

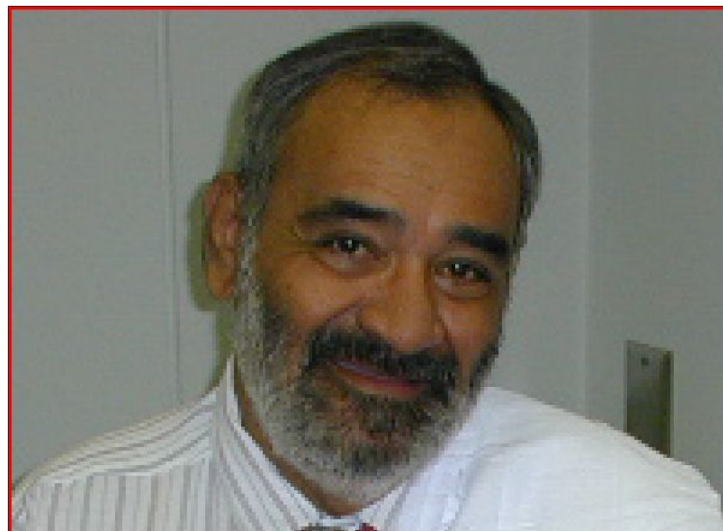
Agapito Mendoza (Augie)

Educator and Activist
1946-2003

By José Faus

There were some other interesting kids at school too. Agapito Mendoza, heaven help humankind, was the class comedian. He could make the [sphinx] laugh. Tall, fat, dark-skinned, he always wore Levis, suede shoes and the most fantastic collection of T-shirts I've ever seen, from one with a picture of Einstein to one with Mickey Mouse and another with Donald Duck. He had trouble-making down to a science.... Agapito was good at football, good at basketball, and almost a pro at baseball. A few days ago this guy turned up at my office with long, graying hair and a beard, wearing a jacket, Levis and suede shoes. It was Dr. Agapito Mendoza, cum laude graduate of the University of Oklahoma, a Chicano activist, a specialist in labor relations.

Aguilar 1987: 65-67



Aguilar's passage vividly captures the force that was Agapito "Augie" Mendoza. He was born September 20, 1946, in El Paso, Texas, to Cosme and Tomasa Mendoza, the youngest of eight children. Mendoza served in the U.S. Air Force for four years in order to pay for his education. After graduating from the University of Texas he taught middle school while working towards his Masters Degree and then went on to earn his Ph.D. in Business Administration at the University of Oklahoma. He served as the Assistant Director of Student Services and Director of the Latino Cultural House at the University of Illinois.

Mendoza's influence was felt immediately on the campus of the University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC) when he arrived in 1986 as Vice Provost for Affirmative Action. He established many of UMKC's policies and procedures surrounding Affirmative Action and academic hiring and was an active voice in local Latino issues. He held that post until 2002, when his health finally prevented him from working.

Mendoza's presence extended to the larger community where he was involved in many committees and organizations, including the Coalition of Hispanic Organizations and the Greater Kansas City Committee on Latino Concerns. He was a board member of the Cabot Westside Clinic, the Guadalupe Center, the Friends of the Library, and the Greater Kansas City National Conference of Christians and Jews in addition to many other civic organizations.

Mendoza's efforts to highlight the history and traditions of the Latino culture and the history and significance of the Chicano movement got him noticed. He was appointed by the Federal Court in Kansas City to serve on the Desegregation Monitoring committee monitoring the Kansas City Missouri Public School District. In 1995 he received the Bruce Scott Award, presented by the Mayor's Committee on Persons with Disabilities, for increasing public awareness of the needs of the disabled in Kansas City, Missouri. In 1999 Mendoza received the Del Corazon Award, presented by AZTECA de Greater Kansas City, for promoting and preserving the Hispanic culture in the Greater Kansas City area.

Mendoza's lasting achievement came in the classroom where he influenced generations of students. In celebrating Mendoza's achievements, one of his students remarked:

I encountered him as a high school student before coming to UMKC. He was so inspirational, so motivational, and he knew so much about the tradition and the culture. He challenged us as young Latino students to really know that knowledge and arm ourselves with that knowledge, because whatever we would accomplish in life, that knowledge and history that was our heritage that would just take us to another level.... He also instilled the importance of sharing that knowledge with everybody.... I can just imagine how many other lives he impacted, because I am just one of many.

"Education was a top priority to him, especially the young students," said Irene Mendoza, Agapito's widow. "When they go into college, once they got in there, he tried to make them understand that it was important to get an education and not be one of the ones that drop out and be one of the ones that go all the way with their schooling."

Mendoza died at his home on January 21, 2003, after a long battle with diabetes. He was 56 years old.

Sources

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