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A Kineño Remembers: From the King Ranch to the White House (Perspectives on South Texas, sponsored by Texas A&M University-Kingsville)

Lauro F. Cavazos

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On September 20, 1988, Lauro Cavazos became the first Hispanic in the history of the United States to be appointed to the Cabinet, when thenvice president George H. W. Bush swore him in as secretary of education. Cavazos, born on the legendary King Ranch in South Texas and educated in a two-room ranch schoolhouse, served until December 1990, after which he returned to his career in medical education and academic administration.

In this engaging memoir, he recounts not only his years in Washington but also the childhood influences and life experiences that informed his policies in office. The ranch, he says, taught him how to live.

These pages are full of glimpses into life on the famous ranch. Cavazos tells of Christmas parties, cattle work, and schooling. In his home, he was introduced to a natural bilingualism: he and his siblings were encouraged to speak only English with their father and only Spanish with their mother.

Cavazos describes the high educational expectations his parents held. After service in World War II, Cavazos went to college and earned a doctorate from Iowa State University, launching him on a career in medical education. In 1980 he returned to his alma mater, Texas Tech University, as its tenth presidentthe first Hispanic and the first graduate of the university to serve in that post.

As secretary of education, Cavazos stressed a commitment to reading. Indeed, he once told a group of educators that the curriculum for the first three years of school should be “reading, reading, and more reading.”

His career is as interesting as it is inspiring, and Cavazos’ memoir joins the ranks of emerging success stories by Mexican Americans that will provide models for aspiring young people today.

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