Episode 2: Voices in the Hall

Lesson Title: The Maestas Case: Challenging School Segregation in Colorado

Author: Whitney Gaskill

Episode Description

Voices in the Hall explores how diverse Coloradans fought for representation, civic participation and expanded civil rights across multiple generations. This story connects early struggles for inclusion with modern movements that reshaped Colorado's political and social landscape. Interviews with disability advocates, supported by accessibility subject matter experts, illuminate how Colorado became a focal point of disability justice.

Episode Inquiry Questions:

1. What strategies have people and communities used to influence change in Colorado? What were the outcomes of civic engagement?
2. Why is it important that diverse voices are heard by communities, as well as, local and state government officials?
3. Why is it important for those who are most impacted by an issue to be involved in creating solutions?

Lesson Abstract

Voices in the Hall focuses on activism and legal reform. This lesson will expand on that theme by allowing students to explore a landmark school desegregation case in Colorado history through primary sources, song, and present-day reporting. This lesson puts students in the role of investigator to discover what happened in the past to uncover this previously forgotten piece of history as well as evaluate present day efforts to make sure this story is brought to life. If you are limited on time, you could simply teach the first part of the lesson about uncovering what happened in the past through primary sources.

Grade Level/Time Needed:

4th Grade/1-1.5 hours

Lesson Inquiry Question

1. How did Francisco Maestas's activism on behalf of his children improve Colorado for everyone?

Supporting Questions:

1. What events led to this becoming a Colorado Supreme Court case?
2. What types of materials do we have that help us understand the events surrounding this case?
3. Does anything unfair seem to be happening?
4. What actions did Francisco Maestas take to get his voice heard?

Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. Analyze primary sources to understand one event, specifically the Maestas Case, in Colorado history.
2. Evaluate strategies for impacting change and keeping history alive.

Background Knowledge / Contextual Paragraph for Teachers:

In 1912, Railroad Foreman Francisco Maestas sought to place his son into the public school closest to their home. They were denied by the Alamosa Superintendent because all Mexican Americans were required to attend the Mexican School. The community united and petitioned for change with a resolution that was signed by the community. They were denied. They contacted the Colorado State Education Commissioner to no avail.

They staged a boycott in protest, an action the school district later seized upon to claim Maestas wasn't interested in his son's educational progress. The boycott went on for three months. The school did nothing.

The community organized further, with the help of the SPMDTU, America's oldest, and still active, mutual aid society, a Catholic Priest, and other key

community members, they raised funds to hire Denver lawyer Raymond Sullivan. Sullivan contended racial prejudice was a driving force behind school administration efforts and the Colorado Constitution prohibited discrimination based on race.

The lawsuit was the first time in the history of America that a court fight was made over an attempt to segregate Mexican Americans in school. Notably, the Maestas case is thought to be one of the first successful school desegregation cases in the country but was all but forgotten until very recently.

Building Background Knowledge for the Student

Voices in the Hall focuses on activism (people working together to stand up for what they believe in or correct an injustice) and legal reform (working to make laws fairer). Today, you will explore those themes further with an important court case that would have affected you if you were a student in Colorado 115 years ago.

If you lived in Colorado 115 years ago, your classroom would have likely looked very different. At that time, schools were segregated by race, meaning, students only went to school with other students who had the same skin color as them. Today, we know that students of all skin colors have the same abilities and potential and we believe that discriminating based on a person's skin color is wrong. Let's find out how our laws and beliefs have changed over time.

Lesson Sources:

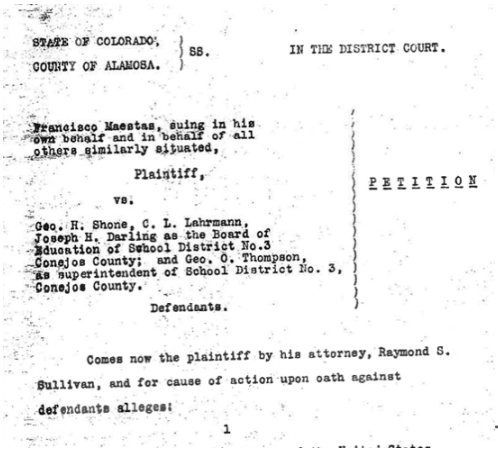
Use these sources to dig into the past during the first round of inquiry, "Investigating the Past:"

Source 1:



This is a map of Alamosa in 1912 at the time of the event. A teacher may choose to use this printable version, but the source is easier to explore on a computer with the option of using the zoom-in feature.

Source 2:



STATE OF COLORADO, } SS. IN THE DISTRICT COURT.
COUNTY OF ALAMOSA. }

Francisco Maestas, suing in his own behalf and in behalf of all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Geo. H. Shone, C. L. Lahrmann, Joseph H. Darling as the Board of Education of School District No.3 Conejos County; and Geo. O. Thompson, as superintendent of School District No. 3, Conejos County.

Defendants.

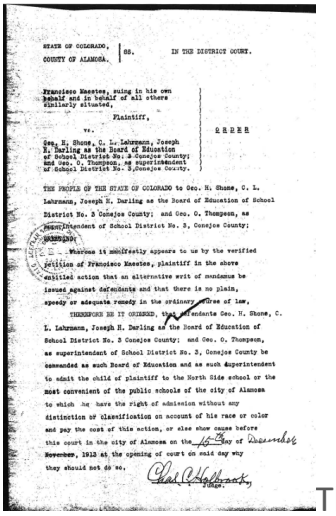
PETITION

Comes now the plaintiff by his attorney, Raymond S. Sullivan, and for cause of action upon oath against defendants alleges:

1

This is an excerpt of the original court documents detailing Maestas' complaint (pgs. 30-33).

Source 3:



STATE OF COLORADO, } SS. IN THE DISTRICT COURT.
COUNTY OF ALAMOSA. }

Francisco Maestes, suing in his own behalf and in behalf of all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Geo. H. Shone, C. L. Lahrmann, Joseph H. Darling as the Board of Education of School District No. 3 Conejos County; and Geo. O. Thompson, as superintendent of School District No. 3, Conejos County.

RULE

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF COLORADO to Geo. H. Shone, C. L. Lahrmann, Joseph H. Darling as the Board of Education of School District No. 3 Conejos County; and Geo. O. Thompson, as superintendent of School District No. 3, Conejos County;

GREETING:

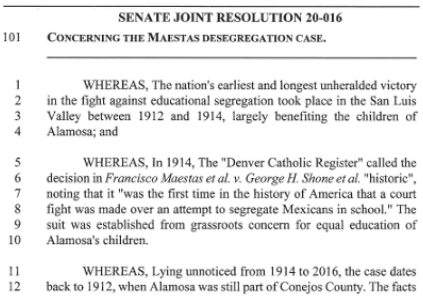
Whereas it manifestly appears to us by the verified petition of Francisco Maestes, plaintiff in the above entitled action that an alternative writ of mandamus be issued against defendants and that there is no plain, speedy or adequate remedy in the ordinary course of law,

THEREFORE BE IT ORDERED, that defendants Geo. H. Shone, C. L. Lahrmann, Joseph H. Darling as the Board of Education of School District No. 3 Conejos County; and Geo. O. Thompson, as superintendent of School District No. 3, Conejos County be commanded as such Board of Education and as such Superintendent to admit the child of plaintiff to the North Side school or the most convenient of the public schools of the city of Alamosa to which he have the right of admission without any distinction or classification on account of his race or color and pay the cost of this action, or else show cause before this court in the city of Alamosa on the 15 day of December November, 1913 at the opening of court on said day why they should not do so.

Clerk

This is another excerpt from the original court documents regarding the decision (pg. 35).

Source 4:



SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 20-016

CONCERNING THE MAESTAS DESEGREGATION CASE.

WHEREAS, The nation's earliest and longest unheralded victory in the fight against educational segregation took place in the San Luis Valley between 1912 and 1914, largely benefiting the children of Alamosa; and

WHEREAS, In 1914, The "Denver Catholic Register" called the decision in *Francisco Maestas et al. v. George H. Shone et al.* "historic", noting that it "was the first time in the history of America that a court fight was made over an attempt to segregate Mexicans in school." The suit was established from grassroots concern for equal education of Alamosa's children.

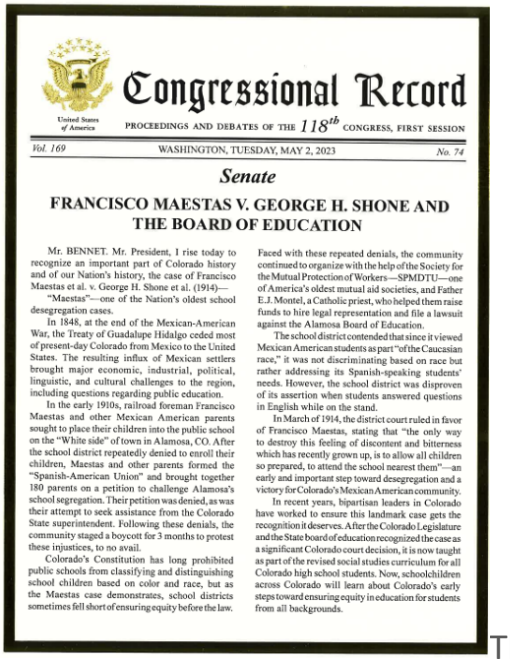
WHEREAS, Lying unnoticed from 1914 to 2016, the case dates back to 1912, when Alamosa was still part of Conejos County. The facts

This is senate joint resolution from the seventy-second Colorado General Assembly (2019) regarding the Maestas case.

Understanding the Case:

Use this [Rocky Mountain PBS video] to learn more about the case after exploring the primary sources.

Use these sources to understand how we are "Keeping the Story Alive:"



Congressional Record

United States of America

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 118th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 169 WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, MAY 2, 2023 No. 74

Senate

FRANCISCO MAESTAS V. GEORGE H. SHONE AND THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize an important part of Colorado history and of our Nation's history, the case of Francisco Maestas et al. v. George H. Shone et al. (1914)—"Maestas"—one of the Nation's oldest school desegregation cases.

In 1848, at the end of the Mexican-American War, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded most of present-day Colorado from Mexico to the United States. The resulting influx of Mexican settlers brought major economic, industrial, political, linguistic, and cultural challenges to the region, including questions regarding public education.

In the early 1910s, railroad foreman Francisco Maestas and other Mexican American parents sought to place their children into the public school on the "White side" of town in Alamosa, CO. After the school district repeatedly denied to enroll their children, Maestas and other parents formed the "Spanish-American Union" and brought together 180 parents on a petition to challenge Alamosa's school segregation. Their petition was denied, as was their attempt to seek assistance from the Colorado State superintendent. Following these denials, the community staged a boycott for 3 months to protest these injustices, to no avail.

Colorado's Constitution has long prohibited public schools from classifying and distinguishing school children based on color and race, but as the Maestas case demonstrates, school districts sometimes fell short of ensuring equity before the law.

Faced with these repeated denials, the community continued to organize with the help of the Society for the Mutual Protection of Workers—SPMDTU—one of America's oldest mutual aid societies, and Father E.J. Montel, a Catholic priest, who helped them raise funds to hire legal representation and file a lawsuit against the Alamosa Board of Education.

The school district contended that since it viewed Mexican American students as part "of the Caucasian race," it was not discriminating based on race but rather addressing its Spanish-speaking students' needs. However, the school district was disproven of its assertion when students answered questions in English while on the stand.

In March of 1914, the district court ruled in favor of Francisco Maestas, stating that "the only way to destroy this feeling of discontent and bitterness which has recently grown up, is to allow all children so prepared, to attend the school nearest them"—an early and important step toward desegregation and a victory for Colorado's Mexican American community.

In recent years, bipartisan leaders in Colorado have worked to ensure this landmark case gets the recognition it deserves. After the Colorado Legislature and the State board of education recognized the case as a significant Colorado court decision, it is now taught as part of the revised social studies curriculum for all Colorado high school students. Now, schoolchildren across Colorado will learn about Colorado's early steps toward ensuring equity in education for students from all backgrounds.

This is a [Congressional Record from 2023] detailing how the Colorado social studies standards have been changed to ensure that all high school students learn about the Maestas Case.



This is a [corrido], a traditional Mexican ballad, written by Dr. Antonio Esquibel to commemorate Francisco Maestas and his fight for justice.

This is a newspaper article from the *Alamosa Citizen* outlining two statues commemorating the Maestas Case at Adams State University and the State Capitol building.

Lesson Materials Needed:

1. Handouts for first round of inquiry: Investigating the Past
2. Handouts for second round of inquiry: Keeping the Story Alive
3. Written Document Analysis worksheet
4. Laptops or iPads
    a. If possible, email students the links for the second round of inquiry and allow them to explore on laptops or iPads so they can listen to the song at their own pace. Otherwise, teachers will need a way to play the song for the whole class. The map in the first round of inquiry may also be better suited to exploring on a personal device so the zoom feature can be utilized.

Lesson Instruction:

1. Tell students they are detectives looking into a court case that happened over a hundred years ago. Let them know until recently, this case had been largely forgotten, and it is their job to uncover the truth about it using documents from the past.
2. Post the following questions:
    a. What happened?
    b. How do you know?
    c. Does anything unfair seem to be happening?
    d. What actions did Francisco Maestas take to get his voice heard?

3. Help students understand how they can use this Written Document Analysis worksheet to investigate each of the clues in the case:
4. Distribute the first four primary sources and give students time to fill out the analysis sheet for each source, individually or in small groups.
    a. Handouts for first round of inquiry: Digging into the Past
5. Bring students back together to discuss what they have discovered as a whole group, revisiting the questions:
    a. What happened?
    b. How do you know?
    c. Does anything unfair seem to be happening?
    d. What actions did Francisco Maestas take to get his voice heard?
6. Tell students that they will now have their investigation confirmed or denied by a secondary source and show this video from Rocky Mountain PBS
7. Pause to revisit what happened and add to your group answers to the supporting questions. Address any misconceptions that may have arisen and replace that with new knowledge gained from the video. Ask, "What connections can be made to the primary sources?" "How did this help with your analysis of the primary sources?"
8. Now that students fully understand the Maestas Case ask:
    a. Why is this important to Colorado history? (it was the first successful school desegregation case put forth by Mexican Americans)
9. If time allows, give students three new sources to see what people are doing to keep this history alive today.
    a. Handouts for the Second Round of Inquiry: Keeping the Story Alive (Students will need a way to listen to the corrido either on personal devices or together as a whole group).
10. Bring students back together as a group to discuss what is being done to keep this history alive. Ask them to evaluate which strategy for telling the story they like the best (song, art, or education).
11. For closure, ask students to discuss:
    a. It doesn't seem like any Hispanic families were consulted when they first decided how to organize the Alamosa school district. How was

this improved when the Hispanic community decided to make their voices heard? Why should they have been involved in the decision-making process in the first place?

b. What would be the consequences if the story of this historic case continued to go untold?

Strategy Instruction Differentiation:

- Before beginning the primary source investigation, review whatever classroom protocols you utilize for students when they come across a word they don't know.
- If you think some of the primary source documents may be too dense for your students, consider highlighting key paragraphs for them to grapple with instead of asking them to read the whole thing. This way, they will still experience primary source analysis with a smaller chunk of text.
- Consider allowing students to make a choice about how they'd like to do the research; alone, with a partner, or with a teacher.
- The corrido is a *translingual* text, meaning it uses Spanish and English in an alternating fashion. Guide students to infer the complete meaning of the song using what they can understand, even if they don't know every single word. Use the experience to build empathy for the bilingual experience many students face in school all day every day. If you happen to have a student who is a skilled Spanish speaker comfortable with translation, consider letting this be an opportunity to put their skills on display to help non-Spanish speaking students understand the corrido more fully.

Assessment:

Exit ticket that addresses the two objectives:

1. Throughout this lesson, we saw how people in the past used their voices to correct injustice and how people today are using their voices to keep that story alive. List all the actions you learned about. Circle the one you believe has had the biggest impact and write two sentences describing why that action is so impactful.

a. Asking to attend the closest school, organizing the community, hiring a lawyer, bringing forth a court case, citing other Colorado laws, etc.
b. Researching, making an official proclamation at the Colorado General Assembly, changing Colorado school standards, writing songs, creating art, and telling news stories.

2. Why is the Maestas Case important to Colorado history?

2022 Colorado Social Studies Standards:

- SS.4.1.GLE 1.EO.a: Draw inferences about Colorado history from primary sources such as journals, diaries, maps, treaties, oral histories. Etc.
- SS.4.1.GLE 1.EO.b: Identify cause and effect relationships using primary sources to understand the history of Colorado's development.
- SS.4.1.GLE 1.EO.d: Identify and describe how political and cultural groups have affected the development of the region. Included but not limited to: African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Indigenous Peoples, Europeans settlers and religious groups.

2020 Colorado Reading, Writing, and Communicating Standards:

- RI.4.6: Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.

Extension Activities:

FacingHistory.org has a lesson about the more widely known school desegregation case- Brown v. Board. While designed for middle school students, this lesson allows students to extend their learning of the Maestas case into other significant school desegregation legal reform with the potential to compare and contrast the two efforts.

Additional Resources:

- Full court documents
- Website commemorating the Maestas case and its significance

STATE OF COLORADO,)
) SS. IN THE DISTRICT COURT.
COUNTY OF ALAMOSA.)

Francisco Maestas, suing in his own behalf and in behalf of all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Geo. H. Shone, C. L. Lahrmann, Joseph H. Darling as the Board of Education of School District No.3 Conejos County; and Geo. O. Thompson, as superintendent of School District No. 3, Conejos County.

Defendants.

P E T I T I O N

Comes now the plaintiff by his attorney, Raymond S. Sullivan, and for cause of action upon oath against defendants alleges:

1

That plaintiff is a citizen of the United States and of the State of Colorado and that he is a resident and taxpayer of the city of Alamosa in said State; that the defendants Geo. H. Shone, C. L. Lahrmann and Joseph H. Darling are the duly elected and acting members of the Board of Education of School District No. 3 Conejos County, and that the defendant, Geo. O. Thompson, is the duly appointed superintendent of School District No. 3, Conejos County.

11

That there are in the city of Alamosa approximately eight hundred Mexican persons, or persons of Mexican descent; that they reside in four settlements in the four corners of said city and that approximately one hundred and fifty of such persons are between the ages of six and twenty-one years; that said School District No. 3 Conejos County comprises three schools situated in the city of Alamosa,- one known as the North Side or High School, which is also a primary or grammar school,

situated in Ward one at Bell Avenue and Main Street; another known as the South Side School, situated in Ward four at Eleventh Street and Hunt Avenue; and another, known as the Mexican School, in Ward three at Ninth Street and Ross Avenue; that all the Mexican children or children of Mexican descent are and have been for more than two years last past, obliged by order of said Board of Education to attend said Mexican School up to the Fifth grade thereof, while other children were and are permitted to attend the schools most convenient to their residence. That said public school houses are ample for the admission, instruction and grading for all of the children of said city, if said children are properly apportioned therein and that all the children in said city between the ages of six and twenty-one years are entitled, and of right ought to be admitted into and instructed in such of said public school houses as is reasonably most convenient to them without any distinction or classification of any such child or children between the ages of six and twenty-one years directly or indirectly on account of the race of such child or children or on any pretense whatsoever. That there are school houses within the said city of Alamosa which are convenient to the residence of the Mexican children and from which they are excluded on account of their race.

III

That plaintiff who is himself of the Mexican race has one child, also of the Mexican race, who lives with him and for whose care, nurture and education he is responsible; that is to say Miguel, who is of the age of eleven years. That on the 2nd day of September, 1913, plaintiff presented his said child for admission as a pupil at the north side or High School, which is also a primary or preparatory school, and which is most convenient to his place of residence. That the defendant Geo. O. Thompson, superintendent of School District No. 3 Conejos County refused to admit said child as a pupil and directed him to attend the Mexican School.

IV

Plaintiff further avers that the Mexican School is at a distance of about seven blocks from his place of residence, and that his said child is obliged to pass by and near the North Side or High School; that there are several railroad tracks with engines and trains frequently passing and re-passing between his house and the Mexican School; and that his said child is forced to cross and re-cross said tracks in his travel to and from said Mexican School to his great danger and to plaintiff's distress of mind.

V

That on or about August 25, 1913 plaintiff, through other Mexican persons as his representatives, applied to said Board of Education of said city of Alamosa, defendant in this action, for relief and requested said board to admit their children into such of the public school houses of said city as were most convenient to them without any distinction, classification or exclusion of such children between the ages of six and twenty-one years directly or indirectly on account of the race of such children; that said board and the members thereof denied said relief and informed plaintiff and said persons that their children and all children of Mexican descent would be confined to the Mexican school up to the fifth grade.

Vl

Plaintiff further avers that the refusal of said defendants to admit the child of plaintiff to the school most convenient to his residence and the limitation of said child and of children of Mexican descent to the Mexican School was and is a violation of defendant's legal duty, and a distinction and classification of pupils in the public schools on account of race or color contrary to the Constitution of the laws of the State of Colorado. That section 427, article 9 of the Constitution of the State of Colorado provides as follows:

"No sectarian tenants or doctrines shall ever be taught in the public schools, nor shall any distinction or classification of pupils be made on account of race or color."

That section 6009 of the Revised Statutes of 1908 of Colorado provides as follows:

"Every public school, except high schools, shall be open for the admission of all children between the ages of six (6) and twenty-one (21) years residing in that school district during at least four school months in each year, and the school board shall have power to admit adults, and children not residing in the district, if they see fit so to do, and to fix the terms of such admission."

VII

That plaintiff has used every means within his power, except legal proceedings, to obtain admission for his said child to the school most convenient to him but without avail, and that there is no plain, speedy or adequate remedy in the ordinary course of law.

WHEREFORE plaintiff prays that an alternative writ of mandamus be issued out of and under the seal of this court returnable at some short day directed to the said defendants, Geo. H. Shone, C. L. Lahrmann and Joseph H. Darling as the Board of Education of School District No. 3, Conejos County and to Geo. O. Thompson as superintendent of School District No. 3 Conejos County commanding them as such Board of Education and as such superintendent to admit the child of plaintiff to the North Side School or the most convenient of the public schools of said city to which he has the right of admission without any distinction or classification on account of his race or color, and pay the costs of this action, or to show cause why they should not do so.

Raymond S. Sullivan
Attorney for plaintiff.

STATE OF COLORADO, | SS. IN THE DISTRICT COURT.
COUNTY OF ALAMOSA. |

Francisco Maestes, suing in his own behalf and in behalf of all others similarly situated,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Geo. H. Shone, C. L. Lahrmann, Joseph H. Darling as the Board of Education of School District No. 3 Conejos County; and Geo. O. Thompson, as superintendent of School District No. 3, Conejos County.

ORDER

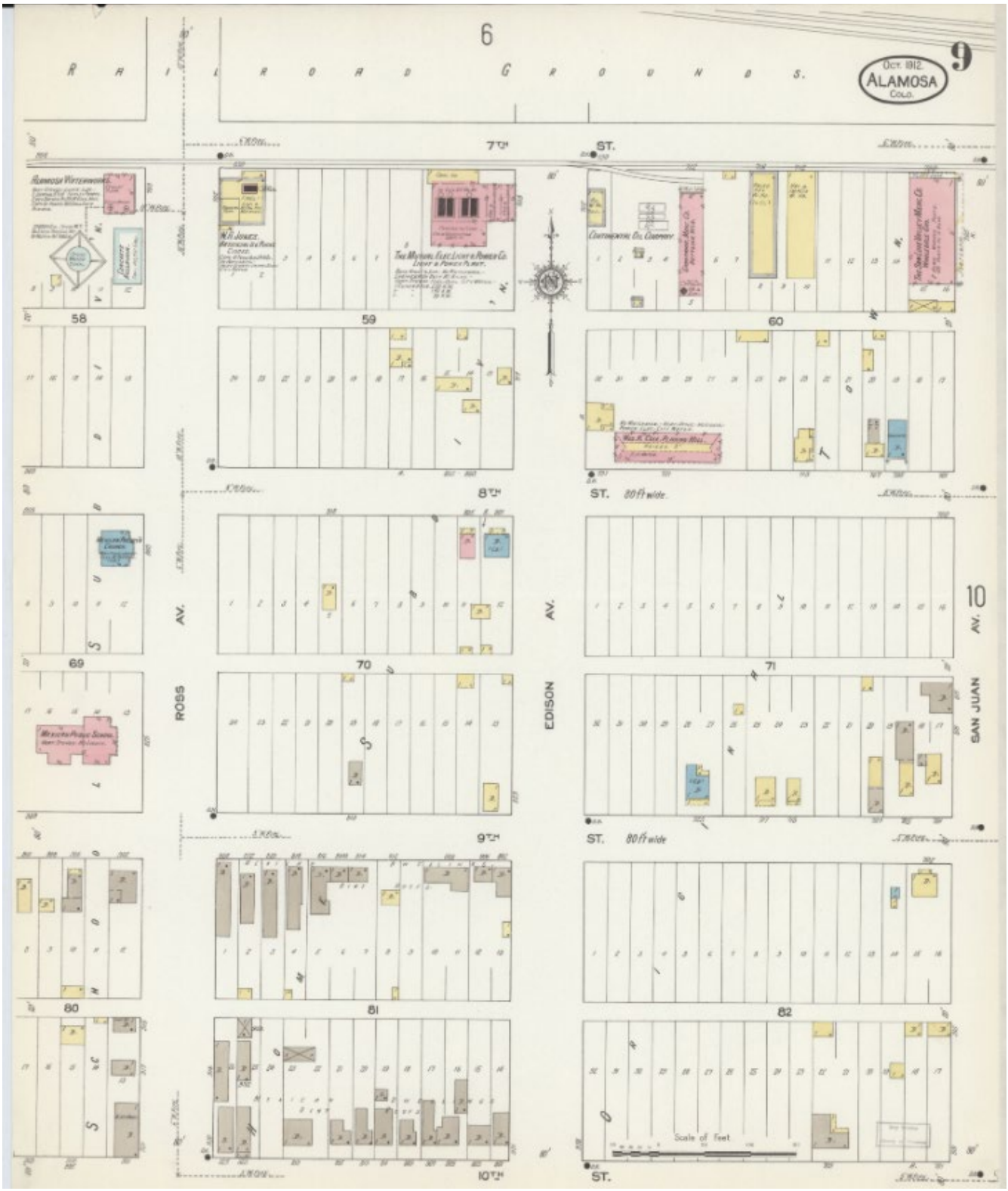
THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF COLORADO to Geo. H. Shone, C. L. Lahrmann, Joseph H. Darling as the Board of Education of School District No. 3 Conejos County; and Geo. O. Thompson, as superintendent of School District No. 3, Conejos County;

GREETING:

Whereas it manifestly appears to us by the verified petition of Francisco Maestes, plaintiff in the above entitled action that an alternative writ of mandamus be issued against defendants and that there is no plain, speedy or adequate remedy in the ordinary course of law,

THEREFORE BE IT ORDERED, that defendants Geo. H. Shone, C. L. Lahrmann, Joseph H. Darling as the Board of Education of School District No. 3 Conejos County; and Geo. O. Thompson, as superintendent of School District No. 3, Conejos County be commanded as such Board of Education and as such superintendent to admit the child of plaintiff to the North Side school or the most convenient of the public schools of the city of Alamosa to which he have the right of admission without any distinction or classification on account of his race or color and pay the cost of this action, or else show cause before this court in the city of Alamosa on the 15th day of December ~~November~~, 1913 at the opening of court on said day why they should not do so.

Paul C. Holbrook,
Judge.


6
RAILROAD GROUNDS.
OCT. 1912.
ALAMOSA
COLO.
9
7TH ST.
58
59
60
8TH
ST. 80 ft wide.
AV.
69
70
71
10
ROSS
EDISON
SAN JUAN
9TH
ST. 80 ft wide
80
81
82
10TH
ST.
Scale of Feet

Second Regular Session
Seventy-second General Assembly
STATE OF COLORADO

INTRODUCED

LLS NO. R20-0923.01 Bethanie Pack x4829 **SJR20-016**

SENATE SPONSORSHIP

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Senate Committees **House Committees**

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 20-016

CONCERNING THE MAESTAS DESEGREGATION CASE.

WHEREAS, The nation's earliest and longest unheralded victory in the fight against educational segregation took place in the San Luis Valley between 1912 and 1914, largely benefiting the children of Alamosa; and

WHEREAS, In 1914, The "Denver Catholic Register" called the decision in *Francisco Maestas et al. v. George H. Shone et al.* "historic", noting that it "was the first time in the history of America that a court fight was made over an attempt to segregate Mexicans in school." The suit was established from grassroots concern for equal education of Alamosa's children.

WHEREAS, Lying unnoticed from 1914 to 2016, the case dates back to 1912, when Alamosa was still part of Conejos County. The facts

of the case stated that 10-year-old Miguel Maestas was forced to walk seven blocks from his home on the north end of Ross Avenue to the "Mexican" school building at the intersection of Ninth and Ross.

WHEREAS, The McKinney directory listed the "Mexican Preparatory School" as being at Ninth and Ross with no telephone number listed; and

WHEREAS, On September 2, 1913, Francisco Maestas went to the Superintendent of Schools and asked to enroll his son. The request was refused, and Maestas was told he had to enroll his son in the "Mexican School", because land for that school was purchased in 1909 to serve only "Mexicans".

WHEREAS, Maestas filed suit and was soon joined by fellow Hispanics and the Catholic Church; and

WHEREAS, Despite the fact that the area had long been part of the United States and the persons involved were born in the United States, distinctions were made between "Mexican" children and "American" children; and

WHEREAS, After a lengthy trial, District Court Judge Charles Holbrook determined that the plaintiffs had made a sufficient case for admittance of the students and issued an order to the school board and superintendent to admit the children to the public school most convenient to their homes; and

WHEREAS, Holbrook stated that "in the opinion of the court...the only way to destroy this feeling of discontent and bitterness which has recently grown up, is to allow all children so prepared to attend the school nearest them"; now, therefore,

Be It Resolved by the Senate of the Seventy-second General Assembly of the State of Colorado, the House of Representatives concurring herein:

That we, the members of the General Assembly, acknowledge the tireless efforts of the Latino community in advocating for the integration of our public schools and improving outcomes for all students in Colorado.

Be It Further Resolved, That copies of this Joint Resolution be sent to the Conejos County Commissioners, the Alamosa County Commissioners, La Sociedad Proteccion Mutua De Trabajadores Unidos (S.P.M.D.T.U.), the San Luis Valley Bar Association, the Colorado Hispanic Bar Association, the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education, and the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area.

United States of America

Congressional Record

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In the early 1910s, railroad foreman Francisco Maestas and other Mexican American parents sought to place their children into the public school on the "White side" of town in Alamosa, CO. After the school district repeatedly denied to enroll their children, Maestas and other parents formed the "Spanish-American Union" and brought together 180 parents on a petition to challenge Alamosa's school segregation. Their petition was denied, as was their attempt to seek assistance from the Colorado State superintendent. Following these denials, the community staged a boycott for 3 months to protest these injustices, to no avail.

Colorado's Constitution has long prohibited public schools from classifying and distinguishing school children based on color and race, but as the Maestas case demonstrates, school districts sometimes fell short of ensuring equity before the law. Faced with these repeated denials, the community continued to organize with the help of the Society for the Mutual Protection of Workers—SPMDTU—one of America's oldest mutual aid societies, and Father E.J. Montel, a Catholic priest, who helped them raise funds to hire legal representation and file a lawsuit against the Alamosa Board of Education.

The school district contended that since it viewed Mexican American students as part "of the Caucasian race," it was not discriminating based on race but rather addressing its Spanish-speaking students' needs. However, the school district was disproven of its assertion when students answered questions in English while on the stand.

In March of 1914, the district court ruled in favor of Francisco Maestas, stating that "the only way to destroy this feeling of discontent and bitterness which has recently grown up, is to allow all children so prepared, to attend the school nearest them"—an early and important step toward desegregation and a victory for Colorado's Mexican American community.

In recent years, bipartisan leaders in Colorado have worked to ensure this landmark case gets the recognition it deserves. After the Colorado Legislature and the State board of education recognized the case as a significant Colorado court decision, it is now taught as part of the revised social studies curriculum for all Colorado high school students. Now, schoolchildren across Colorado will learn about Colorado's early steps toward ensuring equity in education for students from all backgrounds.

Congressional Record

Proceedings and Debates of the 118th Congress, First Session

Washington, Tuesday, May 2, 2023

Senate

Franciso Maestas v. George H. Shone and The Board of Education

Mr. Bennet, Mr. president, I rise today to recognize an important part of Colorado history and of our Nation's history, the case of Francisco Maestas et al v. George H. Shone et al (1914).

"Maestas" – one of the Nation's oldest school desegregation cases.

In 1848, at the end of the Mexican-American War, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded most of present-day Colorado from Mexico to the United States. The resulting influx of Mexican settlers brought economic, industrial, political, linguistic, and cultural challenges to the region, including questions regarding public education.

In the early 1910's, railroad foreman Francisco Maestas and other Mexican American parents sought to place their children into the public school in the "White side" of town in Alamosa, CO. After the school district repeatedly denied to enroll their children, Maestas and other parents formed the "Spanish-American Union" and brought together 180 parent s on a petition to challenge Alamosa's school segregation. Their petition was denied, as was their attempt to seek assistance from the Colorado State superintendent. Following these denials, the community staged a boycott for 3 months to protest these injustices, to no avail.

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ALAMOSA CITIZEN

COMMUNITY NEWS

Two commemorations of the Maestas Case this week

by **Emily Osburn**
April 12, 2022



THE Maestas Case, one of the nation's first civil rights cases, will be celebrated at Adams State University and at the Colorado State Capitol.

On Tuesday, April 12 at Adams State, retired judge Martin Gonzales will speak about the historical background after the unveiling of the bronze relief "Cruzando Los Traques," which commemorates the case. An unveiling of the monument will begin at 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 12, in McDaniel Hall, northwest entrance.

The presentation by the Honorable Martin Gonzales will follow in McDaniel Hall room 101. The free presentation is part of the Adams100 Speaker Series, which celebrates the 100th anniversary of Adams State.

Depicting two young children on their way to school, the bronze piece was created by Reynaldo "Sonny" Rivera of New Mexico. The relief will find a temporary home on the Adams State University campus in McDaniel Hall, and will be permanently installed in the Alamosa County Courthouse in October 2022.

On Thursday, April 14, in Denver, The Maestas Case Commemoration Committee will unveil a sculpture of "Cruzando Los Traques (Vias)" at 1 p.m. on the ground floor of the Colorado State Capitol. Colorado senators Cleave Simpson and Robert Rodriguez and Colorado representatives Donald Valdez and Alex Valdez will deliver a joint tribute in chambers.

The traveling art history exhibit will remain at the Capitol for the remainder of the legislative session before traveling to other Colorado and New Mexico locations. The exhibit tour culminates with a celebratory event honoring the Maestas Case in Alamosa on October 8th, 2022.

From 1912 until 1914, Francisco Maestas and other Hispanic parents challenged the Alamosa School District to allow students to attend the school of their choice. At the time, the district had two schools: one for English speakers and the other for the children of Spanish-speaking families. Although the Maestas children spoke English they were denied access to the school closest to their home. The families eventually took their case to court and District Court Judge Charles Holbrook ruled in favor of Francisco Maestas.

For more information about the Maestas Case, visit **maestascase.com**.

MORE COMMUNITY NEWS

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