

ALONSO S. PERALES

HIS STRUGGLES FOR THE RIGHT OF
MEXICAN AMERICANS

ADELA SLOSS VENTO



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ADELA SLOSS-VENTO 1901-1998

Born September 27, 1901, Adela Sloss was one of four children born to Anselma Garza and David Sloss. A second marriage of Anselma notwithstanding, added two additional children. Adela's positive model was Anselma, a fearless pioneer woman to south Texas at a time when there were steam boats on the Rio Grande and Comanche raids in the hills of the *mesquital* so characteristic of the turn of the century. Anselma was a self-made woman who openly confronted men and /or difficult or dangerous situations. A woman of boundless energy, she supported herself as a mid-wife or *curandera* with truly healing powers. This was the positive model for Adela Sloss-Vento, who like her mothers before her openly confronted all types of injustices that were commonplace after the Mexican-U.S. war. Her brilliant mind is noted by her fellow students in the P.S.J.A. class of '27, notwithstanding her impeccable character and willingness to help others. She places her energy into organizing early with the ideas of Alonzo S. Perales, the original founder of *The League of Latin-American Citizens*. This will lead her to her organizing and participation in the first coalition League for the Spanish-Speaking in Texas (The League of Latin-American Citizens, Harlingen, Texas in 1927.) She will work for the City Hall in San Juan, Texas noting injustices against *Mexicanos* not only in San Juan but also throughout the State. She will single-handedly take on the corruption in San Juan and win her first political victory, which in time will establish her as a political organizer. We note that when Lloyd Bentsen first ran for office, he came to her home seeking her support knowing that she was a political force in the Valley. She refused his request and further advised him that she was supporting a Mexican-American as a State Representative. Lloyd Bentsen acknowledged her principles and courage. We note in her graduating album that she aspired to be a writer. This will be evident, as she will write articles in both English and Spanish newspapers on social/ cultural and political issues from the 20's to the 80's. She will collaborate with Attorney and State representative J.T. Canales of Brownsville, J.Luz Saenz of McAllen, Alonzo Perales of San Antonio among many others concerned for the rights of Mexican-Americans in the U.S. At age 75, she will write a book concerned with the contributions of Alonzo S. Perales as the founder of LULAC (his idea dates back to 1919), a book which has subsequently been labeled rare at the various collections housed at the University of Texas-Austin. While she never took credit for her activism and contributions, it is clear that she worked independently as an organizer and writer above and beyond her duties as a housewife. She was proud of her heritage and language, always reminding her children to never be ashamed of speaking Spanish or one's culture. She often reminded others that it was better to speak many

languages than just one as is the case in monolingual America. She sacrificed for her family throughout her life with the hope that her children and many others would continue the struggle to preserve culture, language and civil rights in a country that belonged truly to our ancestors as *Mestizos* of the Americas. Her role has been immortalized in several novels published in Mexico by her son, Dr. Arnoldo Carlos Vento. As we move into the next millenium, the struggle for equality in all areas continues with the younger generations that are beginning to understand that by mid XXI century, the U.S. will no longer be one color but multi-colored, multicultural and multilingual as the minority today will become the majority of tomorrow. Alonzo S. Perales and Adela Sloss-Vento were right in stating that with Education, we will receive our rightful due in all areas of society.

Arnoldo Carlos Vento,
PhD
Emeritus Professor



Photo taken circa 1927

Facsimile of Speech by Adela Sloss Vento (Circa 1948)

-----Muchas gracias, señor Palacios. Me da mucho gusto estar aquí con ustedes. Y es un honor para mí poder hablarles sobre los derechos de todo mexicano como ciudadano americano. No hace mucho que nuestros antepasados lucharon por los derechos humanos de todo ciudadano. Ahora nos enfrentamos con otro enemigo, que no nos deja desarrollar, que nos discrimina en las escuelas públicas, que ha llegado a abusar con sus tropas de bandidos americanos, que nos tiene abajo con sus sueldos miserables, que se protege con el sistema corrupto, que se defiende con abogados chuecos y que se esconde detrás de los vendidos mexicanos con sus cantinas, prostitutas y jugadas. Ya es tiempo de echarlos a todos fuera. Ya es tiempo de limpiar toda la basura en nuestra Santa María, ya es tiempo de levantar nuestra voz y seguir adelante en pro de los derechos de nuestra Raza! ¡Se ha llegado el tiempo de eliminar las injusticias que han causado sufrimiento a nuestra Raza! Se ha llegado el tiempo de echar todos estos políticos fuera. Tenemos entre nosotros una arma que será la más potente del futuro, y esa es el derecho de votar, porque con este derecho tenemos una fuerza que algún día nos dará líderes mexicanos en todos los niveles políticos, económicos y sociales. Nosotros somos dueños legítimos de estas tierras, estuvimos aquí antes de la llegada de los extranjeros al este de Estados Unidos, y cuando la Unión Americana ganó por fuerza estas tierras, muchos de nuestros antepasados desenterraron a sus familias y se las llevaron con ellos para el otro lado del Río Bravo. ¡Ya no estamos por más abuso! ¡Adelante con nuestra raza y nuestros derechos!...¡Muchas gracias!

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ALONSO S. PERALES: HIS LEGACY

(From Chapter V, *Mestizo: The History, Culture and Politics of the Mexican and the Chicano.*)

By the twenties, second generation Mexican Americans/Chicanos began to move away from the more "Mexican" mutualistic societies and created a number of organizations that were oriented toward citizenship and civil rights. These were aimed at American born or naturalized Spanish-speaking citizens. The orientation was not assimilation although many of its members were college educated i.e. lawyers, doctors, engineers; thus their orientation was social, economic, political and educational. They include *El orden de los Hijos de America* established in San Antonio in 1921, *the Knights of America* and the *Sons of America* (Corpus Christi). The key organization of national significance was the invention of attorney Alonso S. Perales of San Antonio, Texas. His mission begins in 1919 while riding the train to attend Washington State University; here he saw an Anglo-American commit a cowardly crime to a defenseless Mexican. From that day on he knew he had found his aim in life, to defend the rights of the Spanish-Speaking. He conceived very early the idea of coalescing existing organizations and forming a league that would represent the ideals for leadership and defense of *Mexicanos* throughout the state. Adela Sloss-Vento states in her work on Alonso Perales:

The unity of Mexican-American citizens was the dream of Attorney Perales, a man of high moral ethics and principles who did not believe in compromising his principles for material gain. Rather than taking the easy road to financial and political success, he chose rather to struggle for the rights and advancement during his lifetime of his Raza.¹

Miss Sloss-Vento further states in her conclusions that Alonso S. Perales encouraged unity among Mexican-Americans in Texas:

He felt the Mexican-Texano should organize and unify so that he too could enjoy all the rights and privileges as the Anglos. He saw part of the solution in the education of the Mexican-American youth. He felt it was imperative that the youth be provided with the educational facilities and opportunities for advancement for a better tomorrow...²

With these perspicacious goals in mind, he formed *The League of Latin Americans* in Harlingen, Texas on August 14, 1927. He established eight councils in Harlingen, Brownsville, Laredo, Peñitas, McAllen, La Grulla, Encino and New Gulf Texas. It should be noted that the organizations *Sons of America* and *Knights of America* of Corpus Christi sponsored by Mr. Bernardo Garza did not join in the formation of the new league, although he was extended a personal invitation by Perales. A year later Perales was called upon by Washington to serve on several diplomatic missions in Cuba and Nicaragua. Writing from Managua, Nicaragua, Perales pleads with Mr. Bernardo Garza to persuade the two organizations *Sons of America* and *Knights of America* to join *The League of Latin Americans* stating further that he would be pleased if he (Bernardo) were to be elected President General of the league in the coming convention. In Mr. Garza's response, he graciously declines stating, "I would rather see the high position of President General fall upon a more intelligent person like you, Idar, Canales or some other. My intentions are good but I lack the education to be at the point of such an organization..."³ While Perales was for unity, J.T. Canales was skeptical regarding the admission of the Corpus Christi councils stating that they had not earned their mark in socio-civic affairs in defense of Pro-Raza pursuits.⁴

On the 19th of February, 1929, the Corpus Christi councils joined the League and later reorganized adding "United" to the original name ergo *League of United Latin American Citizens*. As has been pointed out previously, there has always been among the Spanish-Speaking power struggles often to the demise of many organizations. Often it is personal and individualistic but sometimes it is ideological. No sooner had the League been established; a rash of criticism and attacks were levied at Alonso Perales and J.T. Canales. The problem here appears to be one of the Mexicans vs. Mexican Americans. Those that were critical were nationalists or Mexican officials working out of the U.S. e.g. *Consul General* of San Antonio. In defense, Perales states, "It is not strange that the consulates try to control Mexican-American organizations that are founded in the

¹ Adela Sloss-Vento. *Alonso S. Perales: His Struggles for the Rights of Mexican Americans* (San Antonio: Artes Gráficas, 1977), p. 77.

² *Ibid.*, p. 111.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

U.S. for their own political and anti-clerical propaganda and to exclude certain refugee elements, but what seems contradictory is that the *Consul General* of San Antonio is displeased for not obtaining control of Mexican-Americans who in any form have anything to do with the politics of Mexico."⁵ It was not the intention of Perales to move toward assimilation and a departure of Mexican culture but rather a re-orientation towards education and leadership for the creation of newer generations who would not have to suffer the indignities of an inferior position. In his defense of J.T. Canales, he points to his integrity, a member of a highly respectable and distinguished family, a man of culture and liberal ideas, his love for his *Raza*, a member of Congress where he denounced the Texas Rangers for crimes committed to Mexicans... A person who risked his life and by his own choice his political position...his father was also appreciated for his integrity and love toward the Mexican people."⁶

The league eventually spread to twenty one states with its main strength centered in Texas. It is true that it promoted true and loyal citizens, the learning of English as important through the leadership of Bernardo Garza but the initial idea of Perales was to have a *Raza* that was educationally prepared to take on as citizens and leaders, the problems and inequities of this country. By inference it suggested "beating them at their own game" in order to rectify social, political, economical and educational discrimination. In my view both the mutualistas and the new Mexican American civic organizations (LULAC, GI Forum, etc.) aided in the unity and defense of the Spanish-Speaking. The mutualistas must be praised for their efforts on the local and regional levels. LULAC was an extension, a new approach that saw unity on a state and national level. Acuña candidly cautions that "Although it has become popular to criticize LULAC's middle class, integrationist approach, it should not be evaluated by present standards. Men like Alonso S. Perales and J.T.. Canales courageously defended the rights of Mexican in the United States. For years, LULAC was the only organization with a nationwide network. It also cut reliance on the Mexican consuls and concentrated on U.S. issues."⁷ Integrationalist here does not mean assimilation as witnessed by the articles 7, 9, 11 and 22 of the LULAC constitution:

We solemnly declare once and for all to maintain a sincere and respectful reverence for our racial origin of which we are proud... We shall destroy any attempt to create racial prejudices against our people and any infamous stigma which may be cast upon them, and we shall demand for them the respect and prerogatives which the constitution grants to us all...we shall denounce every act of peonage and mistreatment as well as the employment of our minor children of scholastic age.⁸

While the league denied it was a political organization, it left the door open for development of a national and political organization who would protect in the courts, the rights of the Spanish-Speaking in the United States. Very early, it established a fund for "mutual protection and for the defense of those of us who may be unjustly persecuted and for the education and culture of our people."⁹

In the end, Attorney Alonso S. Perales follows the struggle of courageous defenders of civil rights of the XIX century: Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, Tiburcio Vásquez, Joaquín Murieta, and Gregorio Cortez. Although often unrecognized, the XX century Civil Rights Movement was begun in the twenties with the leadership of Alonso S. Perales. By his side were Attorney J.T. Canales of Brownsville and Adela Sloss of San Juan, Texas. It was a movement based on equal rights and justice for all of the Spanish-Speaking *Tejanos* who had been since 1848, abused, manipulated and exploited as citizens. Alonso S. Perales dedicated his entire life to the struggle of Civil and Human Rights to insure that in the future all the Spanish-Speaking would be an integral part of the civic, educational and political process.

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⁵ Ibid., p. 27. For a detailed description of the formation of LULAC see Perales' *En defensa de mi Raza*, (San Antonio: Artes Gráficas, 1936-7).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied...*p. 310.

⁸ Moquín, Van Doren, Rivera, *A Documentary History*, pp. 280-281.

⁹ Ibid., p. 281.

*To all of the Defenders of disenfranchised,
The Cortinas, Tiburcios, Gregorios, Murietas
But also to all of the Sor Juanas, Adelitas, Rosarios, Dolores'*

Alonso S. Perales
His Struggle
For The Rights
of Mexican-Americans

By

Adela Sloss-Vento

This work was written by the first Mexican American activist woman in the area of Civil Rights. It is considered a rare book in all of the University of Texas-Austin libraries. There are a few of the original printed copies set aside for University Rare Book Collections. A CD reprint is now available by Eagle Feather Research Institute. For a copy of the original work plus photo and documentation on the author, go to Books in this Series or [Click to Bookstore](#).