

BEHIND THE CV—A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

My long-standing interest in the interplay between defensible knowledge, representative government, and social justice has driven my career back and forth between university life and society's nonprofit and voluntary sector. I believe that if we, the people, are to keep our democratic form of government, we must come together as a nation to protect everyone's rights and welfare, especially the least powerful among us. Success at self-governance also requires collective respect for defensible knowledge and the seeking of truth. Continuing pursuit of usable knowledge and elusive truths should enable all of us—voters and elected representatives alike—to make better-informed decisions in the public interest.

I'm an activist by temperament whose interests in scholarship developed later in life. In high school in the early 1960s, for example, I organized fellow students to solicit donations of lunch money for minority voter registration projects in southern states that were denying Black citizens' right to vote. Some of my most important lessons as a college undergraduate were learned by organizing against university officials' prohibition of student participation in social and political action off campus. As a graduate student in social work, I helped organize tenants to protect themselves against an abusive landlord.

My first job as a trained social worker was at Interstate Research Associates (IRA), a nonprofit consulting group in Washington, D.C. IRA was started in the early 1970s by leaders from Mexican-American (or *Chicano*) communities in the southwestern U.S. IRA specialized in community development programs and services helping Chicano U.S. citizens overcome educational, economic, and political disadvantages arising from over a century of discrimination and injustices following the Mexican-American War. In the 1970s, much of the nation's migratory seasonal agricultural workforce included U.S. citizens whose ancestors were displaced from family-owned lands in the Southwest after the war. At IRA, I helped with research on anti-poverty programs for U.S. migrant farm workers.

The consequences of one such project surprised me. A research study I directed found that disabled farm workers tended to be overlooked by Federally-funded vocational rehabilitation programs that state governments had operated since the 1930s. Vocational rehabilitation is a service dating back to World War I providing "physical restoration" services to potentially self-supporting people with disabilities, providing them with needed training and equipment, and helping them find jobs. Our study led to Federal legislation in 1973 funding a dozen state governments to target disabled farm workers and prepare them for alternative, better-paying employment. Most of those efforts to reach out to eligible farm workers are still in place today.

I hadn't expected Congress to respond to research about a population of working poor who lacked economic and political influence. Credit is due the Federal agency that funded our research. Credit is also due another small nonprofit organization—the Congress of Spanish-Speaking and Spanish-Surnamed Americans (AKA "el Congreso")—that informed Congress about our research. And credit is due members of Congress who voted in favor. El Congreso's lobbyist said afterwards that without our research, the legislation would not have passed.

That led me to return to school for a Master of Public Policy degree. I wanted to learn more about how rigorous and defensible research and analysis might influence public policy. My studies were interrupted in 1976, however, by a job offer from the nation's largest Latino civil rights organization, the National Council of la Raza. At la Raza, we started a new program in Washington, D.C., to research public policy problems affecting Latino U.S. citizens and immigrants. We also testified at hearings, lobbied Congress and Federal agencies, and promoted public policy advocacy by Latino organizations throughout the U.S. La Raza's Office of Research, Advocacy, and Legislation continues that work today.

Our policy successes at la Raza were due in large part to financial support by private and corporate foundations. Earlier, as a newly trained community organizer, I had doubted that foundations and for-profit corporations would support research and advocacy benefiting disadvantaged populations. At la Raza, our successes in Washington made me want to learn more about the internal workings of private and corporate philanthropy. In 1980, I left la Raza and joined Levi Strauss & Co., to work in Levi's Corporate Community Affairs Department and the Levi Strauss Foundation.

As I learned more about organized philanthropy, I found few Latinos among our nation's major philanthropic donors, foundation executives, and grant recipients. Philanthropy and nonprofit organizations improve life in the U.S. in a wide variety of ways. The relative absence of Latinos was cause for concern.

Latinos were fast becoming the nation's largest minority group. Demographers reported that Latino population growth in the U.S. was due to a combination of higher birthrates, immigration with and without required documents, and in some cases, violation of terms of temporary visas. Research also showed that Latinos had some of the nation's highest rates of unemployment, poverty, and high school dropouts. Latino U.S. citizens' political and economic disadvantages were worsened by others' erroneous belief that most Latinos resided in the U.S. illegally.

Several colleagues at other foundations shared my concern. We eventually organized a nonprofit professional association of foundation trustees and staff to promote grant-making to low-income Latino nonprofits and communities in the U.S. The number of Latinos in philanthropic roles increased. Our new organization—Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP)—continued growing after I left. Today, HIP helps create community-supported grant-making foundations of, by, and for Latinos in the U.S., and it helps Latinos find jobs in other foundations. HIP has begun working in other Latin-American countries as well.

By 1983, accumulated experience had left me with nagging questions. How might advocates for social justice make better use of policy research and analysis? Is policy analysis—even when it's rigorous and even-handed—unavoidably suspect when used by policy advocates? How many nonprofit organizations in the U.S. are actually accountable to Latino populations they claim to serve? Why haven't Latinos, especially wealthy Latinos, provided more philanthropic support to Latino communities? These and other unanswered questions had strategic implications for activists seeking a more just and democratic society.

I headed back to university hoping for answers. Despite feeling a little old for this, I resumed work toward the M.P.P. and Ph.D. in public policy, while working as a free-lance consultant and rearing my

children as a single parent. Foundations and nonprofits supported my independent research on Latino nonprofits and philanthropy. My doctoral dissertation laid a foundation for my current research interests in uses of policy analysis by political interest groups.

When I received the Ph.D. in 1992, I didn't want to leave university life. I had discovered that teaching is both a duty and a pleasure. My kids were grown and on their own. My new wife and I moved to her hometown of Denver, where I joined the faculty of the University of Colorado.

For the past couple of decades, I've had a blended career in academic administration, teaching, research, writing, and assisting nonprofit organizations engaged in policy research or advocacy. Most of that time, I've kept at least one foot on campus, first at the University of Colorado, then the University of San Francisco, and now at the University of Denver. I hope to continue exploring factual, theoretical, and strategic questions about the role of research and analysis in strengthening equal opportunity and representative democracy.

Personal experience persuades me that usable answers to those questions come from both scholarship and practical engagement. For me, usable theory and knowledge—like democracy itself—are best built from the ground up.