

2023-24 Latino History Contest, 1st Place Winner

Word Count: 1974

MLA citations

This is not a complete essay. The paragraphs and Works Cited are excerpts of a paper so that we may focus on analyzing what we have discussed today.

Jovita Idár: Paving the Way for Progress

An infuriated crowd has gathered on Main Street in the small segregated South Texas town of Thorndale. Animosity fills the air as community members look upon the body of fourteen-year-old Antonio Gómez. Enjoying the so-called deliverance of “justice,” very few recognize the racial discrimination that led to Gómez’s execution. The boy’s distracted whittling of a wooden shingle angered a townspeople, resulting in the boy’s death (Díaz; Nielson). The wall built of prejudice and discrimination that led to Gómez’s death, and many others similar to it, was high indeed, but in the early 1900s one Latina who was attempting to tear down this wall was Jovita Idár. After suffering the loss of her brother due to their family’s activism, receiving death threats, and battling the tribulations of activism, she knew the only way to stop these acts of violence and effect change was to pave a new way to liberation. Idár took the approach she knew best, that of activism and journalism. She felt healing these grievances and putting an end to the oppressive conditions of the South was her responsibility as well as her calling. Between penning articles such as “Para La Mujer que Lee” (“For the Woman who Reads”) and founding organizations like La Liga Femenil Mexicanista (The League of Mexican Women), Idár led the way, fighting for Mexican children to be provided food, clothing, and an education, as well as for all Mexican Americans to unite against social and political discrimination.

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With the help of family and friends, Idár organized El Primer Congreso Mexicanista (The First Mexicanist Congress) (“1911”). By reaching out to local journalists and other organizations working to support Tejanos and Mexicans on both sides of the border, the organization produced solutions to collective obstacles they knew would never be solved by the government or any other municipal organization (Rose). As El Primer Congreso Mexicanista began to accomplish its goal, with hundreds of Mexican representatives, journalists, and community activists making it one of the largest Mexican American civil rights forums at the time, a new idea sprouted in Idár’s mind (“1911”). She wanted to revisit and combat the problems women and children were facing.

At this time, Idár would have been one of few Latina women to have been educated or to have operated independently of a man. With her actions, she was defining the modern woman while striving to make the South a better place. Within a month, Idár established La Liga Femenil Mexicanista (The League of Mexican Women), aiming “to secure an equal and bilingual education for the poor Mexican-American children of southern Texas” (qtd. in Rose). As the chosen President of La Liga, Idár encouraged women to break out of the domestic sphere, promoting financial independence, and urging them to join “el movimiento feminista,” with the philosophy that “when you educate a woman, you educate a family” (“Life Story”). Idár was passionate about the rights Mexicans were yet to be granted and concerned that without the proper education, a Mexican child “will not know the glories of his nation, he will not love her, and he might even see his parents’ countrymen with indifference” (qtd. in Medina). She used her involvement in these organizations to gain ground on breaking social barriers while she persisted in publishing articles.

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From the moment she stepped into the schoolhouse in Los Ojuelos and decided to face Mexican American injustices head-on, Jovita Idár was a trailblazer. The many articles she published in *El Progreso* and *La Crónica* enabled her to motivate her communities to listen to their consciences, while La Liga Femenil Mexicanista allowed her to empower her fellow women. Through raising awareness as she paved the way to progress, working towards change for oppressive living conditions, Idár created a lasting impact. With her example, the once unheard voices of Texan Hispanics spoke up loudly against racial persecution and now shout the legacy of Jovita Idár.

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