



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Letter to the Editor

The AMS recently published the book, *Testimonios: Stories of Latinx and Hispanic Mathematicians*. The book is a celebration of stamina in the face of obstacles. The role that mentoring plays in a person's life takes center stage, both as the mentee and the mentor. Selenne Banuelos, in her chapter, views "mentoring of underrepresented students as an essential part of my career." In his contribution to this book, Ricardo Cortez states, "I made the decision to dedicate time to work toward increasing the participation of people of color in mathematics at the cost of a reduction in research publications and other professional output."

As a Chicano mathematician in the profession for more than 40 years, I devoted many, many hours to increasing participation by all students in mathematics-based careers. Why did I, as so many of my minority colleagues, devote so much time to mentoring minority students? I can provide an answer to this question quite easily. I was grateful to have had a mathematical career.

Like so many other minority mathematicians, I grew up in poverty. Due to Pell grants and loans, I was able to complete a bachelor's degree. My time in the US Navy allowed me to use the GI Bill to supplement a Teaching Assistantship and complete a doctoral degree. Then I held a tenured position at a state university. The US invested the tax dollars of our citizens in me and supported me for almost six decades. Had there been just a few small changes in my life, I would not have had the benefits of being a mathematician. How could I not be grateful? This gratefulness and my strong belief that mathematical talent lives in every community and will flourish if given a chance led me down this path of giving back to our communities. And not just the minority community, but all communities.

As mathematicians, we have been supported by the tax dollars of our citizens. An infrastructure supports our faculty positions and allows us the real luxury of having that precious time to dream, to carry out our research and attend conferences all over the world. Moreover, we must recognize that mathematical training provides a way out of poverty. Our positions as mathematics faculty makes us the guards at the gate of prosperity.

The dedication that my fellow minority mathematicians have for encouraging minority participation in mathematics-based careers seems natural to me. It is a pattern of behavior that should be emulated by all of us in this profession. Referring back to Selenne, I exhort my fellow mathematicians to make mentoring our students an essential part of our careers. Society will be better for it.

—William Yslas Vélez  
Emeritus Professor of Mathematics  
The University of Arizona

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