

YOUR AMERICAN DREAM

To The Teachers:

Two years ago, my wife, Lilly, and I established the Merage Foundation for the American Dream. We believe its mission is important to the nation and its citizens. The Foundation is dedicated to promoting expanded opportunities for immigrants. It hopes to inspire young immigrants to achieve their American Dream. It hopes to help promising immigrant leaders contribute to their communities and to the nation. It hopes to encourage Americans to understand and celebrate the contributions of immigrants to America.

The Foundation's initiatives include:

- The development of award-winning DVDs and educational materials (The American Experience) concerning the history of immigration and the lives of successful American immigrants for use in high schools throughout the nation.
- The provision of stipends and the creation of a Merage Fellows program for outstanding graduating immigrant students nominated by 21 universities throughout the country.
- The development of occasional papers and the convening of Forums concerning the impact of immigration on America and issues concerning immigration.

We are delighted that you want to use the DVDs and educational materials in your classrooms. Paraphrasing Ralph Waldo Emerson, the famous American author, the Merage Foundation hopes that the American Dream Experience will help students walk with their feet, work with their hands, speak their own minds and reach their own aspirations.

Paul Merage
President

To The Teachers:

The Merage Foundation for the American Dream is pleased to send you DVDs and related educational materials for The American Dream Experience. Both describe in vivid terms the history of immigration to America and the lives and contributions of living American immigrants. Both reflect an effort by the Merage Foundation to create a library of DVDs and educational materials for high school teachers and principals throughout the U.S. Based on use of both in over 1200 classrooms last year, the Foundation believes that the American Dream Experience will inspire students—including immigrant students and students from immigrant families—to define and achieve their American Dreams.

We hope that teachers will incorporate the DVDs and educational materials in their lesson plans over a period of several weeks. We encourage teachers to invite local immigrant leaders to watch the DVDs and discuss their content with students. We urge teachers to involve all students, whether immigrants or not, in the planned activities related to the DVDs. Students, if they are not immigrants or children of immigrant families, are likely to be able to trace their roots back to immigrant grandparents, great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents. The Foundation welcomes teacher feedback concerning the impact of the American Dream Experience in the classroom.

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THE AMERICAN DREAM EXPERIENCE

EDUARDO NAJERA: Basketball Player

BACKGROUND: HISPANICS AND AMERICA

Spanish explorers were among the first Europeans to arrive in the Americas, beginning with Christopher Columbus. The Italian-born explorer sailed to the New World in 1492 for Spain's King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Over the next decade, Columbus made a total of four expeditions, claiming for Spain several Caribbean islands and the territories of Venezuela, Honduras, and Panama.

Like the colonies in what is now the United States, the Spanish-speaking colonies in the Americas disliked being ruled by a European power and fought for self-rule. In 1821, Mexico successfully declared its independence from Spain and took authority over large parts of the formerly Spanish territory. But in 1836, Texas declared its independence, causing Mexico to lose its hold over what is now the American Southwest.

Texas voted to annex itself to the United States in 1845, setting in motion events that would lead to the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-48). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the war, ceded even more land to the United States, including much of California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, and parts of Arizona, Colorado and Wyoming.

The boundaries between the U.S. and Mexico have remained fairly constant ever since. In the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War, nearly 100,000 Mexican citizens found themselves living in areas ceded to the United



States. The terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo gave them the option to return to Mexico or to become U.S. citizens upon statehood. Many who stayed faced discrimination and sometimes lost their land. Yet Mexicans who remained contributed significantly to the development of the western states.

For the next 70 years, Mexican immigration was a non-issue. The 2,000-mile-long border between the U.S. and Mexico ran through desolate, unsettled territory. Fewer than 300,000 Mexican immigrants were recorded between 1850 and 1920; both governments turned blind eyes to the human traffic across the bor-

der. It was only in 1924 that the U.S. established the Border Patrol after larger numbers of Mexicans started moving north to escape the chaos of the Mexican Revolution.

Mexican immigration slowed dramatically during the Depression, when jobs in the U.S. were scarce. In fact, the U.S. sponsored a repatriation program that sent hundreds of thousands of people of Mexican descent back across the border. But by 1942, as thousands of young men went to Europe and Asia to fight in World War II, jobs in the United States became plentiful. The desperate need for agricultural labor led to the creation of the Bracero (guest worker) program. For two decades, hundreds of thousands of migrant farm workers primarily from Mexico (but also Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and other Latin American countries) came to the United States for a growing season, a year, or several years before returning home. By 1960, the census estimated that braceros comprised more than one-fourth of the nation's seasonal farm workers. To this day, many large-scale agricultural operations, especially in California, depend heavily on Mexican and Central American workers.

The U.S. ended the Bracero Program in 1964 under pressure from unions, who were losing jobs to guest workers, and from human rights advocates, who decried the poor working conditions of the laborers. But demand for cheap agricultural labor continued to increase. So when the Immigration and Naturalization Amendments of 1965 loosened the rules about who could immigrate to the U.S., hundreds of thousands of Latin American immigrants crossed the border. Some migrated legally and simply overstayed their authorization. Others crossed the border illegally. Finding plentiful work and a better standard of living on the U.S. side, many chose not to return.

Mexican immigration, both legal and illegal, grew to unprecedented numbers with each succeeding decade. Legal immigrants from Mexico quadrupled from 453,937 in the 1960s to 1.65 million in the 1980s. More than 2.2 million Mexicans immigrated legally to the U.S. in the 1990s, and an average of 170,000 have arrived each year since 2000.

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act provided amnesty for undocumented aliens already living in the U.S. It also promised to crack down on undocumented immigrants. The immediate result was that millions of undocumented immigrants (a large percentage of them from Mexico) became eligible for citizenship. However, the Act's prohibition on knowingly hiring undocumented workers proved difficult to enforce, and the flow of undocumented immigrants continued unabated.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service estimates that there were 5 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. in 1996, more than half of them from Mexico. The agency estimates that approximately 275,000 people have entered the U.S. illegally each year



since then. A more recent estimate from the Pew Hispanic Center puts the number of undocumented immigrants at closer to 11 million as of 2005; of these, nearly 6 million (57%) came from Mexico and 2.5 million (24%) came from other Latin American countries. In all, there were 35 million people of Hispanic origin living in the U.S. in 2000; 20 million of them were from Mexico.

Undocumented immigrants have again become the subject of heated political debate, especially in states like Texas and California, which are home to half of all U.S. Hispanics. For example, there have been renewed calls for limiting immigration and strict control of the nation's borders from some political leaders. Other political leaders advocate a pathway to permanent residency and citizenship for undocumented individuals as well as increased border security.

CLASS DISCUSSION PROMPTS

The Merage Foundation assumes that teachers will view this DVD and

read the related materials as part of their development of lesson plans. Before teachers show the DVD and begin the planned activities, they should:

- Talk about the current national debate over the role of immigrants—both legal and illegal—in the U.S.
- Review with students the important events in Eduardo Nájera's life. He was born in Meoqui, Chihuahua, Mexico, on July 11, 1976. He started to play baseball at a young age. He knew he was not going to become a very good baseball player. After becoming very tall when he was only 14 years old, he turned to basketball. Within a few years, he was one of the best players in Mexico. He immigrated to the U.S. to play against better competition. He played for the University of Oklahoma from 1997-2000. He became a very good player. Eduardo Nájera won many awards including awards for his character on and off the basketball court. In the summer of 1999, he played for Mexico in the World Games and the World University Games. In 2000, he became the second Mexican player ever to be drafted by an NBA team and the second Mexican ever to play for an NBA team. During his still young NBA career, Nájera has played for the Dallas Mavericks, the Golden State Warriors, and the Denver Nuggets.
- Help students understand the significance and meaning of terms and phrases referred to in the video, including *to get cut (i.e. not win a spot on the team)*, *scouts*, *suck up your energy*, *a piece of the pie*, *All-Star Game*, *immigrant*, *foundation*, *culture*, *learning English*, *discipline*, *character on and off the court*, *NBA*.
- Ask students if they can define their American Dreams. If it is difficult for students to do so, teachers should ask students about their hopes concerning their education, jobs, career, marriage, children, family, and contributions to community. Teachers should encourage students to think about and develop their American Dreams as they

continue their education. Teachers should ask students to define Eduardo Nájera's American Dream.

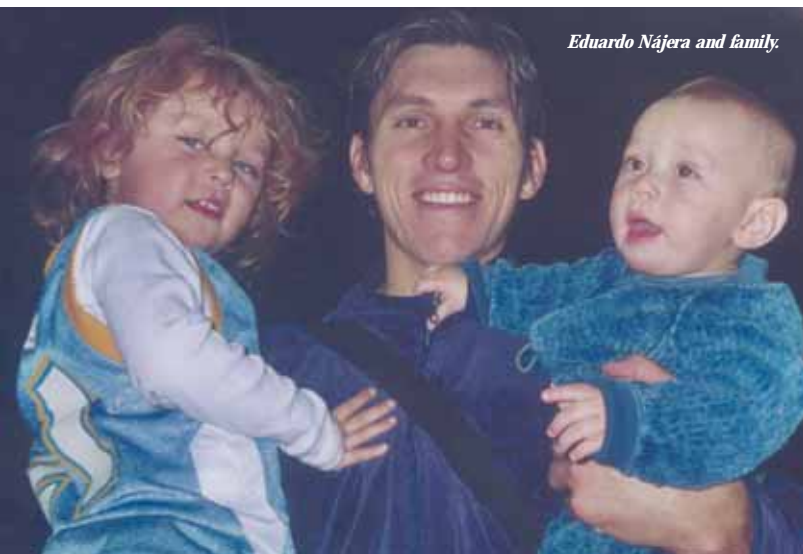
THEME ONE LEAVING BEHIND MEMORIES AND PLACES

As a kid growing up in Chihuahua, Mexico, Eduardo Nájera was a good athlete. His sport of choice, however, was baseball, not basketball.

He wanted to follow in the footsteps of his father, who had been a professional baseball player. But by the time Eduardo turned 14, he was 6-feet 5-inches tall—too tall and too clumsy for baseball.

After failing to make the high school baseball team, he turned to the basketball court, where the other players were also tall. It was the first of many times that Eduardo would make an abrupt transition in his life.

Although he didn't excel right away, he immediately fell in love with basketball. He worked hard to get better each year. Within a few years, he had become one of the best basketball players in Mexico. But



Eduardo Nájera and family.

Eduardo had even higher ambitions. He wanted to be one of the best in the world.

To do that, he would have to play against better players. He would have to leave behind everything he knew—his family, his friends, his hometown—and move to the United States, a country where he didn't know the language and didn't have any friends. The youngest of seven children, Nájera was accustomed to being around family all the time. His decision to move to the United States was painful. His mother didn't want him to leave. However, he knew that to be the best, he'd have to compete against the best.

PLANNED ACTIVITY

Family has played a very important role in Eduardo Nájera's life and in his success, both on and off the court. Growing up in Mexico, he was always around family members, all of whom talked to each other constantly about every part of their lives.

When he first moved to the United States, he was very depressed because he missed his family. He was surprised to meet American kids who were happy to be away from their families.

Although he lives in the U.S. today and has a wife and children of his own in Oklahoma, Nájera remains very close with his parents, brothers, sisters, and cousins in Mexico. He takes his wife and kids to Mexico frequently to learn about the culture he grew up in and to spend time with his children's grandparents and other members of his extended family.

Ask students to write a paragraph or two describing their family. How many people are in their immediate family? Does the family eat dinner together frequently? What kinds of things are talked about at dinner? Do they have brothers and sisters? How many of each? Are they close to their brothers and sisters? What do they talk about when they are with their brothers and sisters? Do they identify more with Eduardo Nájera, who missed his family terribly while at college, or his roommate, who was happy to be on his own?

After students have written their paragraphs, they should share them with the class. Some questions you might ask them to consider in their paragraph and presentation include:

- What makes families close? Why do you think family is so important in Mexican culture?

- Do different cultures value the role of family differently? For example, is Eduardo Nájera's experience typical of Mexican culture, or is he just lucky to have a close family? Are there American families, or Asian families, or African families that are just as close as Nájera's family?

- The immediate family usually consists of parents and children. However, in some families, the extended family (grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, etc.) is considered part of the immediate family. Is this based on culture? That is, do some cultures reflect the importance of extended families more than others? (You may wish to ask students to talk about how often they see their grandparents, categorizing their answers by how recently their families came to the United States and where they are from.)

THEME TWO BUILDING A NEW LIFE IN THE U.S.

When he was 17, Nájera left his family in Mexico and moved to San Antonio, Texas. He attended Cornerstone Christian School and played on the basketball team. He struggled to improve both his English-speaking and basketball-playing skills. Soon, premier college basketball programs like Indiana, Duke, and UCLA were showing interest in him.

The best offer (including a full scholarship) came from the University of Oklahoma, which was close to his adopted home in Texas and his family in Mexico. In college, Nájera improved his basketball abilities and his English. By the time he graduated in 2000, Nájera had become one of the best basketball players in school history. He finished his college career ranked in the top 10 in many categories, including scoring, rebounds, steals, and shots blocked.

But it was his hustle and his positive mental approach to the game that attracted interest in Nájera among scouts for the National Basketball Association. In 2000, Nájera won the Chip Hilton Award, given by the National Basketball Hall of Fame to the college player who demonstrates "personal character both on and off the court." Later that spring, Nájera became the second Mexican player ever to be drafted by the NBA, when the Houston Rockets chose him in the second round. The Rockets traded him to Dallas, and that fall, he became the second Mexican ever to play in the NBA.

Nájera played for the Mavericks for four years before being traded to Golden State and then to Denver. He now plays for the Denver Nuggets. Wherever Nájera has played, his reputation for unselfishness and hard work have consistently won him the admiration of his teammates. "I want people to remember that I was an excellent person, not just as a player, but off the court, too," Nájera says.

PLANNED ACTIVITY:

In the video, Nájera is clear about his American Dream: “I was hungry, I was desperate to succeed and I knew that English was not gonna stop me,” he says. For him, learning English as quickly as possible was an integral part of achieving his American dream. “It was very difficult, but it was all worth it,” he says. Some people believe that immigrant children should be required to learn English quickly and that it is the school’s responsibility to teach them English over a relatively brief period. Many people who believe that English should be taught as soon as possible after immigrant children enter school also believe that English should be the official language of the U.S. They would prefer that all government business (elections, tax forms, airport signs, etc.) be conducted in English.

Other people believe that immigrant children could and some should learn English at a slower pace. They suggest that immediate or almost immediate substitution of English in the classroom in place of the native language of immigrant children would impede the ability of immigrant children to learn in school. These individuals often advocate bilingual education, that is, teaching at least initial curriculum both in English and the immigrant student’s native language.

Ask students to divide in groups and choose a side in this debate. Do they believe schools should require immigrant students to learn English quickly or do they believe English should be taught gradually over a longer time period? Working together, students from each group should write a short essay explaining why their position makes the most sense for immigrant students and for America. Each group should be asked to read its essay to the class. Students from the opposing group should ask questions in hopes of persuading their classmates of the validity of their argument or arguments.

THEME THREE: ACHIEVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Eduardo Nájera battled long odds to fulfill his American dream. He continues to live a dream life today, playing basketball at the highest level in the world. He has a supportive wife, two wonderful children, and financial security for the rest of his life.

He is a hero in his home country of Mexico. His face is on skyscrapers all over the country. He is an inspiration for youngsters from all over Latin America, not just Mexico. He earns millions of dollars each year in endorsements from big U.S. companies like Nike, more even than what he makes from the NBA. Nájera is a good role model for all Americans, whether they are immigrants or not.

In 2004, he created the Eduardo Nájera Foundation for Latino Achievement. The Foundation seeks to give Latino kids the same opportunities Nájera had. It provides scholarships for outstanding Latino students who might not otherwise be able to afford college.

Nájera’s mother never finished high school. But she understood the value of education and pushed her son to finish his studies. It’s a lesson he learned well.

PLANNED ACTIVITY

Eduardo Nájera understands the value of hard work—it’s what got him to the NBA, and what helped him fulfill his American Dream. But other factors are just as important, maybe more so. He talks about education, effort, commitment, and discipline. He illustrates other characteristics that were critical to his success. They include family support, intelligence, motivation, and even luck.

Write the following words on the board: Education, Effort, Commitment, Discipline, Honesty, Family Support, Intelligence, Ambition, and Luck. Ask students, individually or in small groups, to

decide which one of these words is most important for achieving the American Dream. Students should divide into groups and collectively write a paragraph explaining their choices. The paragraph should address the reasons why words the group did not select were viewed as less important than the words they did select. For example: “ambition is not as important as education because without education, you wouldn’t know how high you are able to aim.”

One representative from each group of students should read the group’s paragraphs to the class to stimulate discussion. Note that there are no correct answers, only convincing arguments.

AMERICAN DREAM REVISITED

The Eduardo Nájera DVD and planned activities are designed to help students talk about their own American Dreams. Teachers should conclude the planned activities by encouraging students to discuss their own American Dreams. If some students still find it difficult to participate in the classroom discussion, teachers should ask them to talk about their hopes concerning their future education, jobs, marriage, children, family, contributions to the community. Teachers should foster a classroom dialogue concerning student role models. The discussion should focus on what makes a good role model, including such qualities as hard work, ambition, willingness to overcome problems, courage, and a desire to contribute to their communities.

RESOURCES

Print:

Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life by Roger Daniels (Visual Education Corporation, 2002)

The New Americans, by Michael Barone (Regnery, 2001)

The Other Face of America: Chronicles of the Immigrants Shaping Our Future, by Jorge Ramos (HarperCollins, 2002)

Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States, by Manuel G. Gonzales (Indiana University Press, 2000)

Mexican Immigration (from the Changing Face of North America series) by LeeAnne Gelletly (Mason Crest Publishers, 2004)

Internet

Eduardo Nájera Foundation:
www.najera21.com/fundacion/index.asp

Ridgell, Patrick, “You Can’t Keep a Good Man Down,” from *Latino Leaders: The National Magazine of the Successful American Latino* (www.latinoleaders.com), December 2002.

Wielenga, Dave, “The People’s Champ,”
www.Hispaniconline.com/magazine/20003/dec/career

Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics, Pew Hispanic Center Report, June 14, 2005

The Size and Characteristics of the Unauthorized Migrant Population in the U.S., Pew Hispanic Center Report, March 7, 2006

United States Census Bureau, www.census.gov

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Office of Immigration Statistics, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (annual).
<http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/yearbook/index.htm>

National Basketball Association (www.nba.com)