blame for economic and social problems. This is enforced by legislation which makes it near impossible for many Mexicans to legally migrate into the country, which leaves them no choice but to illegally do so, providing other Americans with the idea that they are unlawful and dangerous. Mexican immigrants are consequently commonly discriminated against, especially in the education system, starting decades ago when the courts allowed segregation in the school system on the basis of language and migrant status. (Ortiz and Telles). And although this is reflected in education and economic disparities between Mexican immigrants and native-born Americans, - only 70% of recent migrants have completed highschool as compared to 90% of native-born Americans (“Chapter 3: The Changing”) - many strongly value the pursuit of education. In recent years, the education level for Latino immigrants has risen significantly, with a 15% increase of Hispanic people with at least a Bachelor’s education among immigrants from 2010 to 2018 (Noe-Bustamante). Moreover, many Mexicans migrate to the U.S. with the sole purpose of furthering their families education. Many parents, particularly mothers, migrate to the United States for work and send a majority of their income home to support the education of their

children. In addition, many more make the move as a family, viewing U.S. education as an opportunity for their children and themselves. (Valentine, et al.)

This was the experience of Irma & David, who initially immigrated to the U.S. in pursuit of education, and came to consider remaining in the country for the learning of their children. Both Irma & David were able to assume specialized jobs where they aided in the development of technology and progress, while making the necessary income to create a stable home environment where they could support their kids' education financially and by not needing the completion of domestic tasks by way of their children, a common roadblock for Mexican immigrant families with the same goal. (Valentine, et al.) Along the way, the couple would meet many other Latino immigrants, none of whom had ever considered crime, and all of whom shared the same fear of being plagued by it themselves. David & Irma benefited their neighborhood, city, and country in a multitude of ways through their dedication to their communities, diligent efforts in their jobs and raising four children who would all grace the nation in their own ways. To Irma & David this story was natural, and they never acted believing they were creating new precedent or traveling an unpaved road. Their success was a result of their hard work and the efforts of their parents and everyone before them. Yet the prevailing belief among many Americans is that such an experience is outside of the norm, and many would be surprised to hear the accomplishments and comfort David and Irma have enjoyed.

Instead, a significant portion of Americans believe these migrants from Latino countries are unable to succeed. This belief, although not overtly negative and not inherently opposed to the

action of Mexican immigration, questions the ability of Mexican immigrants and in doing so suggests they are incapable, unintelligent, or somehow just worse than their native-born American counterparts. A common belief that reflects this thinking is that Latino immigrants benefit the country at their own expense, assuming jobs and roles other Americans wouldn't want. Although many who share this idea support immigration, they devalue the efforts of Latino immigrants and suggest their impact on the nation is rudimentary and insignificant. However, the reality is that the educational experience and level of success of Mexican immigrants is much more similar to that of native-born Americans than many would expect. Although Mexican immigrants are behind other migrant groups in terms of level of education attained, they are still successful and on the rise as a demographic; the portion of Mexican migrants with at least a Bachelor's degree 15% above what it was a decade ago (Noe-Bustamante 1). Mexican immigrants continue to place significant value on education and are increasingly successful in attaining this goal. Yet certain examples and misconstrued statistics seem to define their image in American society.

There are many misconceptions that many Americans hold regarding Mexican immigrants that are simply based on a lack of understanding and information. For example, Irma was an incredible student with more than sufficient accolades and academic results to be accepted into a program like that of Stanford. However, due to her attending a less prestigious university in Mexico, she had zero chance of being accepted; had she applied, they would have ignored her application. This is unfortunately due to the prevailing belief among colleges that only the elite among Mexicans are capable of impact and success in the states. A similar misconception shapes the views of many Americans: that immigrating families are insatiable and constantly struggling to

survive in the U.S. economy. This idea is shaped by the practice of many immigrants from Latino countries to migrate for the main purpose of raising money for their next generations. The result of this is that, “Native-born workers of Mexican ancestry have levels of human capital and earnings that far exceed those of Mexican immigrants” (Picker 3). Despite the reason for this disparity to be a focus on the future, a positive value that would no doubt be welcomed and applauded by many Americans, negative reasons are assumed instead. Americans point to this statistic as stemming from inability by first generation immigrants and economic struggle, when the reality is a reflection of dedication to family and the future. Many would respond to this by arguing, ‘So what?’ Why does it matter what uninformed Americans think of Mexican immigrants? Unfortunately, these beliefs directly translate to policy, an example of this being prestigious universities such as Stanford not considering applications from graduates of non-elite Mexican colleges. These beliefs directly contributed to limiting the educational success of Irma. David did not face the same problem, which allowed the couple to succeed economically, with Irma assuming a parental-focused role in the raising of their children. However, for many families, a simple policy such as that would have given them almost no chance of fulfilling their goals in the U.S.

Fortunately, Irma & David were able to surpass the many harmful policies caused by uninformed beliefs. Instead, they were able to dedicate all their efforts to raising their children with as much dedication and love as possible. They raised their family with the values of education, faith, and love and support for one another, all of this instilled by the dedication and teachings the couple gave to their kids. Following in their parents footsteps, they would focus on religious values and the



development of their childrens' faith life. In regular attendance of Church and integration into the Catholic Community, Irma & David were able to meet other families and create strong connections in San Jose. David used his Masters degree to work as an electrical engineer, and he continues his work today. Irma pursued a similar career, and eventually shifted to a career focused on her faith, where she works now as part of a Ministry. As they worked, they focused on education, and raised their children to be able to succeed as they had.

Their kids grew up accordingly, all with a drive and passion for education. Eventually, they would go on to attend Harvard, Stanford, MIT, and UCLA before raising their own families to continue their parents' legacy. David recalls the time period where their children came to understand the significant costs of education. He recalls that "one by one, as they were growing up, they were telling me that [college is expensive], and I just told them that there are two different things in terms of money. One is an investment and one is an expense. If you buy a car, that is an expense. Eventually, it gets depreciated and eventually is worth nothing. But if you get an education, that is an investment. It is something that is going to provide a huge return in life from them. And as an investment that was a great thing for us. And so we did everything that we could so they could get the best education they could get."

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