

CRUZ REYNOSO: A BEACON OF HOPE FOR JUSTICE

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As I sat in my first-year law school class questioning my belonging, someone with a gentle and compassionate voice broke me out of the questioning.

Justice Reynoso was born in Brea, California, on May 2, 1931. He was one of eleven children and worked in the orange groves. He often told the story of going to a segregated school of Mexican-American children and how puzzled he was when they spoke only Spanish to him since he was bilingual. He was aware of injustice from a very young age and proceeded to dedicate his entire life to justice. He inspired thousands of first-generation lawyers, was the first Latino California Supreme Court Justice, and approached life with determination and kindness. This was my professor, the Honorable Cruz Reynoso at UC Davis Law School.

He asked if anyone in the class was interested in volunteering to work with him on a special project investigating the wrongful police-killing of a local farmworker. I almost jumped out of my seat to tell him I was the right person for the job. After class I visited him in office hours and it was the first time in my legal journey that I felt I related to someone. He inspired me to stay the course. I went on to work with Justice Reynoso for the rest of my law school journey and built a friendship with him that has deeply impacted my life. Throughout the two years I worked as his clerk, we investigated a police shooting by forming a commission of community residents. He taught me the importance of building community and consensus from diverse people. We staffed the commission and organized formal hearings in a community in Yolo County. From this experience I learned more than any legal textbook could ever teach me.

Justice Reynoso, or as I called him in Spanish, *profesor* Reynoso, was a legal giant. Through his life, he received high honors, such as the Presidential Freedom Medal from President Clinton. Still, he made everyone feel like family. I often staffed meetings and convenings with the Woodland community, where Mexican families often brought him tamales and home-cooked meals as a token of their appreciation. On the same day, he would receive an informal call from then Governor Brown, and we often ended the day having a nice meal at the local Black Bear diner with local lawyers. His most impressive quality was his ability to love people of all backgrounds and his desire to help people of all walks of life. He taught me to seek justice with conviction and with passion.

At every stage of my career, I asked for his guidance. I have come to realize that beyond that, he instilled in me a sense of hope, no matter the obstacle. He instilled in me a sense of pride in the legal profession. He instilled in me an unparalleled commitment to justice for all people. This experience was not unique to me but to the many hundreds of lawyers he's inspired to join the fight for civil rights.

Justice Reynoso cared about people. He didn't need the accolades, wealth, nor titles: he needed to be close to his community. He showed up for people when they needed him the most. He was a community organizer, litigator, expert witness, and mentor to countless students as a means of building for the future. He sowed the seeds for a more just and inclusive society and we owe him to continue his legacy. Join me.