A decade ago, at the end of my introductory essay to the first edition of this book, I wrote, “As Tejanos rediscover their contributions to Texas history, as they overcome the barriers that separate Texan and Tejano, Juan Seguín has again returned to serve as intermediary between the two.” Writing in a new century and taking note of the quickly changing ethnic, social, political and economic landscape of Texas, I would like to amend that conclusion. It is not only Tejanos who have been on a journey of rediscovery, so too have Anglo Texans.

Juan Seguín is not just a hero for Texans of Mexican descent. All Texans now recognize his unique contribution to Texas history. In complex, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural societies such as Texas, there is a need for historical figures representative of that diversity. Men and women of public prominence serve as role models for youth and as positive examples of nation building, state building, and community building. Often, these eminent individuals are challengers of the status quo, rebukers of intolerance, defenders of rights, and as such are controversial in their own times—vili-fied, persecuted, and stigmatized. In time, however, their vision and contributions come to be recognized and their history begins to be reconsidered. A recent manifestation of this changing understanding can be found in the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum’s choice of Seguín as the narrative voice for the short video A Revolution Remembered: The Memoirs and Selected Correspondence of Juan N. Seguín. The following is from his introduction to the second edition of that book.
Juan Seguín, born in San Antonio in 1806, served in several political positions before beginning his military career in 1835. He was commissioned as a captain by Stephen F. Austin and fought with the revolutionary army. He entered the Alamo with other Texian defenders when Santa Anna’s army arrived but was sent out as a courier through Mexican lines with a plea for reinforcements. Commended by Sam Houston for his actions at the Battle of San Jacinto, Seguín returned to San Antonio to accept the Mexican surrender of the city. He later collected the remains of the Alamo dead and conducted the military funeral service for them. He served in the Senate of the Republic of Texas and as mayor of San Antonio and Bexar County constable. He retired to Nuevo Laredo and died there in 1890. His remains were returned to Texas in 1974 and buried at Seguin, the town named in his honor.

From Jesús F. de la Teja’s biography of Seguín in The Handbook of Texas Online

presentation on the military aspects of the Texas War of Independence, “Revolution.”

This is not to say that these new-found examples of heroism are perfect in every way. Perfection is a human ideal, not a reality. Even the “great men” in history are full of contradictions—Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence yet owned slaves. Heroes make mistakes, have enemies, indulge in excesses. Often, the very heroism that we applaud is but a momentary rising above the mundane and timid nature that generally characterizes humanity. Having achieved momentary greatness, the majority of persons who rise to occasions return to their previous state and resume normal lives of anonymity.

Juan Seguín was no perfect luminary. He made enemies, both among Anglo Texans and his fellow Tejanos. He made economic gain of the unsettled situation in San Antonio in the post-independence period. What Texian leader could not be accused of the same? Seguín’s accomplishments, both as a civil and military leader, especially in the context of an increasingly hostile ethnic environment, would not allow him to sink into anonymity, however.

Unlike many of his fellow Tejano political and military associates, with the prominent exception of José Antonio Navarro,
Seguín left enough of a record to make him more than a name on a roster or plaque. Not only his memoirs but a considerable amount of correspondence provide ample evidence of Seguin’s life work to grant him a preeminent place among the founders of independent Texas.

That much of this recognition has accrued to Juan Seguín in the last few years should not be surprising. First, the rise of Chicano history some three decades ago brought attention to the neglected role of Mexican Americans in Texas history. Second, there is the changing face of Texas. Mexican Texans increasingly demand public recognition of their contribution to the building of modern Texas, and Seguin has been chosen as one of the primary vehicles of that recognition.

Changes in Texas society in the last twenty years require that we bring new sensibilities to our understanding of that past. After all, the last generation of the twentieth century produced Tejano members of the Texas Supreme Court and Texas Court of Appeals, a Tejano state attorney general, and, in 2002, the first electoral campaign in which a Tejano has been the Democratic party candidate for governor. Tejanos have not only served in local and statewide office but have gone to Washington, D.C., to serve at the cabinet level in the executive branch. Mexican Americans have also served as mayors of major Texas cities and have made important contributions to the social and cultural life of the state. Tex-Mex food and Tejano music are the cross-over expressions of the state’s new cultural reality, one in which Tejanos have as great a stake as the Anglo Texan majority.

The growing diversity of the United States as a whole means that the place of Mexican Americans in the nation’s history is also drawing more attention, and Juan Seguin has become an important ambassador of early Tejanos as a whole.

Latino Presence 1906-2006

1906 was the year that the first known Hispanic student, Maria Elena Zamora (later O’Shea), enrolled at Southwest Texas State Normal College. Zamora had begun teaching at age 15 at a rancho in Hidalgo County and came to San Marcos for a teaching certificate. She would go from here into a career as a teacher-principal (one of her students was J. Frank Dobie), prosperous businesswoman, translator, author and recorder of the Texas-Mexican story. She was involved in politics, Catholic Church activities, the Dallas Woman’s Forum and the Latin American League.

It is Zamora’s legacy that the Latino Presence honored. One of Texas State’s goals is to become a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) within the next few years. And we’re making progress.

To become known as an HSI, 25 percent of a university’s undergraduate student enrollment must be Hispanic; and half of those students must be first-generation college or lower income. This fall Texas State enrolled 5,671 Hispanic students, the largest number ever. That represents 21 percent of student enrollment, but 23 percent of new students. Even more important, the university is retaining these students. Compared to the 10 largest Texas public universities, Texas State ranks third in retention and graduation of both African-American and Hispanic students.

One proven way to attract minority students is to attract minority faculty. Texas State currently has 70 Hispanic and 24 African-American full-time faculty, and here, too, there is progress. Since September 2004, 42 percent of all new tenure-track faculty hires have been ethnic minorities. In the fall of 2002, we had 94 minority faculty, and this fall we have 140. This fall alone, we were joined by 47 new tenure-track faculty, 46 percent of whom are of an ethnic minority. Nineteen percent are African-American; 13 percent are Hispanic.

Texas’ changing demographics make a strong case for increased Hispanic enrollment. Already a “minority majority” state, Texas’ Hispanic population is forecast to increase dramatically. Currently 35 percent of the state is Hispanic, but by 2020 the Anglo and Hispanic populations will be about equal and by 2040 more than half of all Texans will be Hispanic.