

FROM A PUBLIC DEFENDER TO CAREER PROSECUTOR: HOW CRUZ REYNOSO CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF MY LIFE

MARTHA CARRILLO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. POOR AND UNDOCUMENTED IN SOUTH CENTRAL LOS ANGELES	23
II. PROFESSOR REYNOSO: MY MENTOR AT UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW	26
III. JUSTICE AS A PROSECUTOR	30
IV. CRUZ REYNOSO: NUESTRO REY	36

I. POOR AND UNDOCUMENTED IN SOUTH CENTRAL LOS ANGELES

Justice Cruz Reynoso, my law school Professor and mentor, had a profound impact on my life. I met Cruz Reynoso in 1992, as a first-year law student at UCLA School of Law.

I came to the United States as an undocumented child from Mazatlán, Sinaloa, Mexico. I was raised by a single mother, with only a third-grade education, who cleaned houses for a living. She raised me in a cockroach-infested rental home in South Central Los Angeles. Even though we lived with other family members and sublet a room to a stranger, we still struggled to make ends meet. To provide my siblings and me with a good education, my mother borrowed a friend’s address so we could attend out-of-area schools. Because of my mother, I was able to graduate from Henry T. Gage Middle School and Huntington Park High School in the City of Huntington Park.¹

Prior to the passage of the Immigration and Reform Control Act of 1987, my undocumented status meant I existed in a shroud of fear, secrecy, and shame. “Don’t let anyone find out, or we might be deported,” I was told. In elementary school, any thought I might have had of joining

¹ Although the City of Huntington Park offered presumably better schools, these schools came with their own challenges and limited resources. Both schools were so overpopulated, that they had to resort to a tracking system in order to accommodate the vast number of students enrolled.

the Girl Scouts was quickly quashed. Not only were the uniforms too expensive and way beyond our means, but all the patches on the uniforms conveyed a “government” connection, something we needed to stay away from so as not to draw any attention to ourselves. The goal was to be as invisible as possible to avoid the risk of being deported. My home address was also something that needed to be concealed. I was told, “Don’t let anyone know where you really live because you might get kicked out of school.” For that reason, my mother warned me to avert my gaze while I waited to catch the #108 bus to school. That way, any teachers driving down Slauson Avenue to Huntington Park would not recognize me. I would later come to realize that the Huntington Park area schools I attended did not have easy freeway access and some of the teachers got off the freeway right where I caught the bus to school in South Central Los Angeles. They would then drive down Slauson Avenue to Huntington Park; hence, my mother’s fear of me being recognized by the teachers as an out-of-area student.

My mother never learned how to drive, so we relied on public transportation for everything. For laundry, we used a shopping cart to get our clothes to and from the nearest laundromat. We used this shopping cart for grocery trips when we weren’t lucky enough to have a kind uncle drive us. This shopping cart was a valuable possession. We kept it under lock and key in the backyard. As a child, blissfully ignorant, it never dawned on me that the use of the shopping cart violated the law. Unauthorized possession of a shopping cart is considered theft under the penal code or at the very least, possession of stolen property.² Years later, as an Assistant District Attorney in Santa Cruz County, I realized that I could have been fined and/or imprisoned just by using the shopping cart. That something so essential for those without access to a car is a crime and can exact such harsh legal consequences struck me as profoundly unfair. Such a law might deter someone with the same experiences as me from becoming a prosecutor should the law be strictly enforced. This was one of my earliest on-the-job lessons of prosecutorial discretion and collateral consequences; how some laws seemingly benign and fair on the surface, can have grave consequences and severely impact low-income and underserved communities.

Growing up, I witnessed my young cousins get ensnared by gangs and end up as defendants in our criminal justice system. One of my

² California Business and Professions Code section 22435, et. seq.

cousins was sentenced to a lengthy prison term at the tender age of fourteen. As I ascended in my prosecution career, he and I remained in contact via written correspondence and remain close to this day.³

In my last year of high school, my brother was arrested and charged with a very serious sexual assault. Even though my brother fervently maintained his innocence, his public defender pushed for a plea bargain so my family sought a private attorney to represent him. As the “smart one” in the family (because my English was better than my other family members), I was tasked with finding a lawyer to represent my brother. After contacting a car accident attorney—the only attorney I could find—I ended up being referred to an excellent private criminal defense attorney. My family came together, put in every penny we had, and even asked our neighbors for money to hire a private attorney. Throughout my brother’s trial, I assisted his attorney with translation and witness preparation. Watching my brother’s attorney in action, I got a front-row seat to criminal defense work. After the harrowing ordeal, the attorney secured my brother’s acquittal. Even with the joy of the acquittal, there was a painful realization: I was poor and undocumented and, therefore, I could never be a lawyer like her. Perhaps, I thought, I could someday work as a secretary in a lawyer’s office.

Accordingly, higher education appeared out of reach—an impossible future for someone like me. That is, until I met my speech and debate teacher in high school, Ms. Cynthia K. Shelton. Ms. Shelton immediately “adopted” me as the child she never had and mentored me throughout high school. She nurtured and developed the natural advocate in me. She taught me the principles of the Lincoln-Douglas debate, how to skillfully analyze and argue the positive and negative sides of any issue, and even bought me my first and only debating suit, which I wore at every speech and debate competition. She made me believe that even as a poor, undocumented student, a college education *was* possible. She assured me that funding for college was feasible via scholarships and student loans. If I didn’t have the money to go to college, the government would lend me the money, so long as I promised to pay it back someday, she *said*. Such a path to higher education seemed unbelievable when she first presented it to me, but to my profound astonishment, everything she

³ This same cousin has since more than paid his debt to society with his numerous years in prison – many in solitary confinement. Assisted by Homeboys Industries since his release a few years back, he is fully rehabilitated and is now a contributing member of society.

said was true. Thus, I applied to UCLA's undergraduate program in 1986 and was admitted that same year.

I was the first in my family to attend college. During my undergrad years, I became a legal resident. Upon obtaining my undergraduate degree from UCLA in 1990, I was determined to go to law school to become a criminal defense attorney. Based on my personal experiences with my family members being accused of crimes, I viewed the criminal justice system as oppressive to our people—the Brown and Black people of marginalized and underserved communities. I was determined to defend our people against this oppressive system.

II. PROFESSOR REYNOSO: MY MENTOR AT UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW

At UCLA School of Law, I met Professor Cruz Reynoso. Immediately upon meeting him, I knew Professor Reynoso was no ordinary law school professor. Professor Reynoso was not only legally brilliant, but he was also inspirational. His easy nature and humility made him approachable to students like me, those of us for whom law school was a perpetual struggle that imprinted on us an enduring feeling of impostor syndrome.

Although Professor Reynoso had served as a Justice on the California Supreme Court, had held many important and distinguished roles, and had enjoyed an impressive legal career prior to teaching, he remained *humilde*—he was *humilde* to his core. For all the glory, accolades, and recognition he received throughout his lifetime, he never forgot his humble beginnings. This quality attracted students like me to him. I believe it also attracted him to students like me—*los hijos de nada*—children from the humblest beginnings. The children of “My People” beautifully expressed by Langston Hughes,⁴ albeit, with a few additions—the “dreamers,” house cleaners, gardeners, janitors, farm workers, dishwashers, maids, cooks, waiters, day laborers, and the children of those who never owned cars like my mother, yet somehow mastered the maze of the Los Angeles rapid transit system, at times taking several connecting bus lines just to get to work each day.

It was this humility and the gentle, down-to-earth, engaging way that he interacted with students that made him so approachable, inspiring, and endearing. His lectures were imbued with real-life experiences, drawn from his own remarkable fight for justice for low-income individuals and marginalized and underserved communities. When he talked

⁴ Hughes, Langston. “My People.” 1923.

about his time advocating at the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) and serving as a California Supreme Court Associate Justice, theoretical legal concepts came to life. His law school lectures were riveting, mesmerizing, and, above all, personal and inspiring. It is almost an injustice to describe them as lectures at all. They were much more than that—they were a noble call to arms for justice, from the legal giant of a man who had already fought and won many battles for us, but now, with every lecture, every legal concept learned, he handed us the baton. It was as if with every lecture, he was telling us, “I’ve done my part, and I am continuing to do my part by teaching you what I know, so you can do yours.” When I walked out of his lectures, I felt empowered, like I was ready to change the world and take up the battle for justice on his behalf.

When he lectured on legal ethics and professionalism, his very essence and larger-than-life persona transformed the subjects into a living example of the integrity and principles he talked so passionately about. And, when he called on me in class, I knew he wasn’t calling me just as a routine exercise in Socratic diversion. Rather, as a fellow law school classmate fondly recalled at his symposium, Professor Reynoso recognized those of us who suffered from impostor syndrome and who struggled to find our voice. He recognized the students like me who, for too long, had practiced being invisible and silent for fear of being found out. Hence, he made a point of calling on me during his class, forcing me to use my voice, and thereby to start becoming comfortable with the voice I would one day employ as an advocate for clients and for our cause.

With Professor Reynoso, there was no such thing as limited “office hours,” he was accessible to us at *all* times. Professor Reynoso radiated warmth, kindness, and acceptance. To interact and spend time with him, reminded me of the love, support, and warmth of family—of my mother, my grandmother, and my humble home back in South Central L.A. In an academic setting that for too long had felt intimidating and foreign, Professor Reynoso made me feel like I belonged. When we talked, we often shared stories about our upbringing, talked in our native Spanish, shared jokes, and laughed heartily with pure delight.



FIGURE 1: Professor Cruz Reynoso with Martha Carrillo in 1994.

Law school for me, and others like me, was not easy. I struggled to keep my grades up, but Professor Reynoso had a way of easing our academic burden. As difficult as the law school curriculum was, and as challenging as the courses and subject matter seemed, Professor Reynoso had a way of illuminating it all and putting it in perspective. He helped ground us, and by example, led us to believe that all was possible and that someday soon we would become the great lawyers he envisioned us to be. His very presence was an embodiment of our dreams, and what was possible.

Upon meeting Professor Reynoso, we quickly established a strong mentor-mentee relationship. In the classroom and out of the classroom, Professor Reynoso emphasized service above self; that a law degree would empower us to become public servants to all communities, but particularly underserved communities. His was the epitome of a life of service. His focus on our community—the Latino community—was never about elevating himself at the expense of others. It was always about joining our forces, our strength, and rising together.

It was during one of our many mentor-mentee talks that Professor Reynoso asked what kind of law I intended to practice. Without skipping a beat, I immediately responded I would be a public defender, of course. I would be the kind of criminal defense attorney who had vigorously defended my brother and secured his acquittal years earlier; a

public servant who would fight against an oppressive system that continually incarcerates our people; a public servant who would fight to defend the poor, the oppressed, and the underrepresented. As I recited all the reasons why I was going to be a public defender, Professor Reynoso listened intently, and I was sure he would concur with my noble chosen profession. Yet, to my complete shock and dismay, that was not the case. Instead of merely giving me his blessing—acting as my chosen *padrino* into criminal defense work and sending me on my merry way—Professor Reynoso suggested something entirely different. He encouraged me to become a prosecutor—to pursue a career in criminal prosecution!

When he first uttered those words, I could not believe my ears. Here he was steering me toward the antithesis of the career I had envisioned for myself. I found it ironic that someone who had been ousted from the California Supreme Court for being perceived as too liberal was now nudging me toward a historically conservative profession—a prosecutor. As he spoke, I was dumbfounded, silent, in utter disbelief at what I was hearing. Yet, Professor Reynoso persisted, each time emphasizing the word “*prosecutor*” as if sensing my revulsion at the very word.

But because it was him, I listened. “Martha, in our criminal justice system, the *prosecutor* wields great power; the *prosecutor* gets to decide whether to file charges against the accused; the *prosecutor* gets to decide what charges to file; the *prosecutor* gets to decide what a case is worth when offering a plea bargain; the *prosecutor* gets to decide if charges will be dismissed; and the *prosecutor* gets to decide whether to seek the death penalty. Now, the defense attorney, they also play an important role. But, many times, they can only react to what the *prosecutor* does. When you say you want to help ‘our’ people, we need people like you, with your background, your life experience, and sensibilities in all positions of government, including prosecutor’s offices. ‘Our’ people need to be represented in *all* positions of power, and the *prosecutor* is a very powerful figure in the criminal justice system.”

Prior to Professor Reynoso’s suggestion, I had never considered becoming a prosecutor. But after our conversation, I took his advice to heart, even if I was not entirely convinced to change career paths yet.

Professor Reynoso remained a trusted and beloved mentor throughout law school, and at my graduation ceremony in 1995, we shared the podium—with him as the chosen Professor of the Year and myself as the class graduation speaker. I will never forget concluding my remarks

with Emerson's quote about the definition of "Success"—to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived—and thereupon being enthusiastically congratulated by my beloved mentor in our common language, "*Te aventaste, Martha!*"



FIGURE 2: UCLA School of Law 1995 graduation, Martha Carrillo and Cruz Reynoso.

III. JUSTICE AS A PROSECUTOR

Soon after graduation, and after a brief stint as a staff attorney at the California Appellate Project representing indigent defendants on appeal, I heeded Professor Reynoso's advice. I applied to both district attorney offices and public defender offices, certain no district attorney's office would hire me in view of my sensibilities and professional experience (prior to law school I had interned for the Public Defender Service, Mental Health Division, in Washington, D.C.). To my disbelief, I was hired by the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office as an Assistant District Attorney. I spent three years at that office prosecuting misdemeanor offenses. Thereafter, I returned to my hometown of Los Angeles where I was hired by the Los Angeles County District Attorney's office, which is where I remain to this day.

As a new prosecutor handling misdemeanors, I quickly experienced first-hand the power of prosecutorial discretion, the same power that Professor Reynoso had counseled me about years earlier when he had steered me toward prosecution work. I quickly learned that the consequences for misdemeanor convictions—although considered low-level crimes in our criminal justice system—are severe and exacting, often resulting in life-long consequences.

In one case, a young Hispanic woman was stopped by the California Highway Patrol for a minor traffic offense, and she was charged with possession of a counterfeit driver's license. The minor traffic stop had resulted in rather serious charges for possession of false documents.⁵ After listening to her public defender and family, I learned that she had done what many young people her age have done—obtained a false identification card to get into a 21-and-over club. This young woman was in the process of immigration proceedings, and a resulting conviction, even the proverbial “415” (disturbing the peace, the most benign of all misdemeanor charges) would have dire collateral consequences for her pending immigration application and entire life.⁶ Unbeknownst to the public defender pleading for the full dismissal of the charges, she could not have found a more sympathetic deputy district attorney than me—a formerly undocumented prosecutor. Even as a new deputy district attorney, just barely becoming comfortable with my prosecutorial discretion, I did not hesitate to dismiss the charges against the young woman. And as I stood in that courtroom, as the voice for The People, and announced the dismissal of the charges in the interest of justice, I thought of Professor Reynoso.⁷ I realized the wisdom of his guidance and understood why he had placed me on the prosecutor's side of counsel table. It was that wisdom and guidance that led me to that pivotal moment in that young woman's life, to be able to define “justice” in that circumstance, and to be instrumental in serving the people. I will never forget the words of the young woman's parents as I walked out of the courtroom, “*Señorita, usted es una santa,*” as if what I had done was some kind of miracle. I proudly responded, “*No, no soy una santa, soy abogada*

⁵ California Penal Code § 529.5(b).

⁶ California Penal Code § 415.

⁷ California Penal Code § 1385(a) in relevant part states, “The judge or magistrate may, either . . . on motion of the court or upon the application of the prosecuting attorney, and in furtherance of justice, order an action dismissed.

fiscal y lo que hice fue darles justicia.” That would not be the last time I would use prosecutorial discretion for justice.

Once, I was threatened with contempt of court for speaking in defense of an undocumented street vendor, who was the victim of a robbery. An unscrupulous defense attorney tried to intimidate the victim by suggesting in open court that he intended to “impeach” the victim by inquiring about her immigration status. He insisted that her coming into this country illegally was relevant to her “credibility.” When the judge refused to stop the obvious intimidation attempt, I spoke up in defense of the victim, despite being ordered to stay silent. The judge ordered a contempt hearing against me, but ultimately backed down and never went through with the hearing.⁸

I worked for years prosecuting sexual assault crimes of children and vulnerable victims. As difficult as relaying their experiences of sexual abuse was for many non-English speaking Hispanic children, the difficulty was greatly lessened by encountering a prosecutor who greeted them warmly in their own language. Their parents were equally grateful for my ability to explain the process and answer all their questions in Spanish. Their sense of relief and comfort was immediately palpable upon meeting me. You could see the recognition on their faces—they knew I was one of them, I spoke their language, and I understood.

My command of the Spanish language also served me well in court. Once, the court-appointed interpreter distorted a young child victim’s testimony. The translator suggested the child victim was describing having a female “monkey” on her lap as the sexual abuse occurred. The bad translation had the potential to cast doubt on the child’s account of the incident. I mean, what jury would find credible a child describing holding a female monkey on her lap when the sexual abuse was occurring? Alas, that was not allowed on my watch. I quickly corrected the record and clarified that the child was referring to a doll—a *mona* in Spanish—and not a female monkey as had been translated by the court-certified interpreter.

More recently, a young Mexican man was gunned down by an off-duty Los Angeles Police Officer. The murderer fled to Mexico immediately following the killing. The victim’s loving family begged for justice

⁸ Since that time, on August 22, 2022, Senate Bill 836 was enacted, which proscribes that in a civil or criminal action, a person’s immigration status shall not be disclosed in open court by a party or their attorney unless the judge presiding over the matter first determines that the evidence is admissible in an in camera hearing requested by the party seeking disclosure of the person’s immigration status. Codified in California Evidence Code sections 351.3(a) and 351.4(a).

for their murdered son. However, because of a tattoo of a Mexican eagle on the victim's chest (which his killer never saw), it was suggested that the tattoo was somehow indicative of a gang connection, and hence, the case should be settled for something less than murder. While others, including the judge, looked at the victim and saw a gang member, I, the *Mexicana*, saw a young Mexican man simply proud of his heritage. I insisted that the case be tried in front of a jury and, after a heavily contested trial, the jury eventually agreed with me, finding the murderer guilty.

Throughout my career, I remained in contact with my beloved mentor Professor Reynoso and still fondly recall our occasional meetings such as at Mexican American Bar Association (MABA) events or an informal get-together at a dear mutual friend's home. And, after giving me a warm hug, he couldn't wait to ask me how I was doing at work. What did I think of being a prosecutor? And, of course, I would enthusiastically recount some recent stories echoing the experiences described above, where my perspective and background had made a difference in a case. Upon hearing my stories, I would see the twinkle in his eye as he laughed and relished his accomplishment at his mischief—of having completely changed my career path and proving him right. But to be clear, he relished being right not for its own sake, but because this was better for the common good of our underserved communities, that in fact, need advocates like me at the prosecution table.



FIGURE 3: Martha Carrillo and Professor Cruz Reynoso at the 2016 MABA dinner.

In the way I practice law and how I go about each day, I strive to emulate the *humildad* that Professor Reynoso embodied. I always remain accessible to my community, just as he was accessible to his students. Likewise, there have been numerous times in Downtown Los Angeles, as I am walking to my office or the courthouse in my lawyer attire, that I am approached with the hesitant inquiry, “*Oiga, habla Español?*” It is apparent the speaker, although hopeful, is uncertain of what the response will be. At those times, I proudly respond, with “*Si, claro, como le puedo ayudar?*” I have guided someone to the proper courthouse, filled out a necessary form for an essential service, and answered questions (mindful of not offering legal advice).

My beloved mentor, Professor Reynoso, taught me that helping our communities means empowering our communities with knowledge whenever possible. Once, I assisted a Spanish-speaking woman in filling out necessary medical forms written in English, which she could not comprehend. After filling out the forms, she asked me to sign her name on the form, as she could not read or write. Instead of signing the form for her, I gave her the confidence to sign any form in the future herself. I told her, “Do you think if you asked Juan Gabriel or Vicente Fernandez for a signature, they would actually sign their name legibly, writing every letter to their name? No, they would scribble something unintelligible and that would be their ‘signature.’ You can do the same. Pretend you are as famous as they are, and someone asked you for a signature. Decide what your signature is going to be and adopt that as your signature from now on. Now, anytime you are ever asked for a signature, you will have one.” Her face lit up with understanding and relief. “Yes, I can pretend I am famous,” she enthusiastically exclaimed, relishing the idea. She then diligently began practicing her “signature” before settling on one, and joyfully exclaimed that she now had a signature as she showed me her unintelligible scribble!

Today, 26 years later, I am the Deputy in Charge of the Conviction Integrity Unit. I have a profound understanding and appreciation of why Professor Reynoso steered me toward this path—the path of prosecution work. The humility embodied by Professor Reynoso transcends into the work I now undertake in the criminal justice system. It is exemplified in the mission of the Conviction Integrity Unit within the Los Angeles District Attorney’s Office to rectify injustices and exonerate innocent individuals who were wrongfully convicted.

Although innocence projects have been operating for years outside of prosecutor's offices, Conviction Review Units, also known as Conviction Integrity Units, within prosecutor's offices are a relatively new development in our criminal justice system.⁹ The Los Angeles District Attorney's Office Conviction Review Unit (since renamed the Conviction Integrity Unit) was created by District Attorney Jackie Lacey in 2015 and expanded by District Attorney George Gascón in 2020. It requires genuine humility for a prosecutor's office to establish a Conviction Integrity Unit because the very act of doing so is a recognition that our criminal justice system is imperfect, that there is room for error, but the error will not be left to stand. Although for some it is a difficult reality to fathom, as articulated by Judge Learned Hand, "Our procedure has been always haunted by the ghost of the innocent man convicted. It is an unreal dream."¹⁰ Those of us who have been practicing law in the criminal justice system long enough know that the "unreal dream" is actually not unreal; in fact, it is a very real nightmare, which has happened far more often than we will ever care to realize.

The work requires humility for all who play a part in the criminal justice system, but particularly prosecutors, because in uncovering wrongful convictions they must recognize and accept that mistakes were made. It requires humility to recognize that our adversarial system of criminal justice does not always get it right, that we do not always convict the real perpetrator,—that not everyone charged with a crime is, in fact, guilty. It requires humility to accept the notion that, despite our best intentions, our adversarial system of criminal justice is, in fact, an imperfect system. That error exists. It requires humility to collaboratively work with defense attorneys in evaluating and investigating these claims. Attorneys who our criminal justice system typically pit against each other as adversaries in the quest for justice—Prosecution versus Defense—can now work together to uncover the truth.

It requires humility to accept that a Conviction Integrity Unit within a district attorney's office is not the enemy from within. It is a shared and valued common quest for true justice for all. It requires humility to accept that a criminal justice system is comprised of human

⁹ The Conviction Integrity Unit Project of Dallas County, in Dallas, Texas, was the first conviction review unit established within a prosecutor's office to review claims of actual innocence in 2007.

¹⁰ *United States v. Garsson*, 291 F. 646, 649 (S.D.N.Y. 1923).

players, with most (though not always) playing their roles to the best of their abilities. But our very humanity means it is a system susceptible to error. Because as human beings we are, indeed, fallible. This means we are susceptible to implicit bias, tunnel vision, and all the other frailties that often play a role in wrongful convictions. This also means acknowledging the role that systemic racism and explicit bias have played in our criminal justice system, which has led to the unjust and disparate treatment of individuals.

And, thus it is, that nowadays I walk into court and have the honor of declaring that a conviction that had been proven true beyond a reasonable doubt and upheld on all levels of appeal is actually *not*, in fact, true. I implore the court that it must be vacated, and the person released, often after many, many years of imprisonment. Such was the case of Maurice Hastings, who served close to 38 years in prison for a murder, which DNA evidence now shows, he did not commit. In another case, my unit was at the cusp of exoneration for Alex Torres, and I spoke with his mother, *mi tocaya*, as I fondly call her, because her name is also Martha. When I reassured her that her son would be coming home soon, she told me that her family had not celebrated Christmas since her son's arrest 22 years prior. "How could we?" she asked me. "How could we celebrate Christmas knowing my son was in prison *for life* for something he did not do?" And, when I had the privilege and honor on behalf of my Office, to tell her in Spanish, our common language, "*Y le doy mi palabra, Señora, que esta Navidad usted tendrá su hijo en casa,*" she cried with relief. As we held each other, I was filled with a profound sense of gratitude for my beloved mentor Professor Reynoso who guided me toward this path, who was instrumental in placing me on this side of the counsel table. It is because of him that I am now part of a team within the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office that rectifies injustices long overdue for Mr. Hastings, Mr. Torres, and other individuals my unit has exonerated before them. I cannot help but think that my current assignment as the Deputy in Charge of the Conviction Integrity Unit is the ultimate ode to my hero, my mentor, my beloved Professor Reynoso.

IV. CRUZ REYNOSO: NUESTRO REY

To conclude an essay tribute to Justice Cruz Reynoso who embodied humility with an analogy to a king, may seem paradoxical at first glance, but such an apparent contradiction goes to the heart,—to the

essence and beauty—of Professor Reynoso. He was held by all in the highest esteem, that upper echelon of respect befitting a king. Yet, as high above as he was, he remained grounded with his community and his people. As high as he rose, he never once forgot his roots, where he came from. And that is why the contradiction is really no contradiction at all. As I said in my remarks at the symposium for Justice Cruz Reynoso last April 2022, Professor Reynoso, for us Latinos in the legal profession, was our *Rey* as the first part of his surname denotes. He was the king we all admired and hoped to emulate. Our legal icon. Ranchera music had Vicente Fernandez as its “*El Rey*,” and we had our own El Rey in Cruz REYnoso. But for a king, he was the world’s most *humilde* king, and that is precisely why he was so loved, admired, and respected by all. He was ours, *de nuestra gente*, de “*NOSOtros*” as the latter part of his surname denotes. His last name perfectly encapsulates what he was for us - Cruz REYNOSO, el “*REY*” de “*NOSO*”tros.

