

Richard M. Estrada (1941-1999)

America lost a true patriot, and the modern immigration reform movement lost one of its most thoughtful, articulate, and dedicated champions when *Dallas Morning News* associate editor and columnist Richard M. Estrada died suddenly in 1999 at the age of 49.

Richard was born in Lordsburg, New Mexico, to a family of first-generation Mexican immigrants. His father worked as a copper miner and a gas station attendant. Growing up, Richard excelled in school, becoming the first member of his family to graduate from college. He went on to earn a master's degree in Mexican history from the University of Texas at El Paso, and later did graduate study in Latin American history at the University of Chicago.

While at the University of Chicago, he would sneak into famous Chicago School of Economics Professor Milton Friedman's class determined to "prove him wrong" about his free market theories, as Estrada put it. Later, Richard would laugh at the spectacle of himself as a young blue jean clad left-wing Chicano radical challenging a somewhat bemused Professor Friedman from his back-of-the-classroom seat.

After serving in the Army National Guard and teaching part-time with the El Paso, Texas, public school system, Estrada joined the staff of Texas Democratic Representative Ronald Coleman in 1983. Richard's experience growing up along the Mexican border made him keenly aware of how employers could and often did exploit the presence of large pools of illegal immigrant labor to hold down the wages and working conditions of U.S. citizens and lawful immigrants alike. Deeply patriotic, Richard also understood the importance of maintaining U.S. sovereignty and the rule of law that made the American Dream possible for people like himself.

He briefly worked for the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) in 1986 before joining the staff of the newly founded Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) as a senior research fellow. In 1988, he returned to Texas to become associate editor of the *Dallas Morning News*. A syndicated columnist with the *Washington Post* Writers Group, his column, which frequently weighed in on immigration policy, appeared regularly in the *Post* and 24 other newspapers across the country.

At the *Dallas Morning News*, Richard calmly ignored periodic visits by Latino activists, furious at any member of their ethnic group who would oppose their quest for political power and who demanded that the newspaper's management fire him.

In 1992, he was appointed as one of the nine members of the bi-partisan U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, chaired by the late Congresswoman and black civil rights leader, Barbara Jordan, where by virtue of his gentlemanly courtesy and great scholarship, he exerted a quiet but outsized behind-the-scenes influence on the Commission's deliberations and final recommendations.

In the words of commission vice-chairman, the late Brandeis University Professor Lawrence Fuchs, "What I came to see in Richard was ... his concerns were governed powerfully by his major interest in making our own people, our own nation, whole His great preoccupation was any negative impacts that immigration has on the most vulnerable."

In 1995, he testified before the House Judiciary Committee in opposition to agricultural guest worker programs, noting that "the absence of slavery (in guest worker programs) does not imply the presence of freedom," and saying that while agricultural employers have legitimate needs, "the greater the number of workers there are vying for a particular job, the lower the wages and working conditions agricultural employers will be obliged to offer." Milton Friedman would have approved.