FALL BOOKS ISSUE

Second-Annual Short Story Contest Winner
BY LARINA LAVERGNE

Texas' Long History of Shaping National Politics
BY SUSAN SMITH RICHARDSON

Austin's Literary Fairy Godmother
BY DAVID DUHR

PLUS REVIEWS, BANNED BOOKS AND MORE

SEPTEMBER | 2012

OBSERVER

Cronkite's Legacy

Historian **Douglas Brinkley** explores the life and times of 'the most trusted man in America.' **BY DAN OKO**



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PHOTO BY MATT WRIGHT-STEEL

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PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LBJ LIBRARY

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A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES
SINCE 1954

OBSERVER

VOLUME 104, NO. 9

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OUR MISSION
We will serve no group or party but will hew hard to the truth as we find it and the right as we see it. We are dedicated to the whole truth, to human values above all interests, to the rights of humankind as the foundation of democracy. We will take orders from none but our own conscience, and never will we overlook or misrepresent the truth to serve the interests of the powerful or cater to the ignoble in the human spirit.

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DIALOGUE

FLDS Travesty

The cover article on the raid of the [Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] ranch was not worthy of publication ("Are the Kids Safe?" August issue). The failure to contact any lawyers other than those for the state and the ad litem who sided with the state was completely one-sided. Two former board members of the Texas Democracy Foundation, including myself, represented clients for free in this unprecedented roundup of a religious group. As a feminist and a parent who adopted a child from the Texas foster care system, I think the children are much better off with their mothers than with a group of people that forced a child to separate from his siblings at gunpoint and a foster care system that is among the worst in the country.

It is a poor day in the history of the *Observer* that Republican judges of two Texas courts of appeals understood the travesty of the roundup and the editors missed the opportunity to question the actions of state power that undermined the rights of people who look and think differently than they do.

D'Ann Johnson
AUSTIN

Flack Checking

I'VE GOT 40 YEARS IN THE NEWS BUSINESS AND I NEVER heard anybody say this is anything but sleazy ("*Washington Post* Reporter Allows College Officials to Alter Story on Controversial Test," July 24, texasobserver.org). Checking facts? Sure. Reading back a technical description? Of course. But letting the subject's flack edit the draft? Totally out of the question.

Tom DeVries
POSTED AT TEXASOBSERVER.ORG

A Dangerous Bottom Line

I WORKED FOR THE COMPANY THAT CONDUCTED THE emissions testing for Gulf Chemical, and that plant was one of the major reasons I ended up changing careers ("Heavy Metal," August issue). I chose environmental consulting because I felt the testing we provided contributed to our clients' [compliance with] the regulations put forth. But after seeing the blatant disregard for health and the environment by Gulf Chem, I realize the bottom line is ultimately what drives the company's decisions. Those scrubbers they're installing (which are standard at any other plant) should have been implemented a decade ago. It is incredible what that company has been getting away with, and I hope it gets shut down in my lifetime. Thank you for shedding light on the subject.

Christopher Maxwell
POSTED AT TEXASOBSERVER.ORG

Sound Off

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or comment on facebook.com/texasobserver and texasobserver.org

DEPT. OF SCOFFLAW HUMANITARIANS

Freeze, Drop the Sandwich!

In the courtyard of the Houston Public Library, a young woman hands out bananas as a cop and a security guard look on.

It's dusk, 7:30 on a Sunday, and the Houston members of Food Not Bombs are distributing vegetarian meals to whomever shows up, same as they do here four nights a week and have for years. On this night, there are about 75 diners; volunteers say crowds have more than doubled since the city passed an ordinance placing severe restrictions on feeding the homeless. A recent Monday night meal saw a record attendance of 200.

"It's been a little tougher," says Anthony Humphrey, 46, who's been homeless on and off for six years. "It's hard because more people are coming out. There are less places to get fed." Humphrey says that during the day, shelters and some churches provide meals, but in the evening, when the shelters and churches close, Food Not Bombs is one of the last places he can still get dinner.

So far, the city appears not to be enforcing the ordinance. This night, August 12, a policeman leans against his car, parked near where volunteers are serving. His lights and engine are off, and he chats with the library security guard who called him. This is the first time police have shown up for a Food Not Bombs meal since the ordinance passed. The security guard, a young guy named José Witherspoon, explains, "I just wanted to make sure everything was all right, permit-wise."

It's not—Food Not Bombs opposes the ordinance and doesn't comply with it—but the officer, who asked not to be named, says, "I really don't care."

On August 13, opponents of the city's restriction on feeding the homeless delivered 34,000 petition signatures to City Hall to put a referendum modifying it on the November ballot. The ordinance, which passed in April, requires anyone distributing food to more than five needy people at once to obtain advance written permission from the property owner, including, in the case of public property, the city.

A July statement from Houston Mayor Annise Parker's office said that disorganized public meal schedules have resulted in "more [food] than needed for the homeless that show up," creating waste and litter. Originally, the mayor's office presented the ordinance as necessary to protect the homeless



Houston has placed restrictions on feeding the homeless.
PHOTO BY EMILY DEPRANG

ENCE

against food poisoning and required, among other things, the use of an institutional kitchen. But after backlash from a broad and diverse citizenry, the food-safety components became optional, leaving only the permission requirement.

Ordinance opponents say this stripped-down version is redundant, since trespassing is already a crime. They also point out that the ordinance applies only to free food distributed to "those in need" (presumably so that it doesn't prohibit group picnics), but that "those in need" has no official definition. While the mayor and local media regularly state that the maximum fine for a violation is $500, the applicable part of the food service code says $2,000.

The petition seeks to alter only the part of the ordinance that applies to public property. City lawyers say the petition is already too late, that the signatures were due by July 1, when the ordinance took effect. Ordinance opponents have promised to take the fight to court.

"It's a law that was intended to do what it's doing, which is having a chilling effect on volunteerism," says Nick Cooper, 44, who has volunteered with Food Not Bombs for eight years.

Cooper says that even without legal enforcement, the ordinance threatens Food Not Bombs. "We're serving 200 people a night. That's not something that's sustainable forever. And it's because they've scared the shit out of everyone [else] who's traditionally taken care of the people."

Humphrey, who sleeps each night on the street beside one of the city's shelters, worries about an eventual crackdown on Food Not Bombs. "I know at some point it's going to come. I just don't know when."

"They're doing a job the city is unwilling or unable to do," he says. "I don't understand why they want to put a hindrance on that." Humphrey adjusts his glasses. "I don't understand at all." —Emily DePrang

THE PIPELINE BEAT

This Land Is Their Land

Up and down its proposed 1,700-mile path from Canada to Port Arthur, the Keystone XL pipeline has ignited multiple protests. In Nebraska's porous Sandhills region, ranchers and ecologists worry about leaks into the eight-state Ogallala Aquifer. In Canada, indigenous leaders decry the pipeline's power to open markets and invite exploitation of the vast boreal forests where tar sands are strip-mined. Across North America, activists have made disrupting Keystone a top priority, seeing the torrent of carbon it would unleash as devastating for the climate. In Texas, where oil is still king, the environmental outcry has been muted. But pipeline operator TransCanada may be trampling on something even more sacred to Texans: private property rights.

One major flashpoint centers on Julia Trigg Crawford, a six-foot former Aggie basketball player and third-generation farmer from Direct, a spot in the road near Paris. Her family's 650-acre farm, squeezed between Bois D'Arc Creek and the Red River, is in the path of the southern leg of the proposed pipeline between Cushing, Oklahoma, and refineries in Port Arthur. The Crawfords are challenging the company's right to seize a 1,200-foot-wide swath of their land through eminent domain.

Crawford objects to the pipeline on a number of grounds, from the disruption of Caddo Indian artifacts she claims are on her family's land to concerns over water contamination. Last summer, she was arrested at the White House along with 1,100 other people in a massive act of civil disobedience. A couple of months later, President Obama delayed a decision on permitting Keystone XL until after the November election.

But it's the property rights issue that is especially galvanizing for her family and a highly irregular band of allies. Crawford's supporters include the Sierra Club as well as tea-party rabble-rousers like former gubernatorial candidate Debra Medina, who see similarities between the Keystone plan and the wildly unpopular, and defeated, Trans-Texas Corridor scheme once peddled by Gov. Rick Perry.

"Foreign corporation taking Texas land for a for-profit venture? Huh, sounds familiar," Crawford said.

In August, TransCanada and Crawford squared off in a Paris courtroom. Crawford and her attorney contend that TransCanada doesn't have the power of eminent domain because the company hasn't proved that it's a "common carrier"—a pipeline operator acting for the public good.

Wendi Hammond, the Crawford family's attorney, said a recent ruling by the Texas Supreme Court gives landowners wider latitude to challenge pipeline operators over eminent domain. She likened the proposed pipeline's Oklahoma-to-Port Arthur segment to a toll road whose "only entrance point is in Oklahoma and the only exit point is to a refinery on the coast."

The process for establishing common-carrier status in Texas is remarkably easy. It involves little more than filling out a form with the Texas Railroad Commission.

"There's no way that something as precious as property rights should be taken because someone checks a box on a Railroad Commission form," Crawford said.

A ruling in the case is expected in late August. Regardless, Hammond said, the family will appeal.

—Forrest Wilder

TRIVIA TEXAS

In 2011, the Texas Legislature slashed funding for family planning and women's health programs. The stated goal was to attack Planned Parenthood. But by cutting the state family planning program by two-thirds, lawmakers harmed many independent clinics, which are unaffiliated with Planned Parenthood and don't perform abortions. Thousands of poor women lost access to contraception and health screenings. Of the more than 60 family planning clinics that have closed all over Texas since the cuts took effect, how many belonged to Planned Parenthood?

a. 57
b. 0
b. 31
c. 19
d. 12

LEARN more about Food Not Bombs' Texas chapters at txlo.com/m

ANSWER: d. 12. Roughly 50 unaffiliated clinics have shut their doors. But, hey, they got 12 Planned Parenthood clinics to close too. So lawmakers did accomplish their goal in an imprecise way—like performing brain surgery with a rocket propelled grenade.

TALK OF TEXAS

KISS OF DEATH EDITION

"As a voter, I'm not looking for somebody with the best sound bite or an individual who's just out talking over my head.

I'm looking for a proven leader. … Today, I'm endorsing Rudy Giuliani for the presidency of the United States."

—Gov. Rick Perry, October 17, 2007. Giuliani failed to win a single primary and dropped out of the 2008 presidential race three months later.

"Therefore, today, I am suspending my campaign and endorsing Newt Gingrich for President of the United States."

—Perry, January 19, 2012. Gingrich won the South Carolina primary two days later, but placed a distant third in later contests and dropped out of the presidential race in May.

"David [Dewhurst] is the one proven conservative candidate who can make conservative change happen in Washington. That's why I ask you to join me in voting for David Dewhurst."

—Perry TV ad released July 27, 2012. Dewhurst resoundingly lost the GOP nomination for U.S. Senate four days later.



Sergio Hernandez-Guereca was killed in 2010. PHOTO PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HERNANDEZ FAMILY

READ more about the shooting of Juan Pablo Perez Santillan at txlo.com/mat

DEPT. OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Long Arm of the Law

Early on the morning of July 9, a U.S. Border Patrol agent fatally shot Juan Pablo Perez Santillan in Mexico. The 30-year-old was standing on the bank of the Rio Grande in Matamoros just across from Brownsville.

Border Patrol says the agent fired in self-defense. At a press conference after the shooting, agency spokesperson Enrique Mendiola said two agents opened fire in separate incidents around the same time that morning. A group of Mexicans, trying to cross the river, pelted the agents with rocks, he said, while in the other incident a man allegedly flashed a gun on the Mexican side of the river. Witnesses in Mexico say Perez Santillan was unarmed.

The Mexican Foreign Ministry denounced Perez's death as a disproportionate use of force. Both countries say the shooting is being investigated, but it's doubtful anything will come of it. In June 2010, 15-year-old Sergio Hernandez-Guereca was killed in Mexico by a U.S. Border Patrol agent standing in El Paso. The boy's parents filed a wrongful death suit in U.S. court, but it was dismissed. The federal judge said the family had no standing because Hernandez-Guereca was killed on Mexican soil. Incensed by the ruling, the Chihuahuan state government issued a warrant for the Border Patrol agent's arrest. But the warrant is largely viewed as symbolic, since the chances of extradition are next to none.

Deaths like these are on the rise. The Perez Santillan case is the fourth time a U.S. border agent has killed someone on Mexican soil in the last two years. Ramses Torres, 17, was shot in Nogales, Sonora, in 2011, and Jose Yañez Reyes was killed that same year in Tijuana.

Undeterred by the setback in the El Paso ruling, Juan Pablo Perez Santillan's family filed a civil suit in U.S. court in late July. "What happened is a terrible tragedy," said Brownsville civil rights lawyer Ed Stapleton, who filed the suit for the family. "Arguing this case is going to be an uphill battle, but it's important to keep developing it as a legal issue."

The case probably won't be heard any time soon, however. In early August, Stapleton's suit on behalf of the family was rescinded, and he was replaced by Austin-based attorney Marc Rosenthal. Rosenthal has yet to re-file the suit. —Melissa del Bosque

ANNALS OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

Not Quite Fixed

The agency that runs Texas' youth lockups has a new name and a new structure, but some of the same old problems.

In the five years since a sex-abuse scandal rocked what was then called the Texas Youth Commission (TYC), lawmakers have overhauled the state's juvenile justice system, emphasizing community-based probation and merging the troubled TYC with the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission into a new Texas Juvenile Justice Department, which opened in December 2011.

The new department's operations may have been smoother than what came before, but not by much.



A juvenile justice center near Waco.
PHOTO BY PATRICK MICHELS

The department's first year has been marked by reports of violence, riots and escapes. An internal audit in April detailed a culture of violence and coercion built around cigarettes, drugs and money at the Giddings State School, "a hierarchy of leadership in the dorms in which youth are bought and owned by other youth."

The department's first director, Cherie Townsend, the former head of TYC, retired in June and was quickly replaced by Jay Kimbrough, the governor's fix-it man who helped guide TYC out of its darkest days back in 2007.

Texas' two most influential lawmakers on criminal justice issues, Democratic state Sen. John Whitmire and Republican Rep. Jerry Madden, hailed the switch as a much-needed change of direction. "[Townsend's] philosophy to 'love 'em to death'—putting programming above security—didn't work. I don't see us continuing that," Whitmire told the *Austin American-Statesman*. "The kids are not going to continue to run the place."

Kimbrough's most high-profile strategies since taking over involve removing the most violent youths to where they can't cause as much trouble. The department recommends some violent youths for removal to the adult prison system—a decision that will fall to judges, who typically follow agency recommendations. In July, the department reopened a dorm in its Mart facility, near Waco, where the most violent kids can be housed in individual cells.

It didn't take department officials long to get the new effort, which they call the Phoenix program, running.

But advocacy groups that have been keeping tabs on Texas' troubled juvenile justice system for years are concerned about the new approach, and say the department rushed into the new program without hearing their concerns. In August, one month after the Phoenix program began, several critics said their piece at a public hearing before the agency's board. They worried the new program could keep kids locked up far too long, leaving them with less than the required time for school each day.

LEARN more about Crawford's fight at txlo.com/juliatc

But Lauren Rose from the group Texans Care for Children raised a deeper issue, "that [Phoenix] is seen as a final fix to the current crisis when it is really just a Band-Aid on a gaping wound." Advocates also worry that it signals a new punitive focus at the Juvenile Justice Department.

Reform advocates say they've long argued that the agency needs to address understaffing at detention facilities, high turnover rates, inadequate mental health treatment and, as much as possible, keeping kids close to home.

The population in Texas' youth detention centers is already down from 4,000 just a few years ago to 1,100, thanks to community-based probation programs. It may be a smaller population, department spokesman Jim Hurley says, but it's also a much tougher one, comprising the most serious offenders.

READ one group's recommendations for reforming juvenile justice in Texas. txlo.com/tcjcreport

Still, Hurley says that Phoenix isn't the agency's only strategy to restore order.

He doesn't quite get the outrage from the advocate community. He says Kimbrough has met with representatives four or five times, even about Phoenix specifically, and thought they'd reached an understanding.

"There's been a lot of mushing about the Phoenix program as a measure of reform. And it's not," says Texans Care for Children's Eileen Garcia. "The pendulum has swung to something that doesn't look like reform at all."

—Patrick Michels

TYRANT'S FOE

Organizing Low-Wage Workers

ELSA CABALLERO KNOWS ONLY ONE WAY TO MAKE A LIVING: FIGHTING for other people's rights. Caballero is the state director for Service Employees International Union Local 1, which led Houston's janitors to victory in their fight for an improved contract in August. But when she was 16, Caballero was just a kid who needed a job. ¶ She had emigrated with her family from Honduras to Pasadena when she was 12 years old. Her parents made little money, so as soon as Caballero was old enough, she started working at a job she got through an internship with the city, in a shelter for victims of domestic violence. Caballero liked the work and proved invaluable as a translator. So while still a kid herself, she started answering the hotline for women and youth in crisis. She stayed on for years.



Elsa Caballero
Organizes Workers in a Right-to-Work State

"I wanted to feel like I was building something better, a future that was better."

Meanwhile, Caballero wed and had three children. When her husband got a job in Oakland, California, the family moved there, and Caballero continued doing nonprofit work, finding housing and jobs for the homeless. "It became real to me how people could go from having a place to live one day, their family in an apartment or a home, and then lose their job, sometimes through no fault of their own, and within a month they're homeless," she says. "In California, at the time, with the housing market the way it was, it was so hard to find these folks a place to live even after they had gotten a job."

Caballero saw firsthand what could happen when wages didn't keep up with the cost of living. "So I was talking to some friends of mine who worked in the labor movement," she says, "and it dawned on me that this work was something I would like, because it was dealing with the problem *before* they became homeless. It was helping people maintain jobs, and if jobs were good-paying, that could stop these people from being homeless. So I started an internship and I really liked the work and have been doing that since."

Caballero's first campaign organized workers in nursing homes in Los Angeles. "It was very interesting," she says, "because there were a lot of non-union workers in nursing homes [in Los Angeles], but in Oakland, where they had been organized for a long time, nursing home workers had so much better standards. They made better money, and they had benefits. And they were doing the exact same work."

Organizing was rewarding, but Caballero says it came with a cost. The L.A. campaign meant six months away from her family, and even when campaigns were closer to home, they required 12-hour days and sometimes more. "As an organizer, you make choices. It's more than just a job to me, and you make sacrifices for it," she says. "I'm not complaining, because that's a choice I made. I didn't want a 9-to-5 job. I wanted to feel like I was building something better, a future that was better not just for other folks but for my kids."

Caballero says she tries to involve her children in her work when she can. "They come help me at rallies, and sometimes they come to meetings and just listen. I think it's helped them have a whole different perspective about what life is really like for working people."

In Oakland, Caballero organized home health workers and hospital workers. Then her work took a more personal turn. "I had the opportunity to work with developmentally disabled kids in California, to try to increase funding for them as part of my job. Later on, I found out that my son was developmentally disabled himself. Being able to talk to those families when I was organizing helped me ID that my son was autistic early on."

A year and a half ago, Caballero got the chance to move her family back to the Houston area, where the rest of her relatives live, and take on the janitor's strike. She found Texas a more challenging organizing environment because the laws "favor companies much more," she says. But the workers and their needs are the same. "People don't organize just because all of a sudden they want to take on this fight. They have problems and they've tried to address them on their own and they can't. They've tried for years."

She says the hardest part of being an organizer isn't the long days or the calls at all hours from frightened workers. It's being so close to people she can't do more for. "You hear their stories and their heartbreak," she says, "what their lives are like. They make such a huge commitment to fight alongside you. Many of them lose their jobs. Many get targeted or harassed by management. That's what makes the wins so great. I never think it's enough. I'm always going to want to take them and fight for more, but ultimately it's got to feel right for them. It's got to be their win, not mine."

—EMILY DEPRANG

EDITORIAL

The Two Sides of Texas

In 1996, the Houston Independent School District decided to build two new high schools. The district sited the first school on the city's western edge, bordering Katy. The school is surrounded by trees and open fields, and a tony neighborhood of stately brick homes. The other high school—named after Cesar Chavez—was built in Houston's poorer east end. It sits beside three petrochemical plants, amid a maze of highway overpasses and rail lines. The athletic fields lie a quarter-mile from a flame tower. Gas pipelines run under the football stadium.

It's not hard to understand the impact of Texas' extreme wealth and poverty. You can see the divide in a 30-minute drive (without traffic) from Houston's Fifth Ward to River Oaks, from northeast Austin to the sprawling mansions of Westlake, from south Dallas to the manicured grounds of Plano. But there may be no starker contrast between the lives of rich and poor Texans than these two Houston high schools, built at the same time, worlds apart.

Not only are the state's rich getting richer and its poor getting poorer, but Texans are increasingly segregated by their relative wealth. In early August, the Pew Research Center released a study analyzing U.S. Census data and concluding that Americans are increasingly sorted into extremely poor and well-off neighborhoods.

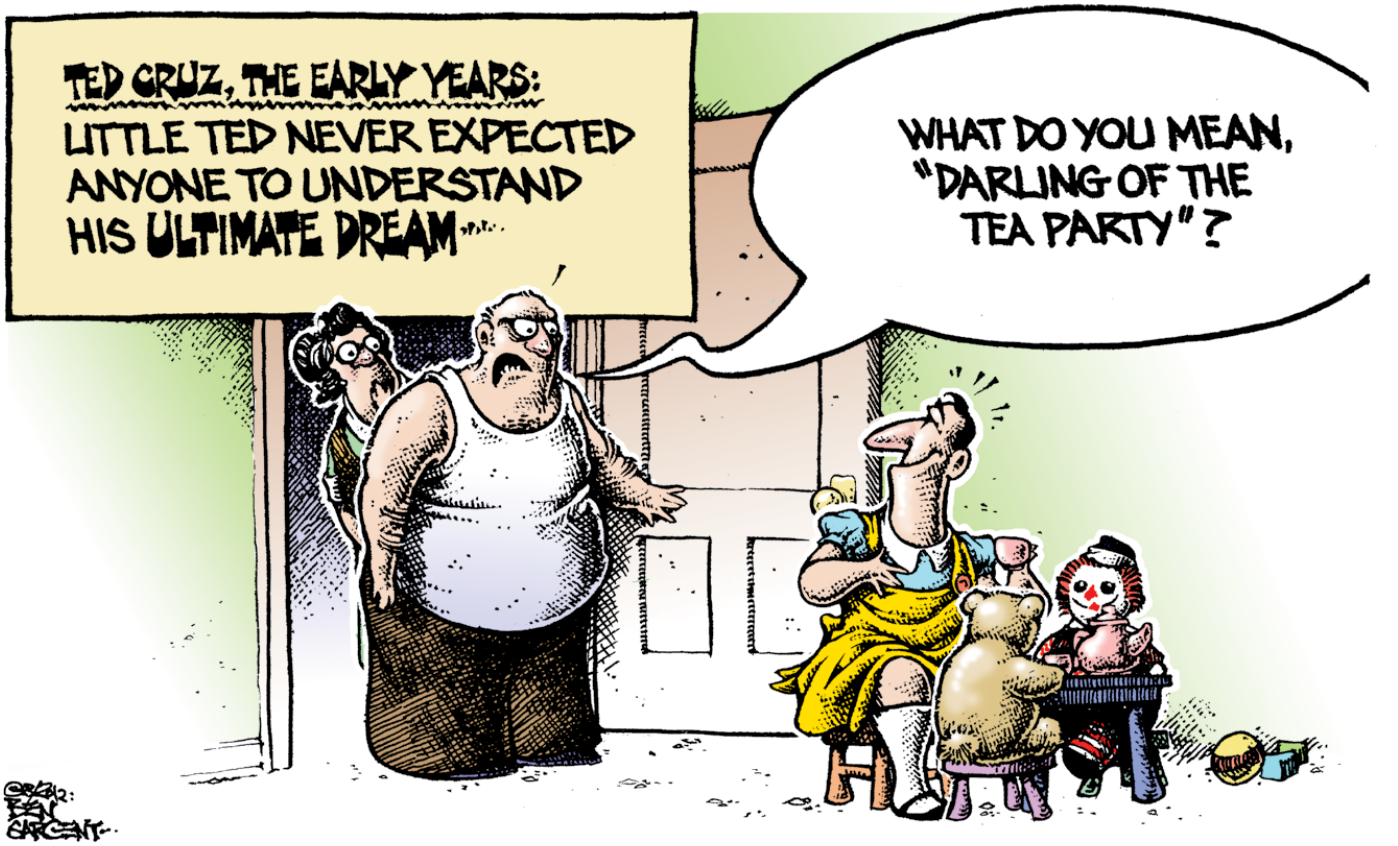
In Texas, the numbers are especially striking. Pew ranked Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, and San Antonio as the top three cities, among the nation's 30 largest metro areas, for economic segregation. In 2010, nearly 40 percent of Houston's poorest families lived in extremely low-income Census tracts. Conversely, a quarter of the city's wealthiest households were found in the richest neighborhoods. Those numbers have nearly doubled in the past 30 years, according to the Pew analysis.

Wealthy Texans receive the best the state has to offer: the best schools, the best health care, the best roads. The poor aren't nearly as fortunate, and economic and tax policies emanating from Washington and Austin are only exacerbating the problem. In fact, some state and federal lawmakers don't see a problem at all.

There have always been rich neighborhoods, and poor ones, and there always will be. What's worrisome is that economic segregation is self-reinforcing. When rich families live only with other rich families—and have no connection to, or understanding of, poor Texans—they're less willing to provide support (in taxes and volunteer time) to the programs and organizations that offer assistance and opportunities to low-income families. A divided Texas is a crueler Texas. And it's getting worse.

Wealthy Texans receive the best the state has to offer.

LOON STAR STATE Ben Sargent




LEARN

FASTER, CHEAPER, SMARTER... AND ONLINE

BY PATRICK MICHELS

Randy Best is going to save Texas' public universities, or get rich trying.

When Hurricane Rita spun through southeast Texas in 2005, Lamar University's 270-acre campus in Beaumont suffered heavy damage. Rita's 100-mph winds ripped holes in the basketball arena roof, busted windows in old academic buildings and flung books from shelves leaving them rain-soaked on the floor. The wind toppled and splintered hulking trees along Lamar's quaint pathways.

The school reached out to Randy Best, one of its richest and most successful graduates, for help with the $45 million repair bill. Best—the Dallas-based entrepreneur and political donor who profited mightily in the early days of No Child Left Behind—saw an opening, clear as the eye of a storm, into the higher education market. He had a vision to market a state school like Lamar to a new set of students—ones who would earn their degrees without ever watching the Lamar Cardinals play at Beaumont's Montagne Center, and without schlepping across campus to find a book tucked away in some musty sanctum of academia.

Lamar's enrollment was plummeting and its campus was trashed. A salesman of Best's caliber could take one look and see the situation for what it really was: one great, rain-soaked, market-cracking, cash-spewing opportunity.

So when his alma mater came asking for a donation, Best seized his chance. "I said, 'you know what you guys need to do is, instead of me trying to give you a one-time gift, you guys should be thinking about the future of online.'"

If you're looking for a market disruption, something to upset the status quo and give license to innovate, you could do a whole lot worse than a hurricane. "So it was an accidental company," he says.

Best called his new for-profit venture Higher Ed Holdings, and with Lamar's blessing, he got busy recruiting students for a new, accelerated, online-only master's program in education. Lamar's education professors created versions of their courses tailored to the new format; Best supplied the software and the students. His company was well compensated for its work. Lamar handed over 80 percent of the tuition from the program to Best's company. (Its share of the tuition at Lamar has since been lowered to 70 percent.)

The new program's first students began coursework in fall 2007. Since then, Lamar has become Texas' third-fastest-growing university, on paper anyway. One of the company's officers told *USA Today* that enrollment in Lamar's online programs has surpassed the rest of the school's total enrollment.

Next, Best took his successful model to the University of Texas at Arlington, where his company, operating under the name Academic Partnerships, has fueled the rapid growth of UTA's nursing school. "There was a 6,000-nurse shortage in Texas," Best says. "Today we have 5,000 students in one nursing program. So we were fortunate to pick programs where there was a great labor shortage."

In the past five years, the company has expanded to 24 public colleges and universities, including eight in Texas. The institutions have combined to pay Best's company at least $105 million in that time, according to university payment records. On the way to winning a contract with the University of Texas System last summer, Academic Partnerships reported 166 employees and annual revenues of $43 million.

Best contends that his model of online education benefits everyone. The schools win because enrollment spikes, bringing in more state funding—often as much as for students attending class on campus, even though online students cost less to educate. Students win because they can earn higher salaries with their degrees, which are cheaper and more convenient to earn online. "Partner" corporations such as hospitals and school districts often subsidize or cover their employees' tuition and benefit from a better-educated workforce. Look at it this way, and it's hard to see who loses.

Best likes to portray traditional higher education as elitist and old-fashioned, an Ivory Tower anachronism that unjustly keeps working parents and regular folks from earning the degrees they need to succeed. "You know what a university is? One of the greatest repositories of knowledge on earth, that's what a university is. And sharing that knowledge, because we know it's life-changing, with as many people as one can is a moral imperative. And now we have the means to do it: technology.

"Public universities' brands are the gold standard around the world," he says. "And now, instead

A salesman of Best's caliber could take one look and see the situation for what it really was: one great, rain-soaked, cash-spewing opportunity.

PHOTO ISTOCK

of moving people around to get knowledge, you can move knowledge around to people."

But Best's vision and his modus operandi have their critics—principally the tweedy academics who may stand to lose the most when Best's online revolution takes hold. Some education professors have complained about the irony of teaching classroom instruction methods without the benefit of a classroom. At some schools, faculty said the deal with Best's company was shoved down their throats, that administrators asked for input only after they'd signed the contract with Best. As Academic Partnerships expands to new UT campuses this fall, those complaints have surfaced again.

READ Mother Jones' 2008 report on Best's part in the rise of 'Pentagon-style contracting' in education. txlo.com/phonies

"I think the big picture is that higher education is becoming more and more a business and less and less a public service," says Jack Zibluk, a former faculty senate president at Arkansas State University-Jonesboro, who spoke out against a deal with Best in 2008. "This may be part of the business of higher ed in the future, but my concern is, at what cost? What kind of education are you going to get as part of that business model?"

READ more about the controversy around the deal at Arkansas State.txlo.com/arkst

Best's critics aren't against online education, but they wonder why a university, with all its resources and scholars, needs a for-profit company to develop online courses and recruit students. Couldn't the schools launch online courses themselves and avoid turning over so much tuition money to Best? Some critics see administrators and for-profits like Academic Partnerships cashing in while faculty get saddled with more work. To them, the company looks like a pipeline from the public coffers to Best's bottom line. It's a familiar charge against him.

Couldn't the schools launch online courses themselves and avoid turning over so much money to Best?

With a talent for networking and a killer instinct for sales, the 69-year-old Best has built a far-flung money-making operation from high in one of Dallas' iconic downtown high-rises. "Those people who have been with him through successful business ventures would put him somewhere between God and the Beatles," Best's former spokesman told *Mother Jones* four years ago, in a story about how Best capitalized on political connections and No Child Left Behind under George W. Bush to turn his tutoring company, Voyager Expanded Learning, into one of the most lucrative literacy programs in public schools.

A decade ago, the knock against Voyager was that it thrived on Best's well-placed friends, not on academic merits. School officials who contracted with Best had a habit of going to work for him later. Critics said he cashed in on a bubble of new federal money. They called his company the Halliburton of K-12 education. Now, they worry that for all of Best's well-intentioned rhetoric, he's building the Blackwater of higher ed.

YOU'LL FIND RANDY BEST'S NAME in some odd corners of the Internet. Paid corporate biographies sing his praises on advertising sites like dallas-pinball-service.com and golfguiding.com with phrases like "Randy Best is a successful entrepreneur;" "Randy Best is a Well Respected Entrepreneur;" "Randy Best: An Entrepreneur Committed to Education Endeavors." It's a low-rent strategy for juking your online profile to get your name associated with flattering search terms, and maybe drown out more critical web pages. It's a little trick known as "black-hat" search engine optimization. It's also an unusual promotion strategy for a guy asking major universities to let him market their brand online.

Many of those online profiles tell the story of Best's childhood, how he was inspired to use his business prowess to help educate the world. He tells much the same story in a phone interview, and it's far more charming in his own voice.

Emery Randolph Best grew up in Beaumont in the 1940s and 1950s, the son of a hardware store owner and schoolteacher. His mom spent decades in the city school system, finishing her career teaching English at Beaumont High School. That made young Randy's extreme dyslexia all the more frustrating. Reading was a struggle—still is today, he says. When he went on to college, he couldn't move far from home. "My mother had to read to me all the way through college," he says.

He enrolled at Lamar University, a popular destination among his high school crowd. "I was really searching for, 'What am I going to do with myself?'" he says. "And I started little companies." By his junior year, Best had 40 other students working for him in Texas and Louisiana. He started a class ring company, and offered quicker turnaround and more custom options than his competitors. In his mid-20s, he sold the business for $12 million.

In 1984, he teamed up with Elvis Mason, a prominent banker who'd backed him in his college days, to launch a merchant-banking firm in Dallas called Mason Best. With $100 million from big backers like the Rockefellers and Wrigleys, they bought up defense contractors, savings-and-loan outfits, and oil and gas companies. They bought a 50-percent stake in Perry Homes. Mason and Best became darlings of the business pages, which covered one $100-million corporate takeover after another. Mason was president of the Dallas Citizens Council, the glitzy, invitation-only civic group that functions as a kind of shadow government guiding the city's growth. Best was a member, too. To judge by the sizeable charitable gifts the society pages attributed to Best, those online robo-profiles are right: He was indeed successful.

Having earned fabulous wealth, Best turned his powers to more ostensibly altruistic endeavors, launching a tutoring business in 1994. He named it Voyager Expanded Learning. Best sent political contributions to top Texas Republicans, supported the campaigns of George W. Bush and Rick Perry in 1998, then pledged to raise $100,000 for Bush's first presidential campaign (though he came up short). He hired school superintendents from Dallas and nearby Richardson to come work for him, after both had signed big contracts to bring Voyager's programs to their districts. Best was close to the governor's education staff, and when Bush went to Washington, the new president took a team well acquainted with Voyager's programs.

As *Mother Jones* detailed four years ago, the $6 billion Reading First program Bush created along with No Child Left Behind was more or less written for firms like Voyager that claimed its programs were "research-based." (Best told the magazine the Bush administration never gave him any special favors.) Anxious to bag their share of the new federal money, school districts across the country signed on with Voyager, whose programs synced with the U.S. Department of Education requirements. Voyager came with a 100-percent literacy guarantee, and was built on phonics rather than on "whole

language" instruction. It's a nuts-and-bolts approach that remains popular among conservatives. Some researchers say phonics is an especially important strategy for kids with dyslexia.

Congress cut funding for Reading First in 2009 after complaints about cronyism and poor student performance. In a federal comparison of various reading programs' impact on test scores, Voyager came in last. But that wasn't Best's problem anymore—he'd cashed out in 2005, selling Voyager to a Michigan company called ProQuest for $361 million. But his work in education was just beginning.

Best says that during his Voyager years he saw just how poorly America's education schools were preparing teachers. His research guru Reid Lyon famously remarked in 2002 that "if there was any piece of legislation that I could pass, it would be to blow up colleges of education." Instead, Best bought one.

In 2005, Best purchased Barat College, a Catholic liberal arts school in Chicago with a rich 200-year history, an empty bank account and, most important, a valid accreditation from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, which is key to acquiring the government aid that often pays for students' college degrees. Best fired the faculty, sold the campus, dispatched the old curriculum, and renamed his school the American College of Education. The new school had little connection to what had been Barat College, but despite the changes, Best managed to retain the school's accreditation. The new college's sole product was graduate degrees for working teachers. Buying and overhauling a college, keeping little more than its accreditation, takes advantage of a massive loophole in the system—the same one for-profits like ITT Educational Services exploited on their march to ubiquity. Soon after, Best did it again with another school, the New England College of Business.

Under then-Chicago schools chief Arne Duncan, the American College of Education scored a sweet deal to deliver classes to the city's teachers in public school classrooms. Most of the coursework was delivered remotely by teachers based in Texas.

The school also embraced Best and Lyon's focus on research-based curriculum, assembling a replicable student experience that leaves little room for professorial eccentricity. In recent filings with Illinois regulators, the American College of Education lists 20 faculty members and 3,183 students. It's the sixth-largest school of education in the country. But it's still just version 1.0 of Best's higher-ed ambition. "All of our dreams for it just have not panned out," Best says. "But it's a great school in its own right."

In a detailed series in 2006, *Dallas Morning News* reporter Joshua Benton wrote that before the American College of Education expanded into Texas, it produced a document for state regulators called "The Big 'To Do' List." The list includes nationwide growth, adding bachelor's degrees in subjects other than education, and then, in bold: "Expand everything internationally."

Best says he and his team spent two years canvassing the world for lessons about higher ed. "We went to 64 countries, wasted a lot of shareholder money, and just studied it and studied it," Best says. Steeped in his faith in the private sector's power to do good—Best's wife Nancy is active in charities offering micro-loans in West Africa—he saw not just a growing market but a higher purpose: opening new corners of the globe to higher education and the opportunities that come with it.

His plan was to use the American College of Education model to help international schools develop their online programs, but when Best got to Brazil, he says, he found a system even better than his. So he bought in. In 2006, he spent $11 million to take over one of those schools, Universidade Norte do Paraná (Unopar for short), in southern Brazil, about 300 miles west of São Paolo. Then he bought schools in Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Argentina, Chile and Paraguay. Collectively, those schools are called the Whitney International University System, a combination of nine for-profit and nonprofit schools Best either owns or controls, with around $400 million in revenues. By the end of 2012, he says, the Whitney system will have 200,000 students.

Best says he's abandoned plans to expand Whitney beyond Latin America. But the lessons he picked up in Brazil about online education, and the drive to reinvent the university system for the masses, were on his mind when Lamar University called in 2005.

Lamar officials loved Best's plan, but other Texas schools weren't so enthusiastic about the possible competition. Some lodged complaints with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Lamar and Best faced a six-month approval process with the coordinating board in 2007. The Texas State University System's chief academic officer Ken Craycraft stepped up to smooth things out with state regulators and help Best gain approval. Three years later, in July 2010, Craycraft left his post to join Best as an executive vice president. The man knows how to repay a favor.

At the University of Texas at Arlington, Best focused on programs in both education and nursing, which have driven the growth that led the school to expand its physical campus, too. (Best and his company donated $500,000 to the construction.) While Texas continues to cut its funding for public universities, every new online student earned UTA $4,522 in state funding in 2011. University payment records show UTA has paid Best's company more than $32 million since 2008.

But when Best made his move outside Texas, he met his first major resistance from faculty. Like Lamar, Arkansas State University-Jonesboro was desperate for new students in 2007, and under new leadership that promised big growth. Academic Partnerships went to work developing online programs in nursing, education and public administration, and the deal was signed before anyone told the faculty what was going on.

Jack Zibluk, a journalism professor who recently left Arkansas State for another school, was then president of the faculty senate. The professors passed a resolution asking administrators not to make any more deals with Best's company. Zibluk says the request was ignored. "This is really a sacred cow. It's just not something that we have much opportunity to interact with or influence. We all agree that we have to address online learning. That's just the wave of the future, and you have to be there. The question really is: How comfortable are we working in a partnership with a private provider?"

He says faculty were told they'd have control over the curriculum, then found a clause in the contract that the university "shall not amend the curriculum except with the consent" of the company. (The clause has since been removed.) Zibluk worries that for a

"The question really is, how comfortable are we working in a partnership with a private provider?"

school with so little online presence of its own, the web ad for its online degrees has taken over Arkansas State's institutional identity. The influx of students has changed the nature of the school. He says he's seen faculty members break down in tears talking about what their job has become. "We have 20 times the students as we did in the past and no new faculty," Zibluk says. He wonders who gets the intellectual property rights to a professor's online course after they leave.

When Arkansas State President Les Wyatt stepped down in July 2010, news got out that he also happened to be serving as "president and chairman" of a Best-owned company. The online *Inside Higher Ed* reported obtaining university documents that said Wyatt worked for Academic Partnerships, LLC. Best says that wasn't the case, that Wyatt came on to help promote a new organization of the Whitney System schools and North American schools called the Network of American Universities. "So he didn't work for AP, and to my knowledge he's never done anything for AP," Best says.

The deal with Arkansas State is still in place; after a contract extension last year, it'll go till at least 2018. The school graduated hundreds of students last year in degree programs that once saw no more than 30.

But in the wake of the Arkansas controversy, Best met another faculty uprising, and more charges of cronyism, at the University of Toledo in Ohio. The school's chief financial officer at the time, Scott Scarborough, was a native Texan who'd been DePaul University's CFO when it sold Barat College to Best. The school turned Academic Partnerships away. (Toledo went on to develop its online courses in-house.)

Best orchestrated a masterful sales pitch—the kind where you never even hear the word "buy."

Best acknowledges facing strong critics at the time, but says attitudes are changing. "Today you don't hear nearly as much. Change is hard. Change is a challenge for me, for a lot of people. And I think faculty have really not known in the past what that has meant." Rather than push schools to go online, Best says, his company now makes the case that it can make the inevitable transition run smoothly. "That's the future," he says. "What services can you offer that help the public universities better serve their customer?"

Academic Partnerships inked a 20-year contract with Ohio University in 2008 and expanded to Florida International University in 2009. That year Best also added a nursing program at Purdue University Calumet, where Indiana's Republican governor (and soon-to-be Purdue president) Mitch Daniels has slashed state funding and stressed efficiency in universities. The American College of Education has announced it will be moving to Indiana, too. Best expanded to Arizona State University in 2010, where President Michael Crow has become a star speaker on the transformation of higher education while drawing fire from some professors who say he's stepping on their intellectual property rights.

In each case, the contracts are nearly identical, often with commitments of five years or more, and Academic Partnerships' cut at least 50 percent. The company still provides the marketing—a mix of online ad placement and old-fashioned glad-handing to establish partnerships with school districts and corporations, and in exchange offering tuition discounts for their employees.

All that growth is good enough to make Academic Partnerships a mid-level player in the online higher ed industry, according to Richard Garrett, a managing editor at the consulting firm Eduventures. What makes the company unique, though, is that it partners only with public universities.

There are benefits to working with state schools, as an email exchange between Best and outgoing UTA President James Spaniolo illustrates. In February, according to emails obtained by the *Observer*, Best asked Spaniolo for the university's login information to access massive student databases kept by the companies that run the major college entrance exams: the College Board's Student Service Search and the ACT Education Opportunity Service. Both organizations make it clear that the database is only for schools and nonprofits offering scholarships, and never to be shared with commercial third parties. Best said he needed the database to research the market for a new online bachelor's degree at UTA, and he offered a novel guarantee: the only person who would have access to the login would be Richard Ferguson, the former ACT president who'd since come to work for Best. "We'll provide the requested access but need to touch a couple of bases first," Spaniolo wrote back. The degree program never materialized. Though it didn't work out for Best in that instance, his company has gotten a major boost from having the right connections.

BEFORE 2008, TEXAS MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN a good place for Academic Partnerships to flourish. But in May 2008, Rick Perry gathered representatives from all six state university systems in Austin, along with a few leading higher ed thinkers with free-market sympathies. Best was among them. So was Jeff Sandefer, the Austin oilman who has been critical of waste at Texas' flagship universities. So was Richard Vedder, a fellow at the conservative think tank Texas Public Policy Foundation and an American Legislative Exchange Council education officer. (Vedder once wrote that he counts Best among the "eight great men" he's ever met, along with Vladimir Putin and George Soros.)

Perry stressed the need for efficiency in higher education, to spend smarter and turn out more graduates to power Texas' economy. He famously challenged universities to offer a bachelor's degree for just $10,000. So while Vedder and Sandefer released scathing reports about professors' lack of productivity at the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M, Best hung back and watched the clouds part over the Texas market for online education.

Public schools saw their funding cut even further, and began privatizing more of their day-to-day operations, while pressure mounted from regents and state officials to boost graduation rates and slash tuition. UT Regent Wallace Hall asked university officials to report back to him about any experience they had with online consultants, like Best's company, that said they could deliver the unlikely combination schools were being asked to produce: more graduates for less money.

In September 2011, Academic Partnerships learned it had won a contract from the UT System to take its courses online (the AP spinoff company Instructional Connections and the education giant Pearson were the other contract winners). Before the news was announced, though, Best orchestrated a masterful sales pitch—the kind where you never even hear the word "buy." He nudged university officials from across

the country to ask the same questions UT had been asking, and timed it so that when they got home the answer was staring at them in the headlines: Academic Partnerships.

Best invited hundreds of them to the Four Seasons resort outside Dallas last October to hear what their future held. For two days they chatted and dined in Las Colinas, the master-planned slice of suburban luxury tucked inside the otherwise unglamorous suburb of Irving. They sat in neat rows in the dim and dramatic ballroom, before a stage lit up like Space Mountain as speakers related the many ways in which higher education's traditional methods are outmoded.

Best called it the "Future of State Universities Conference," but there was something decidedly old-fashioned going on. It was a live sales pitch, and it didn't take long to catch what kind of future was being sold: Personalized. Global. Online. Administrators got buzzwords to try out back home, like "disruption" and "intellectual assets." They got speeches from prime ministers, governors, and a man impersonating Thomas Jefferson. They got sympathy for their dwindling public funding, and the glittery promise of a new way forward. The provosts and presidents were as captive as suckers at a timeshare pitch, but Best played it cool. The man who put it all together didn't utter a word onstage, nor did the organizers draw undue attention to the high-powered speakers' connections to Academic Partnerships.

The event was billed simply as a symposium hosted by former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and former North Carolina Gov. Jim Hunt. Bush, the nation's biggest online education cheerleader, is also a Whitney University System board member. Best sits on the board of Hunt's foundation. Walter Bumphus, a former Voyager salesman, got a speaking slot on behalf of the American Association of Community Colleges. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Australian Prime Minister John Howard offered a look at the global need for higher ed.

Arizona State University President Michael Crow's speech didn't detail his business with Academic Partnerships, but he did help his peers in the audience get used to the idea that they're broke and failing. "The country is not performing well," he said. "If the country is not performing well, the state universities are not performing well. If you think the state universities are performing well—people that govern and fund the state universities don't think that, because they've been taking money away at the fastest possible clip that they can."

There was hardly any mention of Best's company until Jim Hunt helped close the conference by mentioning this "very creative, innovative company that really is dedicated to education."

"There's never been a conference like this one before," Hunt said on the symposium's last day, and the press agreed. *The Texas Tribune* dubbed it "A Public Higher Ed Confab with a Private-Sector Vibe." *Inside Higher Ed* called it "An Unusual Conference." Not many young startups with just a few clients could lure so many university officials or so many prominent politicians to a single room. But most young startups aren't run by Randy Best.

"The conference was a big risk for us. We were virtually unknown," Best says today. "It came across with a good, positive, warm feeling among the participants, and they went back and talked positively about the conference. And we've got the peripheral benefits of that."

The week after the conference, the UT System announced its contract with Academic Partnerships. The very next day, retiring Republican state Sen. Florence Shapiro announced she would join the company as executive vice president of communications. Prior to the October 2011 conference, Academic Partnerships had signed about 10 public universities nationwide. Less than a year later, the company has at least 24, from big ones like Louisiana State University to smaller ones like Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches. The deal with the UT System has netted new programs starting this fall at three campuses : UT-Permian Basin in Odessa, UT-Pan American in Edinburg and UT-Tyler.

Officials at the UT campuses say they picked the programs with input from faculty and from Academic Partnerships. They're being careful not to pick programs that other schools are offering online. Some campuses, like UT-PB, already offer a slate of online degree programs they've developed in-house, and Permian Basin President David Watts says they're adding the accelerated Academic Partnerships degree programs to online courses they already offer. "We're pursuing both models to see which is most of use to Texas students," Watts says. These new programs aren't just in job-training programs like nursing and education, but in liberal arts subjects like sociology too.

Best compares his deal with the UT System to a hunting license: no guaranteed contracts with schools, just a stamp of approval from the higher-ups in Austin. "Our pitch to them [UT-PB] is we can bring you global reach, we can do recruiting for you that we don't believe you can do as well for yourself. Give us a chance. If you don't like us, run us off."

That may be easier said than done. Some faculty members, who asked not to be named, say there has already been pressure from the administration to teach the new online courses, and that there's no sign they'll have a say in how long Academic Partnerships sticks around.

"It seems like the story is pretty common: You wake up one morning and suddenly people are talking about Academic Partnerships," says Derek Catsam, the faculty senate president at UT-Permian Basin. "As long as the institution is always the driving force behind curriculum, then I can live with it. I'm just concerned that won't be the case. I'm concerned that we will be making decisions for reasons other than teaching, learning, and the things that a university is supposed to do."

Not many young startups could lure so many prominent politicians to a single room. But most startups aren't run by Randy Best.

SEE how Academic Partnerships promotes itself to universities. txlo.com/apvid



NO ROAD HOME

After the presidential election, Mexico's exiles long to go home, but have little faith in their government.

BY MELISSA DEL BOSQUE





Thousands marched against Mexican President-Elect Enrique Peña Nieto in July in Puebla, Mexico. PHOTO BY CHARLES MOSTOLLER/ ZUMAPRESS.COM

IT'S JULY 1, THE NIGHT OF MEXICO'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, AND ON TELEVISION IT LOOKS LIKE DEMOCRACY.

Expensively dressed, well-coiffed TV news anchors transmit live from Mexico City's massive central plaza or *Zocalo*—the symbolic center of the country's political life. They announce election returns as they roll in from across the country, and recap the day with footage of presidential frontrunner Enrique Peña Nieto, the boyishly handsome candidate of the old ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, mobbed by cameras and supporters as he votes at his precinct outside the capital. The grinning candidate, flanked by his TV soap star wife, gives a thumbs up and pronounces the day "a festival of democracy" in which "the winner will be the people of Mexico."



Exiles watching election results in El Paso.
PHOTO BY MELISSA DEL BOSQUE

In El Paso, where a dozen Mexican exiles gather around the television, the election doesn't feel like "a festival of democracy." It feels like a wake. Across from me sits Saul Reyes Salazar, 43, a deeply thoughtful man, compact with wire-framed glasses. Six of his family members have been killed in the past four years. None of the murders was investigated. Next to him sits his friend Martin Hueremo, 44, a former city council member from the small community of Reforma that neighbors Saul's hometown of Guadalupe, 35 miles southeast of Juarez. Hueremo fled Mexico after gunmen killed two fellow city council members and left an ice chest filled with decapitated heads outside city hall.

Between the Reyes and Hueremo families, 37 people ages 3 to 78 have fled Mexico and filed for political asylum in the United States the past three years. The giant-screen TV in front of us belongs to Carlos Spector, their lawyer, who now represents at least 153 Mexicans seeking asylum. Since a low-intensity civil war began consuming the country in 2006, an estimated 100,000 Mexicans have been killed, and at least 10,000 have been kidnapped, their bodies never recovered. Last year, violence forced at least 160,000 people from their homes. It's estimated that 230,000 have left Ciudad Juarez—at least half of them to the United States.

We sit on sofas and chairs in Spector's small guesthouse, which doubles as a workout room and now as a place to watch Mexico's fragile democracy take yet another precarious turn. The mood is somber, pensive. Besides Martin and Saul there are Martin's two teenage sons, Saul's three adult nephews, Spector and his 23-year-old daughter Alejandra. Saul's 78-year-old mother Doña Sara sits outside with Martin and Saul's wives watching the younger children play. She has given up on the election. "It's all lies," she says.

A week earlier, Doña Sara had fled Mexico with her grandson after he'd received death threats. Deeply involved in social activism in Guadalupe, she had pledged never to leave Mexico, despite the murders of six family members. But now the matriarch says she's filed for asylum. "Not for me but for my family," she says. She would be the last of 32 members of her family to flee Mexico.

Mexico is less than five miles from where they sit. From a highway near the border, Martin and Saul can see the white steeple of the church in Guadalupe just across the Rio Grande. But the fear of being kidnapped or killed keeps them in Texas. Across the river, their family members and friends have been killed or disappeared, their cars, homes and businesses torched or stolen. Whole blocks of their hometown are charred ruins, as if in a war zone. It's been like this for more than three years.

You would think the violence and forced displacements across the country would be a major topic of discussion leading up to the July 1 presidential election. But you would be wrong. The candidates rarely acknowledged the conflict ravaging the countryside or its victims. Instead they focused on differences in personality and leadership style. The conservative National Action Party (PAN) candidate Josefina Vazquez Mota's campaign motto, "*Josefina diferente,*" was a lackluster attempt to differentiate herself from President Felipe Calderón, in whose cabinet she had served. Peña Nieto's campaign motto, "*tu me conoces*" ("you know me"), was laughable to Saul, Martin and

the others because the PRI had done everything in its power to keep the candidate tightly scripted and rarely free of his handlers.

The exiles peer at the TV screen. There's a mixture of puzzlement and despair on their faces. Pollsters have predicted for nearly two years that the 46-year-old Peña Nieto, who represents the former dictatorship of the PRI, will win by a healthy margin. He is the former governor of Mexico state—a heavily industrialized, horseshoe-shaped region that encircles Mexico City. Leading up to the election, he strove to present himself as the new, more democratic face of the party. Yet it is widely known that his most trusted advisors are the PRI's old guard, whom many Mexicans call "*los dinosaurios*," men who advised former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari in the '90s, a time when political dissidents were assassinated and the country suffered one of its worst economic crises.

It was no secret that "*los dinosaurios*" longed to retake the country after a stunning loss in 2000 to the conservative PAN. For decades the PRI had put on a show of democracy but functioned largely as a dictatorship that governed through a well-oiled system of graft, cronyism and media censorship. There was an election every six years, but real political power was orchestrated from within the party; the process was often referred to as *el dedazo,* "the big finger," because the sitting president tapped his chosen successor.

On election night, after more than a decade out of power, the PRI seems poised to recapture Mexico, but the exiles still hold out hope for an upset win by Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, the leftist candidate, with the Party of the Democratic Revolution, or PRD, who was narrowly defeated by Felipe Calderón in 2006. After that election, according to polls, at least 40 percent of Mexicans believed the election had been stolen from Lopez Obrador, whom Mexicans often refer to as AMLO. Hundreds of thousands of people jammed the streets of Mexico City and set up massive protest encampments in the *Zocalo*. Lopez Obrador vowed to carry on a parallel government, but eventually his movement lost momentum and splintered.

Back then, Saul and Martin were municipal PRD candidates who worked tirelessly for the party. In their community in the Juarez Valley, they and several others had formed an active, vocal block of voters who battled against the impunity of drug lords and for better living conditions. Six years later, most of those people are now dead or in exile, victims of the violence that engulfed the state of Chihuahua in 2008 after Calderón sent in the army. In the ensuing bloodshed among the drug cartels, hired *pistoleros* and soldiers had turned Ciudad Juarez and the agricultural corridor of the Juarez Valley into killing fields. In 2009, Guadalupe, with its 3,000 inhabitants, had the highest per-capita murder rate in Mexico. The press called it "the valley of death."

For the first time in their lives, they tell me, Saul and Martin didn't vote in the presidential election this year. They were not alone. More than a dozen people I spoke with in El Paso's exile community—where an estimated 50,000 Mexicans have fled— hadn't bothered to vote either, even though a law passed prior to the 2006 election allows Mexicans to vote abroad.

Their reasons for not voting are complicated, Saul tells me. "Those who have citizenship or legal residency believe that if they vote in the election they'll lose their U.S. legal status," he says. "It's not true, and it's a myth, but some believe that. Others who are here without documents are afraid the information will be used to locate and deport them."

Others can't get a voting card in Mexico because they've just fled for their lives. As we sit watching the election, a TV reporter arrives shouldering a video camera. He works for a local Spanish-language station and wants to film the exiles watching the election for a story to be broadcast that night. The reporter, originally from Mexico City, tells me he has a special interest in the topic because he, too, was recently granted asylum. When I ask whether he has voted, he smiles sadly. "When they kidnapped me, they took my wallet with my voting card," he says. "And I can't go back."

Underlying all of these reasons, however, is anger and frustration toward the Mexican government. The day before the election, I visited with a woman who recently fled Guadalupe after her sister was kidnapped. The woman had gone from one law enforcement office to the next pleading for authorities to find her kidnapped sister, but no one would help. Her sister had been snatched in front of other family members in the middle of the day. The witnesses even recognized some of the kidnappers. Her brother-in-law, who had tried to intervene, had been beaten so badly he was hospitalized for several weeks.

After receiving death threats, the family—50 members in all—was forced to flee, she told me. They'd lost their homes, cars and businesses. Now, she lives in a dilapidated trailer in Texas with six other family members, trying to survive on odd jobs. Her husband, deeply depressed, wants to go home so he can work, but she's begged him not to because she's afraid he'll be killed. Recently, they'd gotten a call from Guadalupe informing them that some men had cleaned out her husband's auto repair shop and stolen $30,000 worth of equipment. The thieves hauled away everything in a municipal truck.

I asked her whether she thinks the election might improve things so her family can go home, and she shakes her head. "I don't think anything is going to change with the election," she said. "At this point, you can't believe in the government. So many years and the same things repeating and repeating themselves, only now it's worse, and they really are good for nothing. Before at least you had a little bit of faith in the authorities, but now nothing. Absolutely nothing," she says, tears rolling down her cheeks. "We didn't vote. One of my nephews said, 'you know you can vote from here.' I said, 'No, what for? Why should we, if our own government doesn't support us or value us as Mexicans?'"

The woman doesn't show up at Spector's house to watch the election even though she knows many of the people there. The exiles wait expectantly for the results. Within two hours of the polls closing, the TV announcers call the winner: Enrique Peña Nieto. Despite this being the predicted outcome, Saul, Martin and the others seem to be in shock as the vote tallies show the PRI winning with 38 percent of the vote. Lopez Obrador is second with 31 percent, and Vazquez Mota is third with 25 percent of the vote.

The loss for Calderón's party is a stinging rebuke

"I don't think anything is going to change with the election. At this point, you can't believe in the government."

READ more about the Porras family at txlo.com/por

"Well, I guess we can all go back tomorrow," Saul deadpans, then walks outside. "They've stolen the election again," he tells his mother.



Saul Reyes Salazar at his home in El Paso.
PHOTO BY VANESSA MONSISVAIS

to his drug war strategy, which has spurred so much death and misery. The president appears on the screen from the presidential palace. Posed in front of a Mexican flag and an ornately framed painting of Francisco Madero, the first president of the revolution, Calderón announces that a rapid count by the federal election agency shows that Peña Nieto is indeed the "president elect." Calderón assures viewers that Mexico values the democratic process. "All Mexicans count in the government. Mexico is a strong country with freedoms that we all should be proud of. I invite you to join us in demonstrating once more that we are a civilized and democratic nation."

"Well, I guess we can all go back tomorrow," Saul deadpans, then walks outside. "They've stolen the election again," he tells his mother Doña Sara, who is sitting in a folding chair watching her grandchildren. She nods as if it's a foregone conclusion.

READ a timeline of the PRI's history in Mexico at txlo.com/pri

LITTLE MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, the dominant feeling in Mexico was hope. In 2000, for the first time in modern history, many Mexicans believed they'd finally participated in a fair presidential election. The PAN's Vicente Fox ended the PRI's reign of 71 years in the presidential palace. Young voters were especially upbeat that their country might finally have democracy. But what looked like a new era instead became a reckoning with the repression and corruption that had festered under the PRI.

A few days after the election, I meet with Carlos Spector, who in his asylum practice has interviewed hundreds of Mexicans fleeing violence, and for whom the conflict engulfing Mexico has become something of an obsession. A true *fronterizo*, or border citizen, Spector, 58, is as keenly interested in Mexican politics as he is in the upcoming U.S. presidential election. He is bilingual and bicultural. His father, a Jew from Brooklyn, fought for the establishment of Israel, then set out for Mexico's Sierra Madre to pan for gold. He never found gold, but he did find love in the form of 17-year-old Dolores Calderón, the beautiful daughter of Guadalupe's mayor. Sixty years later, in an odd twist of fate, their Jewish, Mexican-American, red-haired son would represent the majority of the town's refugees seeking political asylum.

Spector said that since 2008, when the violence began to devastate Guadalupe and other Mexican communities, it was "like a faucet had opened," with people calling or arriving daily in his office asking for help. The flow of new arrivals has only increased. Despite having recently been diagnosed with cancer, he's just taken on another difficult asylum case. The Porras family, from Villa Ahumada in southern Chihuahua state, had just arrived in El Paso—20 family members in all. Gunmen for the Juarez cartel had killed the eldest son, 49-year-old Rodolfo. The police stood outside during the murder, Spector says, but did nothing to detain the killers. A week later, when his 19-year-old son went to put flowers on Rodolfo's grave, the gunmen killed him, too.

The family begged federal police officers to escort them to Juarez, where they holed up in the attorney general's office demanding an armed escort to the international bridge so they could beg for asylum. But the government refused and tried to convince the family to stay. For five days the family, with crying toddlers and elderly grandparents, slept on the floor in the government office. After a flurry of news coverage, the government finally relented. Local police escorted the family on the 10-minute drive to

the international border. Before leaving the attorney general's office, an employee handed the family Carlos Spector's business card.

"I probably get at least 20 inquiries about filing for asylum every week," Spector says. "Before 2008, if we had one asylum case every six months it was a lot."

All of the asylum cases Spector and his law firm have taken have been *pro bono* or sliding scale. Spector's small law firm is already overwhelmed. But he has a hard time saying no, he says. The families arrive in El Paso traumatized, sometimes with only the clothes on their backs.

Spector has been handling Mexican asylum claims since the 1990s, and he's one of the first U.S. immigration lawyers to actually win cases. He took on his first cases during the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, viewed by many Mexicans as a sort of bogeyman and embodiment of PRI corruption and impunity. During his term from 1988 to 1994, Salinas privatized government industries, handed out concessions to his well-connected friends, and helped spur the devastating devaluation of the peso. His eldest brother Raul was accused of the murder of his former brother-in-law and money laundering after more than $100 million was uncovered in a series of Swiss bank accounts. The millions were believed to be protection money from drug cartels.

Political repression also skyrocketed under Salinas. Leftist activists and political leaders were jailed or killed. The military was dispatched to quell the Zapatista uprising of indigenous communities in southern Mexico. In 1994, Spector represented an army captain who had been ordered to kill Zapatista prisoners but refused. In another case, in 1991, a political leader from the PAN, then the opposition party, was targeted for assassination and fled to El Paso. Spector began to get an idea of Mexican society as a pressure cooker. "From talking to people, we got a sense that the level of repression was very heavy, especially in the small towns," he says. "Much of it was the daily type of corruption where the *cacique* (mayor or political boss) rules with impunity and there's widespread abuse."

It was only a matter of time before something had to give. "I had been expecting this would happen," Spector says of the cartel violence and refugees. In a country where 50 percent of the population lives in poverty, Mexicans struggle to survive while being extorted by local police who often work for drug kingpins. The authorities are either on the take or look the other way. For years under the PRI's rule, poverty and corruption festered. The party never built strong civic institutions; Mexico lacked reliable law enforcement or an independent judicial system. When the PRI's rule finally ended, organized crime quickly filled the void.

Frustrated and angered by the violence and corruption, Spector encourages his clients to speak out publicly and protest the abuses committed against them back home. His efforts have earned him several death threats. He can no longer visit Ciudad Juarez or Guadalupe, his mother's hometown. In that sense, Spector himself has become an exile.

AFTER THE JULY 1 ELECTION, I check Mexico's federal elections web site to see what the voter turnout was in Guadalupe and the Juarez Valley. The numbers show that between the 2006 and 2012 presidential elections, nearly 80 percent of the registered voters in the Juarez Valley have disappeared or been killed—exactly 13,340 people.

Saul, the former Guadalupe city secretary, estimates that perhaps 20 percent of the town's population remains. Many of Guadalupe's residents have been killed. Some were burned alive while others were massacred in the streets. One man was skewered and roasted over an open fire. It's the same story all over the surrounding Juarez Valley, which spans 50 miles along the Rio Grande. It's common knowledge that this territory belongs to the Sinaloa cartel. Before the army arrived in 2008, it belonged to the Juarez cartel.

When I visited Guadalupe in December 2011, many houses were charred ruins. Businesses were shuttered, and the town had a siege-like atmosphere. No one goes out after dark. It has been this way since the soldiers arrived in 2008 and converted the town's gymnasium into a barracks.

Ciudad Juarez and Guadalupe seemed like a violent anomaly in 2008. They are now nothing unusual. The violence and forced displacements have spread to other towns in Veracruz, Tamaulipas, and more distant parts of the country. A few months before I arrived in Guadalupe, a former Mexican security minister told reporters that the government "has lost territorial control, and therefore governability" over at least 50 percent of Mexico.

This is the country that Enrique Peña Nieto inherits on December 1, 2012, when he moves into the presidential palace. Many see the vote for the PRI as an act of desperation in a crisis without a foreseeable solution. They hope Peña Nieto can at least reduce the violence. But Saul, Martin and the other exiles have little hope that the political regime that created Mexico's problems will be able to fix them.

"We got involved politically because we had illusions that we could give our families a better future," Martin says. "Now I feel like I've failed them because we didn't accomplish anything. The country rid itself of Porfirio Diaz because he was a dictator, but from the revolution until today we have the same conditions. The poor get poorer and the rich get richer. We don't have a future."

LEARN more about the Juarez Valley at txlo.com/vall

Political repression also skyrocketed under Salinas.

LETS DO LUNCH!

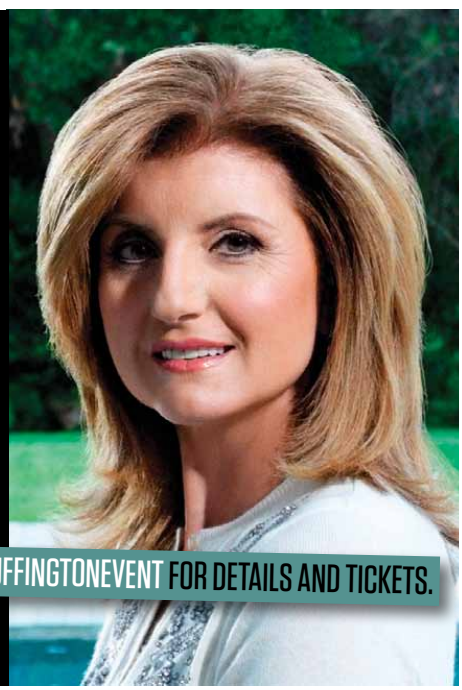
Join ***Texas Observer*** and the **Texas Nature Project** for a special lunchtime conversation with **Arianna Huffington**, the author, syndicated columnist, and president and editor-in-chief of the Huffington Post Media Group.

November 2, 2012
11:30am -1:30pm
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on the UT-Austin Campus

VISIT WWW.TEXASOBSERVER.ORG/HUFFINGTONEVENT FOR DETAILS AND TICKETS.

Texas Nature Project

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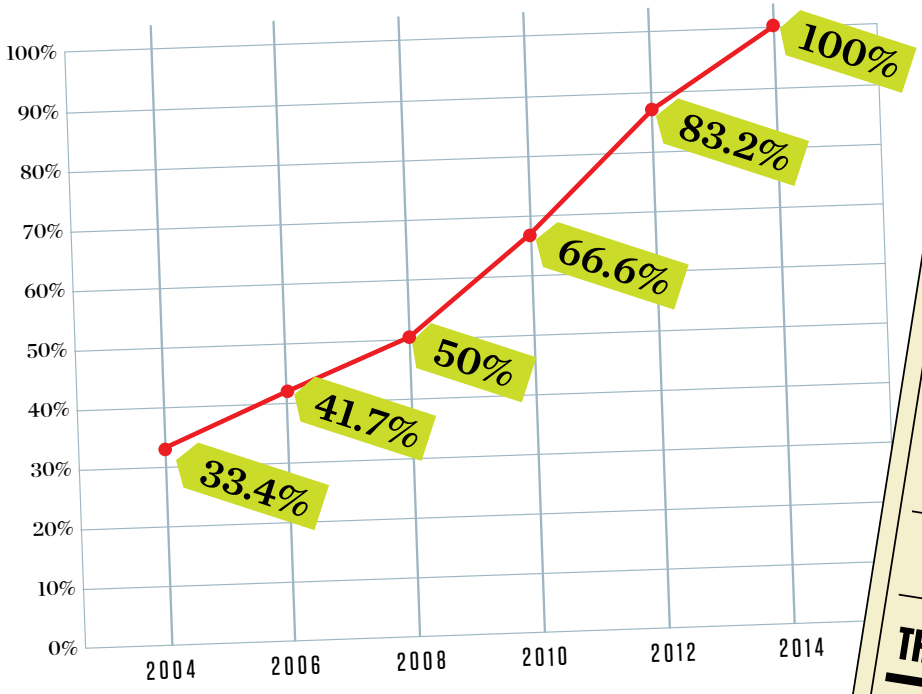


STATE OF TEXAS: Designed to Fail BY PATRICK MICHELS

MORE AND MORE TEXAS SCHOOLS ARE FAILING *to meet the federal No Child Left Behind standards. The schools aren't necessarily getting worse; the federal standards are becoming increasingly high. No Child Left Behind, George W. Bush's signature education initiative, took effect 10 years ago, and since then it's been raising the bar for Texas schools' standardized test results. The federal law requires 100 percent of students to pass standardized tests by 2014—an impossible standard. The law allowed states to construct the incremental standards schools had to meet on the way to 100 percent passing rate. Texas designed a system that required low standards in the early years and saved its most dramatic gains for 2012, 2013 and 2014. That made it easy to get a good federal grade in the early years and nearly impossible to pass now. In other words, Texas schools were set up to fail.*

THE RISING STANDARDS

Percentage of students required to pass basic math standards



SOURCE: Texas Education Agency
ILLUSTRATION BY JOANNA WOJTKOWIAK

REPORT CARD

THE FAILING SCHOOLS

Percentage of Texas schools that met the federal standard:

GRADING PERIOD	%	LETTER GRADE
2004	83%	B
2006	82%	B
2008	75%	C
2010	86%	B
2012	44%	F

THE CONSEQUENCES

Texas schools facing federal sanctions in 2004:
199

Texas schools facing federal sanctions in 2012:
1,159



CINDY CASARES

BIG BEAT

UndocuBus Takes On Obama's Record

On July 29, a bus full of undocumented immigrants calling themselves UndocuBus began a journey from Phoenix, Arizona, to Charlotte, North Carolina, to raise awareness about immigration reform and, ultimately, to protest against President Obama at the Democratic National Convention in September. You might be surprised to hear that, since Obama just made a big speech about how his administration will no longer deport qualified undocumented immigrants under age 30. Unfortunately, like many of the president's well-publicized immigration decrees, this one doesn't exactly match his rhetoric.

Like many of the president's well-publicized immigration decrees, this one doesn't exactly match his rhetoric.

In July, one month after Obama's speech from the Rose Garden, 26-year-old undocumented immigrant Viridiana Martinez turned herself in at Broward Transitional Center in Florida. Her goal: to document U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) failure to comply with the Obama administration's new policy on young undocumented immigrants. From inside Broward, Martinez reported to *Democracy Now!* and the National Immigrant Youth Alliance the presence of more than 60 detainees without criminal records, another three dozen eligible to request that discretion be applied in their cases, and several immigrants requiring medical attention. Now, remember, the Deferred Action Process came after another highly publicized Obama directive, issued in June 2011, ordering ICE officials to "refrain from pursuing non-citizens with close family, educational, military, or other ties in the U.S. and instead spend the agency's limited resources on persons who pose a serious threat to public safety or national security." If the president's directives aren't completely ineffectual, why has he had to make two?

In August, as UndocuBus rolled through Austin, certain Texas Democratic groups tried to convince the protestors not to go to Charlotte. The critics weren't willing to go on record, but suffice it to say the complaints were made to activists who were closest to the UndocuBus as it came through the state.

I experienced the same blind loyalty to the Democratic Party from *Texas Observer* readers who came out to defend the president on Facebook last month when my story about his pandering to the Latino vote was published. Despite having the worst deportation record of any American president, President Obama enjoys a 70-percent approval rating among Latino voters. This is probably because those voters, by definition, are documented. At the end of the day, if it's not your problem, it's tough to do more than keep up with an issue through the headlines. And the president's administration does a great job of making the headlines read like he's really got your back.

"The Democrats have helped us—even if it's been in a very limited way," Eleazar Castellanos, a 45-year-old day laborer and UndocuBus rider, told daily news site *Colorlines*. But he doesn't believe that Obama's policy, which allows young undocumented immigrants to apply for "deferred action" to avoid deportation, is nearly enough. "What if, during that time, someone has a radical idea to change the deferred action? They would have a new database of young people who applied, with their names and addresses. ... Maybe they should hold off until a real change happens, before applying. That's why I say Obama's deferred action was not enough."

Latino immigrants are only the latest in a long line of immigrant groups given the worst jobs for the lowest pay in America. That the majority of people in previous immigrant groups came here legally proves that they weren't mistreated for breaking the law. They were treated like second-class citizens because they were different. Make no mistake: That's the same reason undocumented immigrants are mistreated today. If you care about stopping bigotry and discrimination, you should care how immigrants are treated.

The issue of immigration reform not only affects the lives of undocumented people, it sets the tone for how all Latinos are viewed in this country. While many Latinos aren't willing to vote for Republicans because that party has aligned itself so closely with whites openly hostile to them, Latinos could decide to vote for no one, concluding that neither party has their interests at heart. This would be damaging to the Democrats. Ergo, *someone* better start making immigration reform a priority.

In the meantime, it's the UndocuBus riders who have the courage to risk everything for their convictions.



The Power of Words

FALL BOOKS

It's no small feat to harness the power of words. Words can free you or trap you; make you feel or make you think. The authors featured in our Fall Books issue have done so admirably, and on subjects from the personal to the political.

The issue begins with Larina Lavergne's funny, irreverent and poignant story about the shady circumstances of a woman's birth. Lavergne is the winner of this year's *Observer*'s Short Story Contest, selected from among more than 200 entries by guest judge Heidi Durrow, the author of the award-winning *The Girl Who Fell From the Sky*.

David Duhr, Steven G. Kellman and Christine Granados helped select the books for this issue with an eye for the stories that are shaping or have shaped Texas. Domingo Martinez's brave coming-of-age memoir, *The Boy Kings of Texas*, captures the deep poverty of many communities in the Rio Grande Valley. Douglas Brinkley's sweeping biography of legendary broadcaster (and Houstonian) Walter Cronkite explores the rise of broadcast journalism and its impact on modern American politics.

Brinkley's *Cronkite* is part of our nod to the presidential election year. Before we wade too far into the political swamp, we look at Texas' impact on the presidency and the national agenda through the lens of Robert Caro's *The Passage of Power*, the fourth installment in his biography of Lyndon Baines Johnson, and Gail Collins' *As Texas Goes ... How The Lone Star State Hijacked the American Agenda.*

Our books issue wouldn't be complete without recognizing *Librotraficante,* a word play on trafficking and books. Earlier this year, when the Tucson school district removed books taught in Mexican-American studies classes from high school classrooms, artists and writers in Texas organized to symbolically "return" the books to Arizona. The caravan, which traveled from Houston to Tucson, underscored the power of books to shape both individual identity and political discourse.

Candace Lopez, a freelance writer for the *Observer,* explained her reaction when she read the list of books removed from Tucson classrooms: "I saw *Occupied America*, *Borderlands*, *The House on Mango Street* and other texts by Chicano authors that had played a profound role in shaping my pride and confidence as a Latina. Imagining someone taking that from me is aching."

That's the power of words.

—Susan Smith Richardson



Illustrations by Wesley Allsbrook

FALL BOOKS

[SHORT STORY CONTEST WINNER]

Water Birth

by **Larina Lavergne**

I WAS BORN IN WATER.

I read recently in a fancy magazine I swiped from the bookstore on Blount Street that that's what rich women in rich places are doing—natural water births in a special kind of tub with a birth coach and a midwife. Heck, maybe they even have a staff of nurses and doctors around to hand out cigars after it's all done.

The water is important physically and psychologically for the newborn, because it simulates the safe environment of the mother's womb, thereby reducing the trauma of the transition for the baby.

The woman who wrote that article has a Ph.D. According to the little author's bio, she is a professor, writer, pundit and apparently super-mom. Her name is Marsha Longfellow, she is pregnant again (six months) and has decided on a water birth for her next baby.

It's a nice thought, a nice idea, and I'm sure some women spend many hours thinking about it and planning the perfect birth right down to the water temperature and depth, what music to play, what natural foods to consume during the nine months.

My mama didn't quite plan my water birth the way Professor Longfellow and her readers are planning theirs. She didn't quite plan anything, actually.

My mama didn't quite plan my birth the way Professor Longfellow and her readers are planning theirs.

I'm listening to the story for the hundredth time. I'd come over to Skelly's to bum a cigarette and to look for Tommy; I should've known Skelly would corner me and we would have to dance this sad, broken dance, in this sad, broken room of his sad, broken trailer.

He tells me the story every time I see him, if he can get me to stay long enough. The words are the same each time; the setup never changes. He'll cough his way through a wheezing laugh, his lips will pull apart like a drying scab, and I will stare at his yellow, gritty incisors as he points out the window at the dirty plastic wading pool by his trailer. The pool is so old now, mold has blackened half of its bottom, and because Skelly always forgets to cover it, there are scummy things floating around in the rain from the night before.

"We were sittin' by the fire outside, though we sure as hell din't need it cuz it wuz so hot. Shuld've been cold that late in the year." I can see his tongue peeking between gaps in those yellow teeth as he speaks and enunciates words differently from how they're spelled, like our people do.

The tongue disappears and reappears like magic, a little purplish rabbit in a moist red hat. "We just got the dang plastic pool too, got it off Mr. Simmons in that house down the street who done gone decided to get a bigger one in his backyard."

I stare, perfectly still, knowing he's not going to let me leave without retelling the story. I really need a cigarette now, but Skelly will not be interrupted when he's on a roll.

"Yer mama, she wuz tweaked out and drunk, running around and singing all night long at the top o' her lungs, and everyone yellin' at her to shut her trap, but she just kept on with that danged singing."

I concentrate on the flecks of spittle against the bristles of his half-hearted moustache. They remind me of this poem I read recently about drops of dew on grass at dawn—they might both have the same kind of texture, and in the same way, Skelly is like Robert Frost.

Skelly hitches up his pants and lets out a loud groan, rubbing his bad back. He's distracted for a few precious seconds, and I seize the opportunity to inch away, but he anticipates me, moving with some difficulty to lean against his armchair and block my path.

I sigh.

He's now at the part where he saw my mother stumbling over toward them.

"She so danged big with you, she looked like she wuz gonna pop any second now."

Skelly coughs again and can't seem to stop. When he finally emerges from that ecstatic fit of wheezing, he looks at me with a dreamy gaze. "You know, you look juz like her when she wuz growin' up," he muses. "Hair the color of night so dark you could go blind looking, and eyes so big there warn't hardly any room fer nuthin' else."

I say nothing—it's best to say nothing. Skelly blinks and goes on with his story.

"I tol' her she wuz gonna hurt herself with all that prancing around, but she juz laughed at me when I yelled at her to get her ass back home. Then she snatched my bottle and went and sat in the pool, and she just continued drinking and laughing, and singing in the water."

Skelly gestures at my birthplace but I don't bother to look.

"It wuz so dark, the fire was out, and she wuz still sitting there. I wuz done ready to go to bed, and I shouted at her to go back home, don't let me catch ya tomorrow morning passed out in my pool like the last time. And as I wuz walking up the stairs, then she started screaming and cursing, and motherfucker can yer mama scream and curse."

I sweep my gaze around and finally catch sight of what I came here for on the counter in the kitchen. As he's in the middle of a sentence, I sidestep him with a swift move and ignore his wounded look. I grab a cigarette from the packet of Marlboros lying on the counter and walk slowly back to him.

Skelly digs into his trouser pocket and gives me a light. "Those things will kill ya," he says gruffly. I don't even pause to think how random that statement is.

He continues: "She din't stop screaming and cursing, and we wuz like, 'What the hell?'"

I take a drag of the cigarette and savor the grimy smoke at the back of my throat. It'll be over soon, I think. He should be almost done. There's a patch of

sunlight that has landed on my forearm, illuminating the fine hairs on my skin. The prickly summer heat almost seems to attack each individual hair, blanketing me with a million pinpoints of warmth. The patches of light on my arm are strangely fascinating, and I move my arm up and down, watching them dance and struggle to keep up, imagining the heat curl around their edges. Skelly furrows his brow, wondering what I'm doing, but then he decides it's not compelling enough for him to pause in the middle of his story to ask.

"And I go over, I'm sayin' to her, 'What's wrong, Maddie? What's wrong?' And she just screamed and screamed, and I'm holding her. We're both in the pool now. And she's saying, 'motherfucker fuck fuck fuck,' and Michael wuz just standing there, looking like the screaming wuz hurtin' his head."

Michael was my father, I think.

"And then you popped out."

There's a strange, terrifying note of tenderness in the old man's voice. He lays his hand on my arm, covering the patch of sunlight, which makes me temporarily angry before I remember I don't need to be angry about anything, really.

"I goddamn birthed you in water, right here, seventeen years ago," he says. "Cut the cord with my own goddamned scissors. With my own goddamned hands." He holds them up, displaying those marvelous birthing hands. I notice that the yellowed fingertips are the same color as his teeth, but that doesn't bother me as much as when my gaze falls upon a big pair of shears hanging by the door. They're rusty and blackened with dirt. I shudder, imagining them ripping and slicing roughly through an umbilical cord.

He follows my gaze.

"No, heck, that warn't it," he assures me. "We used them bright shiny ones, from the kitchen."

He reaches out then, and I hand him the cigarette I'm smoking. He takes a drag but doesn't hand it back immediately. I eye it as wafts of smoke curl around the tip and rise to the ceiling.

So far, I haven't said a word. I'm thinking about my mother now. My entire life, my mother has barely tolerated me, and she's done her best to distance herself from me. She was never around much, and my earliest childhood memories are of Skelly and Tommy, and then Beau. I can see them so clearly—Skelly barbecuing, Tommy and me playing, and Beau with his dusty cowboy hat dancing the two-step with my mother. In contrast, I don't see my mother. I think I've absorbed her through smell, hearing and touch, and seeing her ... hurts. I can't explain it, but when I think about my mother, I *feel* her, and it's always a painful feeling.

"You alright?"

Skelly eyes me cagily, sensing that I've stopped listening to him. He takes another puff on my cigarette and I nod slowly as he continues his monologue.

"That Michael wuz no damned good," he proclaims. "Big baby who ran out at the first sign things weren't all peaches and cream. A real prince. And Beau. Now don't get me started. Yer mama could do a whole lot better, let me tell you."

I listen a few more minutes to him as he rants about my mother and the mess she's made of her life, and the blasted men who can't keep their hands off her. And then I can't stand it any longer. Mid-sentence, I push past him and I'm at the door, my hand on the handle. He looks stricken, and he sounds suddenly fearful.

"You leavin' so soon?"

Skelly's lonely, but we're all lonely.

I don't answer and turn away, walking out the door and racing down the steps and across the grassy patch in front of his trailer. I have to circle the pool of my birth in all its scummy glory, and I try not to think about how lucky I am not to be retarded, brain-dead, or just plain dead. Instead, I think about professor Marsha Longfellow.

Simulates the natural environment of the baby.

Reduces the trauma of the transition for the baby.

I don't know why I look back, but I do, and I see Skelly outlined in the doorway. He's a black figure against the light of the blinding Texan sun and I know suddenly, with a conviction that almost saddens me, that he's going to die soon.

As I'm watching, Skelly lifts his hand. I think he's waving goodbye at first, but instead his fingers go to his lips and he takes a drag from the cigarette.

I'd forgotten to take the cigarette back from him. ◘

I listen a few more minutes to him as he rants about my mother and the mess she's made of her life.



Born and raised in Singapore, Larina Lavergne now resides in North Carolina, where she works in power grid engineering and clean energy. In between writing novels, she likes to fly aerobatics—the world just looks a lot better upside down.





John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Baines Johnson and Houston Congressman Albert Thomas campaigning in Houston in 1960.
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LBJ LIBRARY

Power Politics

Books about Texas, the presidency and national politics remind us that the Lone Star State has a long history of influencing the country's agenda.

by **Susan Smith Richardson**

Aside from being Texans, John Nance Garner and Lyndon Baines Johnson had something else in common. As vice presidents, they were eclipsed by charismatic commanders-in-chief: Garner by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Johnson by John F. Kennedy.

As Robert Caro writes in *The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, the newest and fourth volume in his biography of LBJ, the once formidable "master of the Senate" had been relegated to the outskirts of Camelot, pining for an invitation from Kennedy to the throne room. The Ivy League circle embedded at the White House and in the Washington, D.C., social scene derided LBJ as "Uncle Cornpone," a swipe at his Texas drawl and awkward demeanor.

Caro and Collins capture Texas and Texans at two very different stages in the state's political progression: The Texas of LBJ and the Texas of the tea party.

Sam Rayburn, the longtime U.S. House Speaker from Bonham, had warned LBJ that the vice presidency was a powerless position. John Nance Garner, known as "Cactus Jack," once told Rayburn the job was not worth "a bucket of warm piss," Caro writes. Roosevelt had selected Garner, a former House Speaker, as his running mate in 1932 after the Texan failed to get the Democratic presidential nomination. In 1941, Garner retired to Uvalde, done with national politics. In 1963, an assassin's bullet made LBJ president.

After three years out of power, Johnson was back.

The Bushes—George Herbert Walker and George Walker—eventually followed LBJ in the office, though plenty of other Texans had designs on the presidency and fell short. Most recently, Gov. Rick Perry briefly rode the tea party wave before wiping out during the



In June, Texas congressman and presidential candidate Ron Paul addressed the state Republican convention.
PHOTO BY RON T. ENNIS/ *FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM*/ ZUMAPRESS.COM

Republican primaries. The anti-Washington, limited-government politics that fueled his candidacy are analyzed in Gail Collins' *As Texas Goes... How the Lone Star State Hijacked the American Agenda.*

The Passage of Power and *As Texas Goes...* reflect the ongoing fascination with the state, its political progeny and the influence they exert over the national agenda and the presidency. Caro and Collins capture Texas and Texans at two very different stages in the state's political progression: The Texas of LBJ and the Texas of the tea party.

"The whole sense of the Texas-ness of Texas was interesting to me, " Collins said in an interview with the *Observer*. She had never encountered a place where the residents were so wedded to a state identity and where the politics were so influential.

"The influence the state has had over the Republican Party since it became a Republican state is best reflected in the tea party," says Collins. "[Former House Majority Leader] Dick Armey was one of the original founders and organizers of the tea party. Before it became more socially conservative, Ron Paul was one of the original intellectual guiding lights of the tea party movement. It very much has a Texas energy to it.

"When wonderful and very smart journalists from Texas call up and have arguments with me for the benefit of a radio station, one of the things they say is that I'm misjudging the Republican Party in Texas, that there's a lot of old establishment Republican

"The influence the state has had over the Republican Party since it became a Republican state is best reflected in the tea party."

spirit still in Texas. ... The tea party end seems very ascendant to me right now."

Armey recently told CNN's Soledad O'Brien that President Barack Obama is the "biggest threat to our liberty in the history—in our lifetime."

Long before Dick Armey and the tea party, Texans had ascended to national power with a relatively liberal brand of politics.

"The peak of Texas power was 1930 to 1948," says Walter L. Buenger, a history professor at Texas A&M University. "There was Rayburn, Garner and other influential committee chairs and leaders."

Part of the state's influence was due to the long tenure of its congressional members. "Texans had the habit of re-electing people over and over again," Buenger says, citing Congressman Wright Patman of Cass County in northeast Texas, among others. From 1928 to 1976, Patman was a member of the powerful House Committee on Banking and Currency, now the House Committee on Financial

Services, and served at times as chair. Rayburn was House Speaker for 17 years and a congressman for almost 49 years, arriving when Woodrow Wilson was president and departing under Kennedy.

Before "the modern period," Buenger says, Texas had "liberal politicians of considerable importance.

"The tea party end seems very ascendant to me right now."

Sam Rayburn was liberal by modern standards, a staunch supporter of the New Deal. Wright Patman was more liberal, and senators were more liberal." In *Unprecedented Power: Jesse Jones, Capitalism, and the Common Good*, published last year, Steven Fenberg chronicles the Houston businessman who helped FDR revive an economy on the rocks during the Great Depression.

Texas' influence on the presidency predates the New Deal. Another Houstonian, Edward M. House, was a close advisor of President Wilson, working as a foreign policy emissary in Europe. And there were Texans in the cabinet and in positions of power in Congress when Wilson was president, including a young Rayburn.

"Most in those days were Democrats," says Buenger. There had been a long string of Republicans before them, but "until recent times, [Texas' influence] has been in Democratic administrations."

For a long time, the former slave-holding states rejected the Republican Party as the party of Lincoln, who ended slavery, and the party that established Reconstruction in the South. As a result, the Texas Democratic Party was a big tent (for white politicians) with three distinct factions. "You could think of one faction as the conservative business; one faction as rural insurgents, populist types; one faction as progressive modernizers," Buenger says.

Successful Texas politicians learned to juggle the factions and align two of the three to win elections. They learned to compromise, Buenger explains, to "seize the middle ground and make deals."

When the Republican stigma began to fade, conservative Democrats started joining the party.

"The more interesting thing is since about 1985 Texas has grown more conservative: whether it is a leader in this movement or has followed the pattern of California, I don't know," says Buenger, who has yet to read Collins' take on state politics.

Collins argues that Texans' conservative worldview is shaped by what she calls "the law of empty places." As if in a time capsule, Texans view themselves as rural folks who don't need government interfering in their lives, rather than as residents of a largely urban state.

Texas' politics may have changed since the days of LBJ or even those of George W. Bush, but the state is still a major player. According to Collins, Texas has already had an impact on the presidential election. Although he's "not normally a Texas kind of individual," Collins say, Texas put Mitt Romney over the top in the Republican primaries, even though his track record has been to fix government rather than grind it into the dust.

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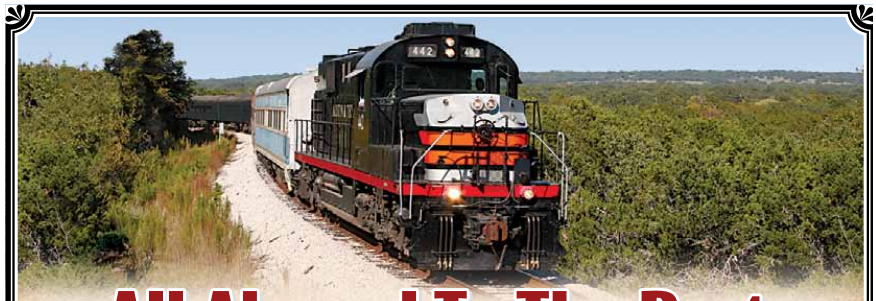


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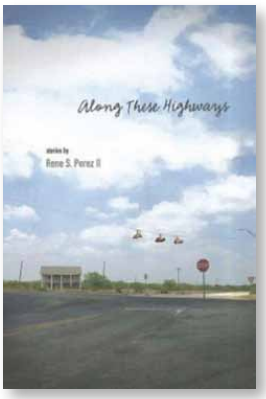
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BOOK REVIEW

Lost in South Texas

by Richard Z. Santos



ALONG THESE HIGHWAYS
By Rene S. Perez II
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA PRESS
152 PAGES; $16.95

Everyone in *Along These Highways*, Rene S. Perez's fine, slender debut collection of short stories, wants to be someplace else.

These people, mostly young Latinos in small towns across South Texas, are trapped in cycles of poverty, crime and crushed aspirations. Perez's work succeeds by examining cultures and places that have often been ignored. He also resists (for the most part) melodrama or letting his characters wallow in self-pity.

The first story, "One Last Drive North," establishes a serious tone and the specter of death and violence, which recurs throughout the book. Alfredo, undertaker of the fictional town of Greenton, embarks on his final drive to San Antonio to pick up a body. These solemn excursions, sometimes with his son, provide Alfredo with some small solace.

Temporary reprieves from their own lives, whether in a van with a corpse, in a familiar bar where nothing ever changes, or in the town's first Starbucks, are the best these characters can hope for.

Violence and crime play a central role in several of the stories. The characters in "The Art of Making Something Out of Nothing" are impulsive kids trying to pull off a major drug deal. Yet not all the stories are violent. The quiet, tender stories in which Perez explores love and resigned suffering are some of the strongest in the collection.

"Remember, Before You Go" follows Joey and his best friend J.R. the night before Joey ships out to Iraq. The young men drink, horse around, and generally act like nothing matters. The final pages peel away layers of machismo: "Joey felt briefly again J.R.'s tears. J.R.'s embrace wasn't tight or strong, but secure and unrelenting. ... Then J.R.'s hold broke and his right hand rose to Joey's neck, his thumb and forefinger pushing ever so slightly up into Joey's hair. J.R. pulled his head back slightly to meet Joey face-to-face." There are obvious romantic undertones to their goodbye, but this story also reveals two sad, scared boys.

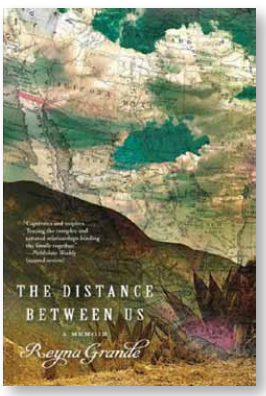
Most of the writing in *Along These Highways* is clear and lucid, with a modern, intelligent feel. The shaky signs of a debut collection can be most clearly seen in Perez's dialogue, which can feel wooden. Also, at times the requisite epiphany at the end of the stories can feel forced or obligatory. Yet Perez mostly resists easy conclusions. Just because these characters know they're in trouble doesn't mean they'll be able to change.

Richard Z. Santos' fiction and reviews have appeared in multiple national publications and websites. He is currently working on his first novel, a literary thriller set in New Mexico.

BOOK REVIEW

The Other Side of the American Dream

by Robert Leleux



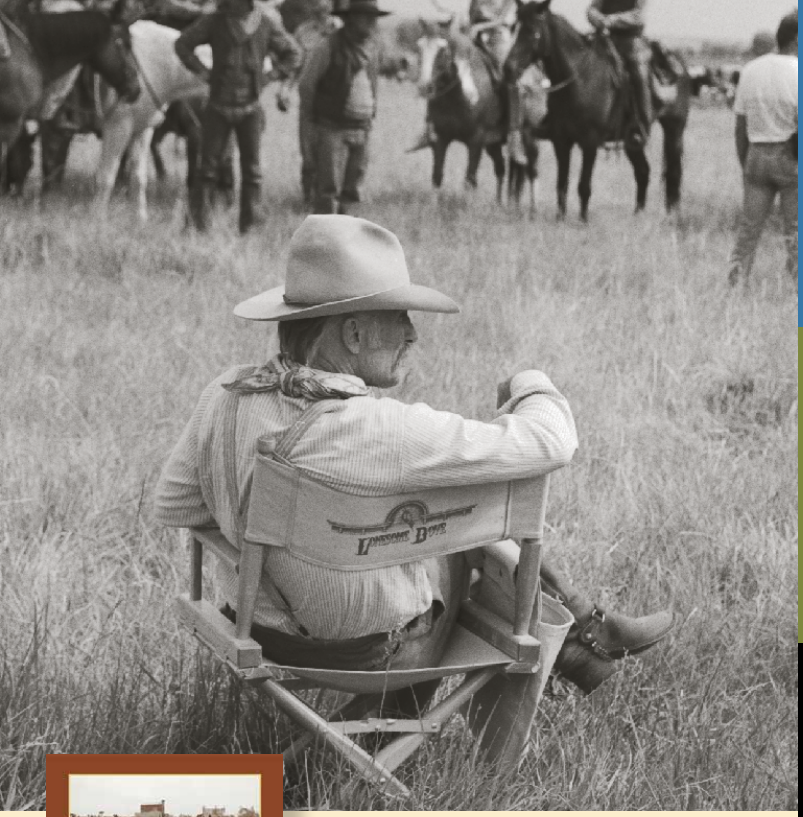
THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US: A MEMOIR
By Reyna Grande
ATRIA
352 PAGES; $25

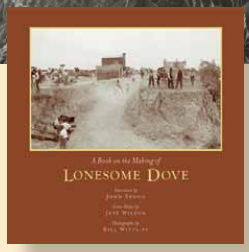
Many of us find it difficult to practice diplomacy with our relatives. But when typical family squabbles are complicated by national borders—as they are in Reyna Grande's excellent new memoir, *The Distance Between Us*—the stakes are raised far higher than "Who's cooking Thanksgiving dinner this year?"

Grande's story begins in 1980 in Guerrero, Mexico, when her mother, a headstrong romantic, leaves her three small children with their thorny *abuela* and illegally crosses the border into "El Otro Lado" (which translates, evocatively, into "the other side"). She's in hot pursuit of her husband, who has been in Los Angeles for two years; but really, she's following that faithless old "American Dream." Given the context of the family's squalid, backbreaking Mexican poverty—rife with scorpions, lice and parasites—adult readers may sympathize with a mother temporarily leaving her kids in hopes of providing them with a better life. But for a child of 4 (Grande's age at the time of her mother's departure), the eventual prospect of middle-class comfort can't compare with someone to tuck her in at night. To the children of the Mexican underclass, Grande writes, America is often a spirit more dreadful than *La Llorona*, the banshee who roams the earth kidnapping disobedient youngsters. The United States is "a power" that overlooks children, but "takes away parents."

After their mother's migration, the lives of Grande and her siblings, de facto orphans, are characterized by loss; for years, their days are spent awaiting their parents' return. When their mother and father do return, they've been transformed by their North American experience. Moreover, everyday life—betrayal, adultery, child custody disputes—has sullied these sadder-but-wiser adults. After several tries, Grande's father succeeds in bringing his children to Los Angeles, but by then, this "dream come true" has been warped by the knowledge that reality rarely measures up to expectations.

In Los Angeles, Reyna Grande slowly begins to shine—as a student, award-winning author, and ESL teacher of immigrant children. In the latter role, she learns that "one in five children in U.S. schools have spent time away from a parent in the process of migration," she writes, a staggering statistic that helps fuel her writing, and her political awareness. In the end, Grande's life is incomparable to those of her parents', and yet her own American Dream has been realized because of their "vision of the future."





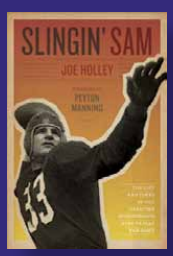
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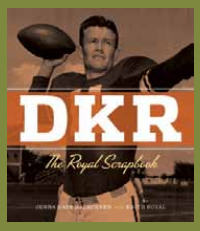


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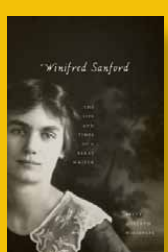
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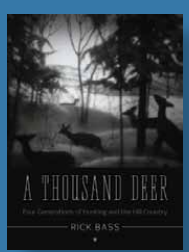


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Uncle Walter and Modern American Politics

by **Dan Oko**

As a young boy, the budding historian Douglas Brinkley followed Walter Cronkite's nightly broadcasts on the *CBS Evening News*. The legendary, late broadcaster was the anchor for 19 years, until 1981. Like a lot of families, the Brinkleys of Perrysburg, Ohio, relied on Cronkite for the day's news.

"That's how I found out about the world," Brinkley says. "I learned about civil rights, war, Watergate through Cronkite. I blocked some of that out as a professional historian, but growing up in the '50s and '60s, he was my babysitter; he was my information source. Whatever he said was considered the truth."

Brinkley's *Cronkite*, a wide-ranging, sharp-eyed, nearly 700-page biography, was published this summer.

A protégé of the late historian Stephen Ambrose, Brinkley, 51, has enjoyed a distinguished career as an author and educator and presidential historian. Brinkley is a history professor at Rice University in Houston and contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*, where he has written about figures in the pop-culture firmament such as Johnny Depp and Bob Dylan. In an interview earlier this year, Brinkley, who is based in Austin, told me that his subjects are unified by their "sustainable" participation in U.S. history.

Whether figures such as Depp will remain culturally relevant remains to be seen, but not Cronkite. Widely proclaimed "the most trusted man in America," he was an irresistible subject for Brinkley. "It's highly unlikely that we will ever see a Walter Cronkite again," he says. "Television now, with satellite technology, and YouTube and the Internet, has made that notion that you're going to have a person or one or two people that are trusted to distill news ... part of the bygone days."

Walter Cronkite at a TV studio in Washington, D.C., in 1954. PHOTO COURTESY DOLPH BRISCOE CENTER FOR AMERICAN HISTORY, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

IN *CRONKITE*, BRINKLEY COVERS the career highs and lows of the "Great White Father," a term employed by Ben Bradlee of *The Washington Post* after Cronkite's Watergate reports in 1972. Cronkite was born in Missouri but raised in Houston, where he was drawn to newspapers in high school. In the 1930s, he dropped out of the University of Texas to write about the Galveston nightlife. During World War II, he embedded with the U.S. military. Battle-hardened and professionally accomplished, Cronkite returned to Texas and joined the nascent CBS television network. His rise from cub reporter to international correspondent to heavyweight television anchor coincided with changes in broadcast journalism. Cronkite was part of an era when TV was defined by the Big Three: ABC, NBC and CBS.

Brinkley delivers a blow-by-blow of many of the major events that shaped the second half of the 20th century in America and illustrates how Cronkite, in many ways, became the embodiment of the changes taking place in post-World War II America. He helped television news gain legitimacy, as Americans witnessed worldwide events from the comfort of their living rooms. Present for presidential inaugurations from Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan, Cronkite also rushed to the broadcast booth that fateful day in 1963 when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. Baby Boomers may remember how Uncle Walter, an honorific given to Cronkite for his familiar presence, fiddled with his glasses before announcing Kennedy's death. Cronkite also covered Vietnam, including the fall of Saigon, the civil rights movement and the U.S. space program. Many credited his coverage of NASA and the moon landing in 1969 with helping to heal the nation following the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr.

The book has flaws. Brinkley gives short shrift to lesser-known figures and historical anecdotes that might bewilder readers born after 1965. Still, in a tumultuous new era of 24-hour news augmented by social networking, *Cronkite* offers a timely reminder that journalists, pundits and politicians should aspire to more than Stephen Colbert's "truthiness." Like the elected officials he covered, Cronkite discovered early on that television was a political game changer, capable of galvanizing support for candidates and vulnerable to manipulation by savvy campaigners. Brinkley drives home these points in chapters dedicated to Cronkite's relationships with various chief executives, especially President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

As the 2012 election comes to dominate the national airwaves, readers will find Cronkite's historic role in televising the presidency especially resonant. Before he emerged as the leading anchorman of his time, the newscaster coached Sen. John F. Kennedy and U.S. House Speaker Sam Rayburn in how to look good on television, offering tips on makeup, manners, diction and wardrobe. Cronkite, who covered both Democratic and Republican conventions, paved the way for the electoral contest to become part of the television landscape. Simultaneously, broadcast news paved the way for national conventions to shift from selecting candidates to crowning them.

During an interview, Brinkley offered further insight into this dramatic change. "Anybody who thinks you're going to have a brokered convention, they know nothing about politics," he explains. "TV killed the brokered convention in 1952, and it gave birth to our modern caucus and primaries. The primaries are the sausage factories. Two months before the election what you see isn't a nominating process, it's a coronation done with the trappings of whistles, balloons and smiles for public consumption."

CRITICS HAVE TAKEN ISSUE with Brinkley's analysis of Cronkite's impact in other areas, however. The author is on shakier ground when it comes to the impact of the newsman's famous 1968 Special Report broadcast, during the bloody Tet Offensive in Vietnam, when the Viet Cong overwhelmed U.S. and South Vietnamese military positions. In the July 9 issue of *The New Yorker* staff writer Louis Menand argues that Cronkite's



FROM TOP LEFT: Cronkite and Lyndon Baines Johnson; Betty and Gerald Ford; Fidel Castro; John F. Kennedy; in a reduced gravity environment, and with Robert F. Kennedy. PHOTO COURTESY WHITEHURST PHOTOS

declaration that the war was "mired in stalemate" did not have the influence over LBJ that Brinkley claims it did. Brinkley revisits the story that after the divisive broadcast, President Johnson declared: "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost the war." In his article Menand, who criticizes Cronkite and the book, says: "The trouble with this inspiring little story is that it is either invented or disputed." Menand cites a variety of sources, including Cronkite's own 1996 autobiography, as evidence that Cronkite's report did not drive foreign policy.

In his book, Brinkley notes that the LBJ quote is mired in "scholarly controversy," but claims regardless that Cronkite "grabbed America's attention about Vietnam in a way that would have been impossible for LBJ to have missed."

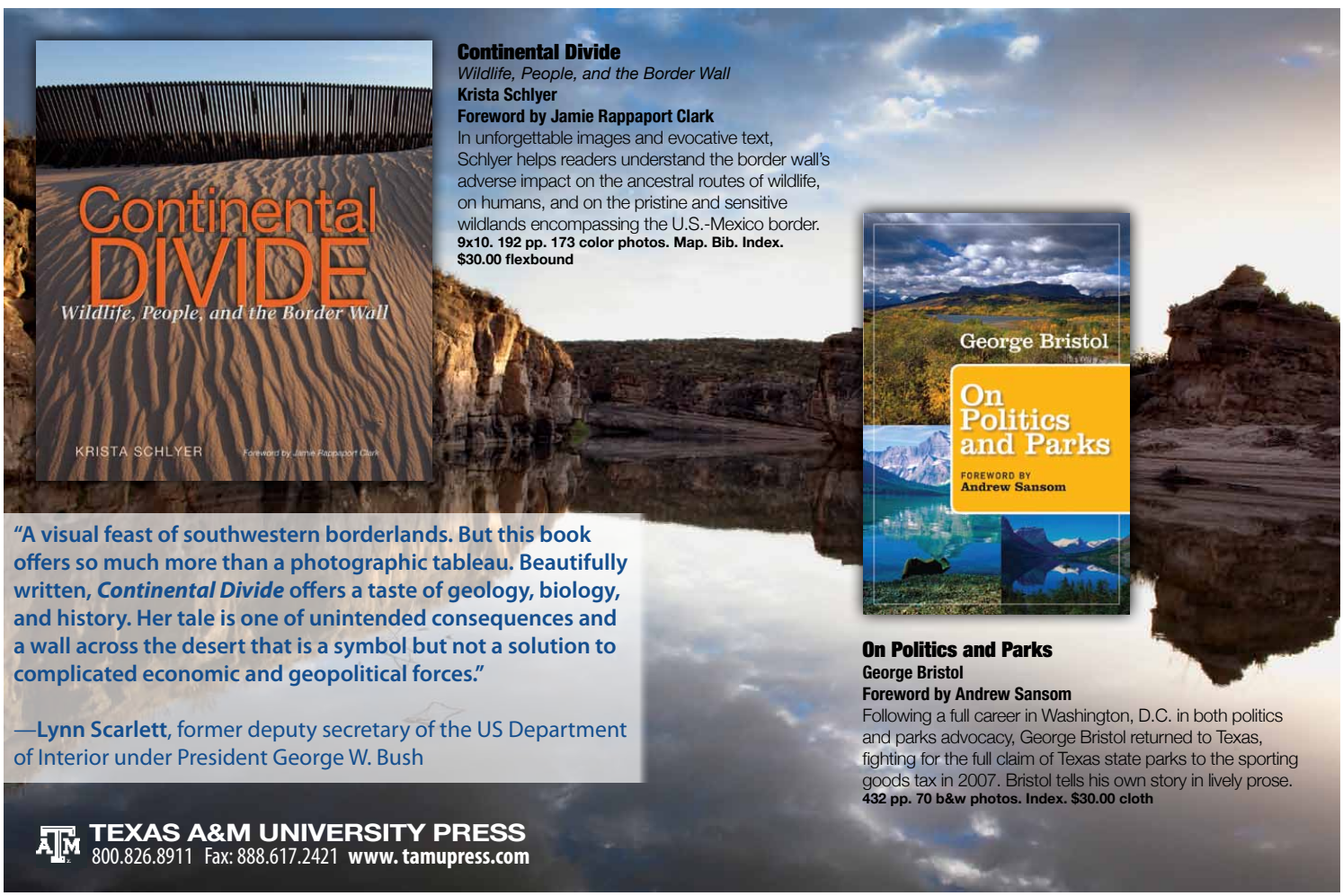
Brinkley writes: "That single *CBS New Special Report* guarantees [Cronkite's] status as legend."

Here, Brinkley comes under fire from journalists and historians for appearing to stake Cronkite's importance on that special report, rather than on the overall impact of his legacy. For example, when Richard Nixon became president, Cronkite and his colleagues at CBS encountered a much more disdainful bunch in the White House, with Charles Colson, special counsel to the president, helping lead the charge against the press. Forty years before anybody heard of the tea party, Vice President Spiro Agnew was attacking the liberal media, complaining about East Coast elites. Although Cronkite never landed on Nixon's infamous Enemies List, he and his colleagues were embroiled in a running battle with Tricky Dick.

Brinkley concludes that speaking truth to power made Cronkite a beloved figure among his fellow journalists and television viewers. Nonetheless, Cronkite was criticized by some journalists for asking softball questions, and didn't always hammer home the toughest points. The newscaster was neither the first nor the loudest critic of the Vietnam War, and he didn't wade into the mess of Watergate until *The Washington Post* made a solid case that crimes had been committed. Questions surrounding conflicts of interest and some less-than-savory aspects of the early days of television news—a junket here, the editing of an interview there—do damage to Cronkite's reputation. But Brinkley says that Cronkite really did aim to serve the public good.

The newsman didn't forget his Texas roots. His connections in Austin and Houston paid professional dividends, according to Brinkley, especially after LBJ became vice president. Indeed, whatever the fallout from Cronkite's on-air foreign policy analysis, the two stayed in touch well after television ceased to bring Vietnam into households across America. "It didn't hurt Cronkite having been from Texas to suddenly have Lyndon Johnson in the White House from '64 to '68. In fact, the last interview that LBJ gave was with Cronkite—again, because he had the Texas ties."

Freelance writer Dan Oko lives in Houston, where he is a contributor to Houston *magazine. His work also appears in* Garden & Gun, Audubon, *and* Texas Highways. *In 1981, when Dan was 13, his stepmother gathered the family to watch Cronkite's last nightly newscast. That's the way it was.*



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Krista Schlyer
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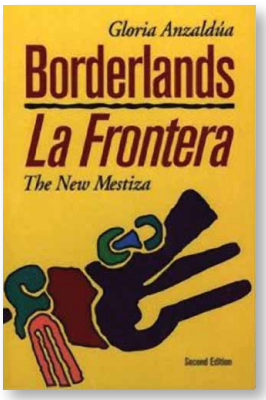
—**Lynn Scarlett**, former deputy secretary of the US Department of Interior under President George W. Bush

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George Bristol
Foreword by Andrew Sansom
Following a full career in Washington, D.C. in both politics and parks advocacy, George Bristol returned to Texas, fighting for the full claim of Texas state parks to the sporting goods tax in 2007. Bristol tells his own story in lively prose.
432 pp. 70 b&w photos. Index. $30.00 cloth

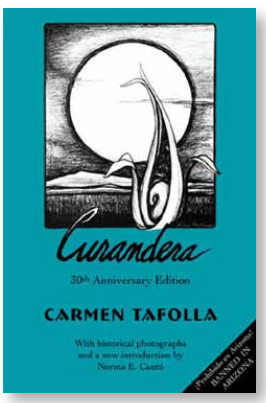
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Viva Los Traficantes

This year dozens of books taught in ethnic studies classes in high schools in Tucson, Arizona, were removed from classrooms, including nine by Texas authors. The decision was in response to a state law that bans ethnic studies as divisive. Houstonian Tony Diaz organized *Librotraficante*, a caravan that collected nearly 1,000 copies of the books and took them to Tucson. The *traficantes*, the name for caravan members, organized book readings along the route. Here are the books by Texas authors:



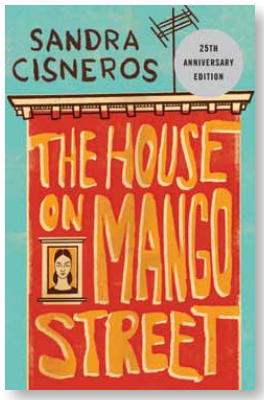
BORDERLANDS LA FRONTERA: THE NEW MESTIZA
by Gloria Anzaldúa
AUNT LUTE BOOKS, 1987.
The book pioneered the genre of *autohistoria-teoría*, a blend of theory and biography that combines prose and poetry in English and Spanish.



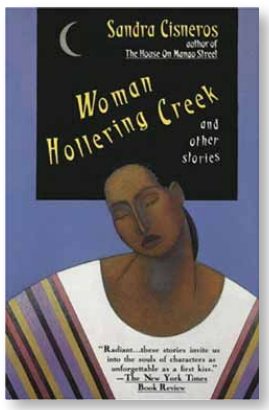
CURANDERA
by Carmen Tafolla
M&A EDITIONS, 1983
The poetry collection about Chicanos living in San Antonio is written in English, Spanish and Spanglish.



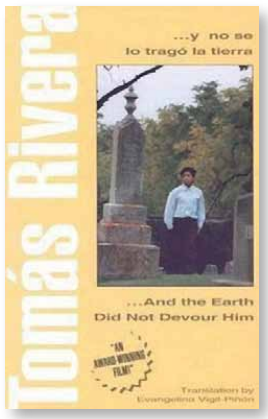
DRINK CULTURA: CHICANISMO
by José Antonio Burciaga
JOSHUA ODELL EDITIONS/ CAPRA, 1992
The collection of 26 essays written in English, Spanish and Spanglish explores the Chicano and Mexican American experience during the early days of the Chicano movement.



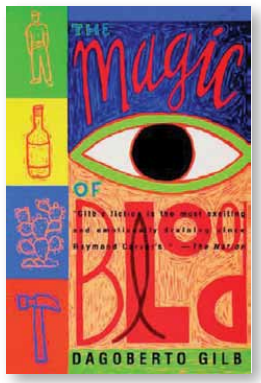
THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET
by Sandra Cisneros
VINTAGE, 1991
The coming of age story, first published in 1984, is required reading in middle and high schools and universities across the country.



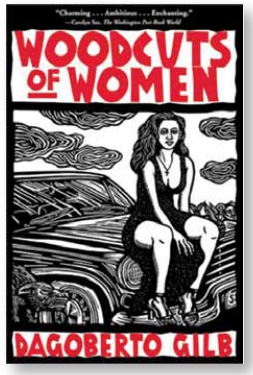
WOMAN HOLLERING CREEK AND OTHER STORIES
by Sandra Cisneros
RANDOM HOUSE, 1991
A collection of 22 short stories that capture life on the Texas-Mexico border from a woman's point of view.



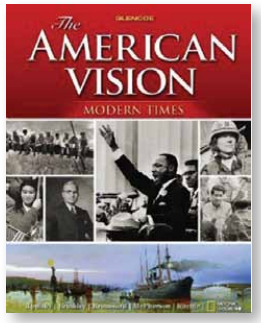
...Y NO SE LO TRAGÓ LA TIERRA/AND THE EARTH DID NOT DEVOUR HIM
by Tomás Rivera
QUINTO SOL, 1971
A standard in university ethnic studies courses across the country, the 14 short stories and vignettes document the lives of Mexican American migrant workers in the '50s.



THE MAGIC OF BLOOD
by Dagoberto Gilb
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO PRESS, 1993
A classic collection of 26 stories set in the Southwest explores the lives of working-class Chicanos.



WOODCUTS OF WOMEN
by Dagoberto Gilb
GROVE PRESS, 2001
Ten allegorical tales about working-class men obsessed with working-class women.



THE AMERICAN VISION: MODERN TIMES
by Albert S. Broussard, et. al
GLENCOE/MCGRAW HILL, 2002
The textbook chronicles American history after the Civil War.

FALL BOOKS

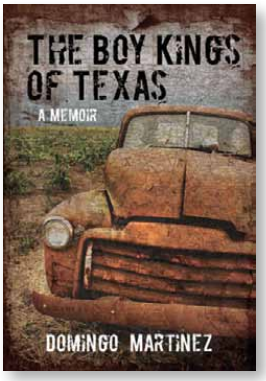
BOOK REVIEW

Coming of Age in Brownsville

by **Roberto Ontiveros**

IT HAS ALWAYS TAKEN A LOT OF GUTS TO WRITE UNFAVORABLY ABOUT ONE'S FAMily. Domingo Martinez, a Seattle-based writer who grew up in Brownsville, just might be one of the bravest memoirists around. In his first book, *The Boy Kings of Texas*, Martinez details his gritty upbringing by a philandering father who brags to his son about the women he's bedded and a mother who spends much-needed money consulting a *curandera* before her husband's attempts to smuggle pot. He describes two sisters who pretend to be white and wealthy by bleaching their brown hair blonde and referring to each other as "Mimi."

In Martinez's memoir, readers encounter the frustrations of a poor and brokenhearted Mexican-American kid who breaks into his old elementary school to weep in private and skips school to watch foreign films in a beachside hotel room. Martinez's family doesn't notice when he goes missing for weeks, and school officials tolerate his frequent truancy. The author describes his adolescence, in which he confesses a love of English New Wave bands and a hatred of American football, with a sense of humor



THE BOY KINGS OF TEXAS: A MEMOIR
By Domingo Martinez
LYONS PRESS
459 PAGES; $16.95

In his first book, Martinez details his gritty upbringing.



Martinez's grandmother, Virginia Campos Rubio, in Matamoros, circa 1950.
PHOTO COURTESY DOMINGO MARTINEZ

that borders on the absurd. There are familial conflicts and schoolboy pratfalls. Martinez unwittingly tries to buy drugs from his uncles. In a show of disloyalty, he lets his brother get his ass handed to him in a schoolyard brawl.

The Boy Kings of Texas is a spirited confession in the tradition of smart, self-deprecating comedies about young manhood like Robert Graves' *Good-Bye to All That* and early Philip Roth. Martinez weaves artful comic asides with anecdotes about poverty so crushing that it leads to the death of his friends. But humor can't mask the pain of poverty in this coming-of-age story.

Roberto Ontiveros is an artist, writer, and contributing editor to Latino Magazine *whose fiction has appeared in* The Threepenny Review *and the anthology* Hecho en Tejas.

BOOK REVIEW

A Dangling Metaphor

by **Nico Vreeland**

The Kentucky Club, a storied, once-elegant bar whose historic guests include Frank Sinatra and Marilyn Monroe, sits on Avenida Juarez, four blocks from the U.S. border in Mexico's most infamous city.

The bar appears in every one of the short stories in Benjamin Alire Saenz's book, though, contrary to the title, nothing begins or ends there. The Kentucky Club keeps Saenz's characters just barely in Mexico, mentally, if not always physically.

Each of Saenz's flawed young heroes lives in the U.S. but has family ties to Mexico, and each feels conflicted about abandoning his family's homeland. For these young men, Mexico is an abusive father whom they love (and hate), and whom they move away from reluctantly and only out of mortal fear.

It's an intense, nuanced metaphor—and it makes a great spine for a short story. The problem here is that Saenz makes it the spine of *every* story. Every story centers around a young man who doesn't need to live in Mexico, but can't bring himself to leave the country behind. Every story features an abusive father—not always the hero's, but usually close by—and a son's complicated quest to get away, and to find a more healthy kind of love.

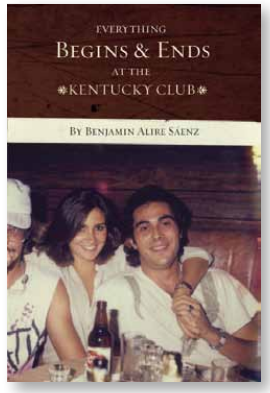
These stories share so many similarities that they begin to run together, and Saenz's style only exacerbates the problem. The author describes a protagonist's tryst with a new girl:

"God, we did everything together that night. She wasn't really a girl. She was a woman, much older than me. She had some real experience behind her and I learned more than a few tricks that night. Not that I hadn't imagined them."

That passage reveals nothing interesting or unique about the character. *Everything Begins and Ends at the Kentucky Club*, unfortunately, overflows with these generalizations, so Saenz's central metaphor never comes to life through his characters.

The metaphor is a fascinating idea. But a story collection needs more than one lofty metaphor (and one past-its-prime bar) to work.

Nico Vreeland lives and writes in Boston. He reviews books for ChamberFour.com.



EVERYTHING BEGINS AND ENDS AT THE KENTUCKY CLUB
By Benjamin Alire Saenz
CINCO PUNTOS PRESS,
180 PAGES; $16.95
273 PAGES; $29.95

BOOK REVIEW

A Soccer Team Mirrors Juarez's Decline

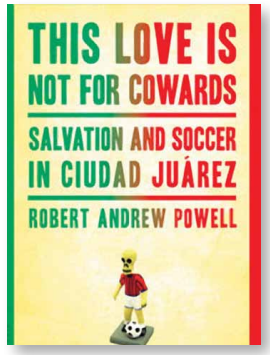
by **Christine Granados**

In *This Love Is Not For Cowards: Salvation and Soccer in Ciudad Juarez*, Robert Andrew Powell chronicles the downward spiral of a Mexican professional soccer team, Club Indios de Ciudad Juárez, into the minor leagues. The team's decline becomes a metaphor for Juarez's descent into violence and lawlessness.

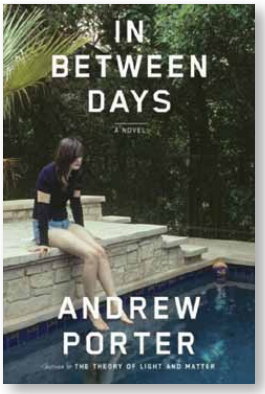
Powell's statistical research and vivid details about the murders and drug and human trafficking that permeate the city make this work of nonfiction difficult to put down. Powell is at his best when he lets the people of the border speak for themselves. An assistant coach of the Indios says about his country's blindness to the murders, "Juarez doesn't exist ... To the rest of the country, what goes on up here doesn't even happen." A conversation with an Indios fan, Saul Luna, who lives in El Paso, captures the fluidity of the border. "They call us *frontchis* ... [A perjorative term El Pasoans use for people from Juarez]. I wanted to stay in Juarez, but my parents were caught up in the American Dream and all that."

> Powell is at his best when he lets the people of the border speak for themselves.

Of the book's 23 chapters, the best is "The Dead Women," in which Powell offers a new perspective on the murders of women in Juarez. Nearly 700 women have been killed in the city since 1993, according to international media. Powell interviews Molly Molloy, a New Mexico State University librarian,



THIS LOVE IS NOT FOR COWARDS: SALVATION AND SOCCER IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ
By Robert Andrew Powell
BLOOMSBURY
272 PAGES; $25



IN BETWEEN DAYS
By Andrew Porter
ALFRED A. KNOPF
336 PAGES, $24.95

who works to dispel the femicide myth. "What is happening in Juarez is much more than femicide. It's a human-rights disaster," Molloy argues in the book, noting that 10 times as many men have been killed as women since 1993. The chapter could have been a book in itself.

Many of the other chapters read like journal entries, and are sprinkled with over-the-top soccer metaphors. The battles among cartel bosses for control of the streets are rendered trite with lines such as this: "Chapo Guzman stepped up his pursuit of Juarez, the World Cup trophy of drug routes." However, these flaws can be overlooked in favor of the book's greatest merit: Unlike other books about violence along the border, *This Love Is Not For Cowards* presents the daily lives of border residents in their own words.

Christine Granados is a mother, wife and writer, although not always in that order. Her writings have appeared in anthologies, journals, magazines and newspapers. She teaches at the University of Houston-Victoria.

BOOK REVIEW

A Nuclear Family Comes Apart

by **Steven G. Kellman**

THE TOXIC RADIATION EMITTED BY THE Hardings of Houston comes from the fission of a nuclear family. The fission also accounts for the power that Andrew Porter harnesses in his debut novel, *In Between Days*.

Once the hottest architect in town, Elson Harding has become a doleful lush who tries the patience of the 27-year-old museum curator he has taken up with after the collapse of his 30-year marriage. Cadence, Elson's ex, is mismatched with the instructor of a business course she took at Rice. The Hardings' son, Richard, a graduate of Rice, still lives with Cadence, and, despite literary talent and ambition, spends his days waiting tables and his nights hanging out at gay bars. What drives the plot of Porter's novel is the sudden return, mid-semester of her junior year, of Chloe Harding from venerable (and fictional) Stratham College in Massachusetts. All that her frantic parents know is that Chloe's involuntary leave has something to do with an Indian boyfriend named Raja Kittappa, and that their daughter has been implicated in unspecified felonious acts. Soon after returning to Houston, Chloe disappears.

Porter, who teaches at Trinity University in San Antonio, moves deftly in and out of the minds of Elson, Cadence, Richard and Chloe. Ashamed and confused over what happened at school, Chloe is reluctant to confide in anyone, and the reader learns only gradually, along with the rest of the family, her complicated secret. A Jamesian examination of character that dances a quadrille with the points of view of four Hardings, the novel sustains the taut suspense of crime fiction.

At the end of the first chapter, driving—under the influence—to Cadence's house to discuss their daughter's crisis, Elson becomes disoriented " . . . and realizes then, with something like panic, with something like fear, that he doesn't actually know where he is, that he must have made a wrong turn somewhere, that somehow, in this city where's he's grown up, this city where he's lived all his life, he is lost."

Porter knows his way around Houston, particularly Montrose and downtown. He also knows how to navigate a sentence. Except for Cadence's recurring sessions with a psychotherapist, manipulated to elicit information for the reader, the prose and pacing are nearly flawless. The title, though, is awkward and unenlightening, since most novels assume that everyone alive is always in transition. However, coming after *The Theory of Light & Matter*, his 2007 story collection that won the Flannery O'Connor Award, *In Between Days* confirms that Andrew Porter has arrived.

Contributing writer Steven G. Kellman teaches at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

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For nearly four decades, Ted Lyon and his legal team have represented clients injured through the negligence of others. The firm has tried cases throughout Texas and across the nation, helping people rebuild their lives resulting from a range of complex litigation cases, including motor vehicle, truck and bus accidents, personal injury and wrongful death accidents, products liability and business dispute cases.

"Clients need a legal team that has successfully tried a case like theirs before," notes managing partner Ted Lyon. "So the first question you should ask before hiring an attorney to represent you is 'When did you last try a case to verdict?' and further, 'Have you tried a case similar to mine?'"

As a former Texas State Senator, State Representative and police officer, Ted has had a lifetime commitment to serving people. His dedication has proven successful as he works hard to protect the rights of injured individuals and their family against negligent parties. Recently, Verdict Search's Top TX Verdicts recognized the firm for its verdict against Greyhound for clients who were injured when Greyhound's bus driver rolled a bus in icy conditions on the interstate. The verdict was:

- The largest motor vehicle accident verdict in the State of Texas in 2011
- The largest verdict against Greyhound
- The largest overall verdict in Dallas County in 2011

"When cases involve life-changing events and complex legal issues, clients need a proven legal team," Lyon says. "We approach our cases with the intensity and skill they require and deserve."

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THREATS was nominated for the prestigious Dylan Thomas Prize.

Austin's Literary Fairy Godmother

by **David Duhr**

AROUND THE TIME *FIFTY SHADES OF GREY* BECAME A WORRISOME phenomenon, a quieter novel, one without bondage porn or roots in *Twilight* fan fiction, was released by an author once described as "the fairy godmother of Austin writers." ¶ Six months later, *Fifty Shades* still dominates bestseller lists, while Amelia Gray's *THREATS* has been removed without ceremony from the New Fiction shelf. Such is life for a writer of literary fiction: Pour three years of toil into a novel and watch it outsold 1,000 to 1 by a fad.

Still, Gray gets her shots in where she can. In a blurb for Amber Sparks' forthcoming *May We Shed These Human Bodies*, Gray writes, "This book is amazing. Makes *Fifty Shades of Grey* look like *Twilight* fan fiction."

If this sounds like sour grapes you haven't spent much time with Gray, who is well known for owning a comedian's sense of timing and misdirection. She doesn't labor under naïve misconceptions about the proclivities of the reading public. "It was always clear to me that *THREATS* would never become a bestseller," she told me.

Gray set more modest goals for the novel, and recently she hit one: In July, *THREATS* was

Amelia Gray recently moved from Austin to Los Angeles.
PHOTO BY MATT CHAMBERLAIN

nominated for the prestigious Dylan Thomas Prize, an award of £30,000 (nearly $47,000) given annually to a writer between the ages of 18 and 30. The winner will be announced in November.

Plenty of Austinites will be rooting for Gray, but if she wins they'll have to celebrate without her—Gray now does her fairy godmothering in Los Angeles, where she moved in late 2011.

"My move to L.A. was less about Austin or L.A. and more about time," she says. "I did seven years in Texas between San Marcos and Austin, I met some of the greatest people in the world, but there was a moment when I just felt in my body that I'd done my time."

She left a mark on Austin's literary landscape that might never wash away.

Originally from Tucson, Gray came to Central Texas to earn an MFA at Texas State University, then spent the next several years in Austin. Working by day as a marketing copywriter, in her free time she knocked out enough short stories to fill two collections: *AM/PM* in 2009 and 2010's prize-winning *Museum of the Weird*.

She also founded the popular (and ongoing) storytelling series Five Things, a mix of oral, audio/visual and musical performance art that has since spawned several local imitations.

"The work [Gray] was doing and the string of shows that seemed to follow illuminated the shift in the story economy," says Lesley Clayton, who took over Five Things when Gray left. Rather than the traditional focus on the publishing side of storytelling, "the local, live show has taken over that role," Clayton says. "At least in Austin. I haven't submitted a story to a lit journal in years, but I'm on stage somewhere at least once a month."

Gray continues to take the stage herself, both in L.A. and on book tour for *THREATS*.

Written mostly in Austin, *THREATS* is an eerie, moody, atmospheric book about the mental unraveling that often accompanies grief. It's also a mystery novel, but one in which the mystery goes almost entirely unsolved—no surprise to any reader familiar with Gray's work. "I often have weird goals," she says. "One of the first here was to write a compelling mystery that would make the reader feel satisfied, but where nothing is revealed."

THREATS opens with a bleeding woman named Franny asking her paranoiac husband David to call the fire department; instead, David plants himself next to Franny on the stairs for three days as she bleeds out and (maybe) dies. "They leaned against each other and created a powerful odor," Gray writes. "In that way, it was like growing old together."

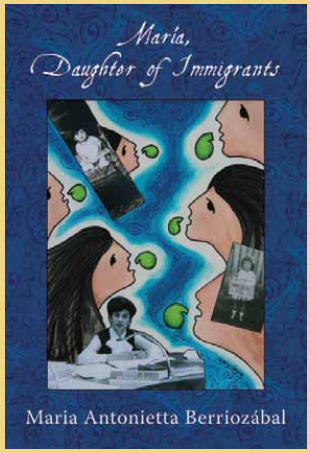
In the ensuing 70-plus rapid-fire chapters, David becomes the focus of a police and media investigation, and begins to find bizarre typewritten threats hidden around his house.

"I WILL LOCK YOU IN A ROOM MUCH LIKE YOUR OWN," one threat reads, "UNTIL IT BEGINS TO FILL WITH WATER."

As David's fears mount, he has trouble distinguishing reality from fantasy. Meanwhile, Franny, or her doppelganger, is spotted around town. Is Franny really dead? Who is writing these threats? How much of David's life is hallucination?

Gray goes out of her way not to answer these

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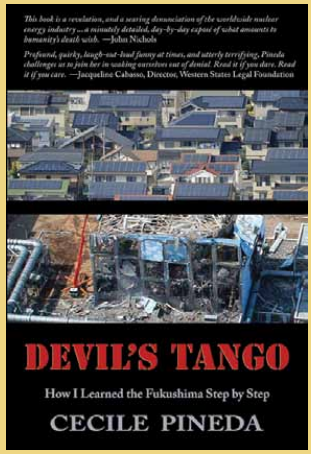
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by María Antonietta Berriozábal

"A rare achievement—both a landmark story of one bright life and a beacon for many others." —Jim Hightower

"A *testimonio* to a moment in women's history, in mestiza history, in the history of the borderlands." — Sandra Cisneros

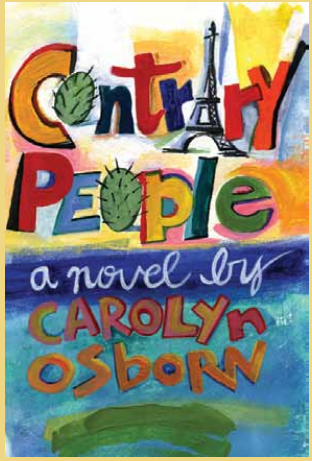
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ISBN 978-1-60940-244-0

Devil's Tango: How I Learned the Fukushima Step by Step
by Cecile Pineda



"Pineda's masterful framing of the urgency for readers to learn from the Japanese nuclear disaster and the machinations of its industry handlers makes *Devil's Tango* one of the most important and required reads this year."
—Jeff Biggers, *Huffington Post*

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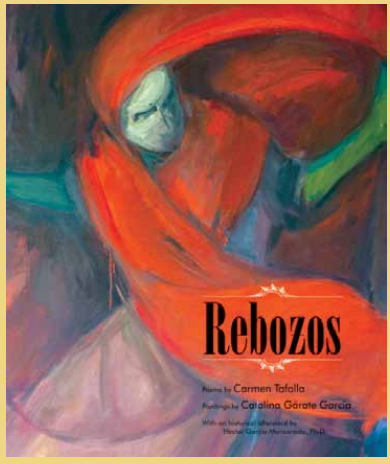
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Rebozos
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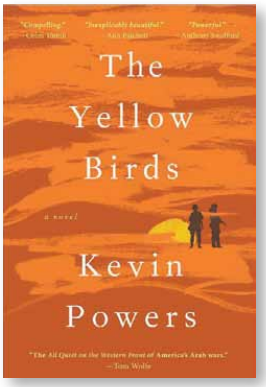
"An incandescent interweaving of poems and paintings depicting multiple patterns of women's experience." — Tomás Ybarra Frausto

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ISBN: 978-0-916727-98-7

questions, but attendees of next month's Texas Book Festival should get the chance to prod her for more details. This will be Gray's second return to Austin since she moved; if all goes well, on her third visit she'll be almost $47,000 richer.

Unless she spends the Dylan Thomas money as soon as it comes in. She's already done so in her mind, and in characteristic Amelia Gray fashion. How? "I think the obvious answer here," she says, "is the world's biggest ice cream cake."

Observer Fiction Editor David Duhr is co-founder of WriteByNight, a writing center in Austin.



THE YELLOW BIRDS
by Kevin Powers
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
$24.99; 240 PAGES

BOOK REVIEW

An Unforgettable War

by Ed Nawotka

FOR NEARLY A DECADE PUBLISHERS HAVE been filling bookstores with tomes about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. First came those from the embedded journalists; then the officers and politicians who led the wars, whether in Washington or on the battlefield; then the survivors, snipers, SEALS and soldiers with Silver Stars. These books will be quickly forgotten. Save for a few non-fiction titles about war, the books that linger longest are those by writers who transformed the events of the day with their imaginations.

Poets in particular have proven expert at capturing the emotion and terror of war. Think of Whitman writing about the Civil War, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon on the trenches of World War I, Auden and Eliot on the horror of World War II. Regarding our recent wars, one thinks of Brian Turner's 2005 volume *Here, Bullet*, a visceral manifestation, in poetry no less, of the life of a modern soldier.

Now we have *The Yellow Birds* by Kevin Powers, an Iraq war veteran and Michener Fellow in poetry at the University of Texas at Austin. Powers' novel relays the story of two Virginia boys—21-year-old Pvt. Bartle and 18-year-old Pvt. Murphy—from basic training at Fort Dix to the battlegrounds of Al Tafar, Iraq, and its stateside aftermath. Murphy ("Murph") never returns after a horrifying tragedy.

In Powers' depiction of military life in and out of war, he punctuates Wordsworthian passages of poetic stream-of-consciousness about nature and human nature with Hemingwayesque observations. (A vaporized body is described as "a perfect bloody angel made of dust.")

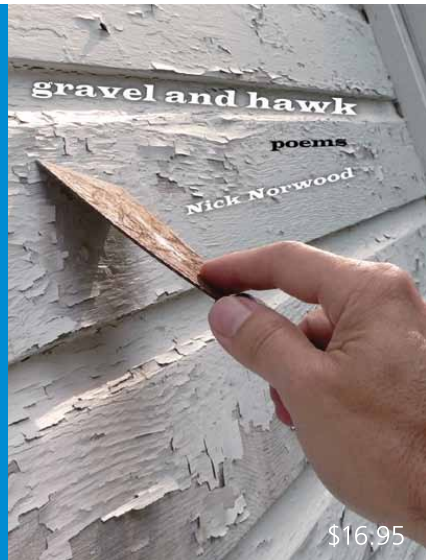
But what does it say about war today? Well, war is a "morbid geometry," and this novel delivers a close approximation of the mental anguish and loss that war inflicts on the sensitive and the barbaric alike. *The Yellow Birds* reads like one man's raw version of the truth, and you feel not only for, but with Pvt. Bartle. This does not make for easy or particularly enjoyable reading, but it is full of passionate intensity. Exactly what might give this particular book about war a chance to last.

Ed Nawotka is the Editor-in-Chief of Publishing Perspectives.com, a trade journal for the international book business. He lives in Houston.

Gravel and Hawk
poems
Nick Norwood

"Norwood writes vividly and with concrete, true detail about lives forged here in East Texas."
— *Texarkana Gazette*

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Winner of the Hollis Summers Poetry Prize

OCTAVO BEGINNING WITH TEPOZTLÁN

by Rosemary Catacalos

The house without a number on
the street without a name faces
east toward cliff-homed gods who do not
forgive all we forget and lose.

The same small house without address
sleeps deep — world over — in every
human cell, unceasing dream of
place, earth, a fruiting lemon tree.

Rosemary Catacalos lives in San Antonio and has been to the house in this poem.

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BILL MINUTAGLIO

STATE OF THE MEDIA

Does the *Picayune*'s Fate Portend the Future of Dailies?

IT'S THE KIND OF THING THAT ALMOST NO ONE WOULD NOTICE. THAT, IN AND OF itself, is part of a welling media problem. In New Orleans, the clerk of the Civil District Court, Dale Atkins, quietly released a mid-summer memo with this news tucked inside it: ¶ "The Clerk of the Civil District Court's Office has selected *Gambit* as its official journal for all advertisements required to be made in relation to judicial proceedings. Beginning August 1, 2012, all advertisements required to be made in relation to judicial proceedings for the Clerk's Office shall be placed in *Gambit*."¶ Atkins was telling the public that those small ads written in confusing legalese—and that are often found in the very back of newspapers—will be running in the alternative *Gambit* newspaper instead of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. Atkins announced that he was motivated, in part, by what might prove to be the real canary-in-the-coal-mine moment for mainstream newspapers in America. He said his decision, a financial knife in the back of the already staggering *Times-Picayune*, was guided by the fact that there is going to be a "reduction in the number of times the paper would be printed."

Come October 1, the historic *Times-Picayune* is scheduled to cease being a daily newspaper.

Come October 1, the historic *Times-Picayune*—the paper that won Pulitzer Prizes for its courageous coverage during and after Hurricane Katrina—is scheduled to cease being a daily newspaper. Newspaper executives announced plans earlier this year to cut back publication to just three days a week. If that happens it will be a watershed moment in American journalism, and could become the tipping point for the nation's large dailies. (Never mind that staffers at the *Times-Picayune* first learned about this when they read an article in *The New York Times*.)

Publishers everywhere, including Texas, are watching closely. *The Austin American-Statesman*—which rarely receives reassurances from its owner, Cox Media Group—must be studying the impact of slicing its seven-day-a-week publication schedule, cutting the print-centric staff and coalescing around its online operations in tech-friendly and tech-savvy Austin. If there were one place in Texas where the financial planners might want to go all-in on an online-only operation, it would be Austin.

Meanwhile, the executive overseeing the changes in New Orleans for Advance Publications, which owns the *Times-Picayune*, told the excellent media reporters at *Poynter Online* that he wasn't concerned with "how many days we publish but how well we cover the community." That sounds noble but it probably rings extremely hollow to the hundreds of staffers who have been forced out, or will be forced out, of the *Times-Picayune* because of publication cutbacks.

One *Times-Picayune* staffer has described the retrenching into the online operation as doubling down on an unproved bet—a gamble with livelihoods ... and a public's need for daily news. Not to mention that we are talking about New Orleans, a city that can shift on a dime, and that is often home to more human and natural disasters than many places in America. New Orleans (hell, the entire state of Louisiana) practically exists as a poster child for the need to have daily, constant, vigorous, intensive investigative and explanatory journalism.

A few folks in The Big Easy are howling in the face of the storm. The colorful owner of the local football and basketball teams offered to buy the paper but was basically told it was not for sale. Various citizen kings, community leaders, academics and artists have formed groups to lodge protests with Advance. You know people are pissed when both Mary Matalin and James Carville have joined the protest.

There have even been vague rumblings about big players ironically canceling even more advertisements in the paper unless Advance agrees to cancel plans to leave New Orleans without a daily newspaper. So far, it doesn't look like any of the moves has gained momentum.

Finally, some enlightened souls have suggested that Advance could have split the difference—keep some semblance of the daily print operation alive, but stripped down to the necessary essentials: hard news and investigative packages. That's the type of reporting that really changes lives, that people need to see in paper, in their hands.

Instead, Advance appears to be staying the course. And it might not be too long before publications in Texas make the same mistake.



FORREST WILDER

FORREST FOR THE TREES

What Does the 'P' Stand For?

Your great-grandfather was a United States senator. Your grandfather was president. Your uncle was president. Your dad was a governor. You're young, Hispanic, a veteran, handsome, well-spoken, coached by the best in the business. You speak Spanish and have degrees from Rice and the University of Texas School of Law. You're the only male in your family who isn't discredited, retired, senile, or dead.¶ For a decade you've enjoyed a sort of slow-motion coronation. For as long as you can remember, people have been whispering about your future. Congressman? Governor? President? Some call you "47." You can't help it—your name, it just rings out. George. P. Bush.

It seems "P" stands for *posiblemente.*

On the other hand, you haven't even run for public office yet. You're a 36-year-old private equity manager and inexperienced lawyer with a famous last name. It seems "P" stands for *posiblemente.*

You've been coy about entering "public service," as you humbly refer to your family's multi-generational accumulation of political power. "I'd love to keep the door open," you told the *Texas Tribune*. "Politics is in my blood."

By the way, what are your politics?

Even after the recent media hype, your beliefs are still a little fuzzy. Your interviews and speeches are almost always in soft-focus, replete with glittering generalities about leadership and blandishments about young people and Hispanics getting involved in the political process. On immigration, you've staked out a moderate if frustratingly nonspecific position. The GOP, you told reporters in July, needs to offer an "honest solution to the immigration problem," one that recognizes the "need for labor in our country and the need of enforcing, for purposes of national security, our immigration laws," according to *The New York Times*.

Your media appearances are brief and calculated. But occasionally a hard edge comes through. In August, you said on CNBC, "I don't think austerity should be a bad word," and urged the type of radical "entitlement reform" to Medicare and Social Security pushed by vice presidential pick Paul Ryan. And then, like that, the segment was over, and all we had was a parting shot of your pearly white anteriors.

You've been useful to the Republican Party as a recruiter and booster of Latino candidates. Through your Maverick PAC and the Hispanic Republicans of Texas, you've taken on the formidable task of bringing Latinos into the party. Incidentally, this work is also establishing a fundraising base and a network of supporters for you.

Your latest star turn comes in late August at the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Florida. With Uncle "W" unwilling to re-enter the "swamp" (his word) of politics, you'll be the only Bush there.

"It will be fun," you told *The Dallas Morning News*. "I'm just thrilled that I'm part of the effort to be involved politically at the national level through [Maverick PAC]. This has been a true labor of love." This is the sort of thing you're always saying—bland, vague, yet keenly aware of your own career arc.

But you'll have competition from another up-and-coming Texas Latino. In Charlotte, North Carolina, at the Democratic National Convention, Julian Castro will be giving the keynote speech. Can he reprise the 2004 breakout performance of Barack Obama? As you know, Castro is the mayor of San Antonio, the seventh-largest city in the U.S. and the center of Tex-Mex culture. He's 37, about your age; Harvard-educated; Catholic. Unlike you, his Spanish-language abilities are minimal.

His name has been bandied about—in *The New York Times Magazine*, no less—as potentially the first Latino president. Though his mother is a lefty Chicana activist who helped launch La Raza Unida in San Antonio, his politics are mostly middle-of-the-road, pragmatic, business-friendly. One of his big initiatives—building a "new energy economy" from the ground up—relies as much on harnessing cheap, fracked natural gas as on a bold push into wind, solar and energy efficiency. The plan largely turns on the top-down decision-making of CPS Energy, the city's giant utility. Frankly, it's Obamaesque: forward-thinking but technocratic, potentially transformative but also arguably a half-measure.

To expand pre-kindergarten for 22,000 kids in San Antonio, Castro is asking voters to approve a one-eighth-of-a-cent sales tax hike. I know what you're thinking: big city mayor proposing a tax increase in Texas? In the age of austerity? Bold move.

It's politically risky, maybe, but at least Castro has staked out positions. He stands for something.

What've you got?

EYE ON TEXAS **Jeff Heimsath**





BASTROP WILDFIRE *Bastrop*

One year ago the most destructive wildfire in Texas history erupted in Bastrop. The fire destroyed nearly 1,700 homes and killed two people. It spread so rapidly that many people had little to no warning about the situation.

Following firefighters for a day was a surreal experience. I had never seen such commitment to a job and attention to detail as when they walked through a smoldering moonscape that was once a neighborhood.

When the fires were extinguished and the media attention faded, the true hardships began for most people. Clean up took months, then the headaches with banks, insurance companies and contractors started. Putting the pieces back together has been a slow process that will continue for years to come.

See more of Jeff Heimsath's work at www.texasobserver.org/eyeontexas. CALL FOR ENTRIES: Seeking Texas-based documentary photography that captures the strangest state. Please send inquiries to smith-richardson@texasobserver.org.

YOUR MUTUAL FUND HASN'T QUITE BOUNCED BACK YET? WELL...



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