



Name of Property: United States Post Office and Court House
(Court House for the Southern District of California)
City, State: Los Angeles, California
Period of Significance: 1945-1946
NHL Criteria: 1
NHL Theme: III. Expressing Cultural Values
1. Educational and intellectual currents
Previous Recognition: 2006 National Register of Historic Places
National Historic Context: 2000 *Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States*

NHL Significance:

- Between 1945 and 1946, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California (today the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California) became an exceptionally important site in the annals of postwar American school desegregation efforts and the civil rights history of Mexican and Mexican-American people in the Southwest. The decision in *Mendez v. Westminster School District* (1946), a lawsuit filed by five Latino families whose children were denied admission to public schools in Southern California, forbade segregation on the grounds that separate was not equal. The decision by this Federal court—the first to declare that the doctrine of “separate but equal” ran counter to American law—marked a turning point in the legal struggle against segregation in primary education and served as precedence in striking down segregation



for Mexican Americans in the Southwest.

Integrity:

- The U.S. Court House for the Central District of California retains the majority of the essential physical features that made up its character and appearance between 1945 and 1946. The building possesses its original location and urban setting within the Los Angeles Civic Center complex, its overall design and feeling as a mid-twentieth century Federal courthouse, and its association as the place where *Mendez* was heard. Constructed using the highest quality materials and techniques, the building has proven to be very durable.
- Courtroom 8, the courtroom that heard the *Mendez* case, has experienced alterations to its lighting, flooring, pivoting gates, some seating, and possibly the acoustic tile wall design. However, its overwhelming appearance as a mid-twentieth century courtroom is evidenced in its dominant furnishings, woodworking elements, and period detailing.

Owner of Property: City of Los Angeles

Acreage of Property: 2.4 acres

Origins of Nomination: The *Mendez v. Westminster* case was tentatively identified as possessing national significance in the *Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States Theme Study* (2000). The nomination is also part of the U.S. Department of Interior's

National Park System Advisory Board

<http://www.nps.gov/history/nhl/Spring2012Nominations/LACourthouse.pdf>

<http://www.nps.gov/history/nhl/themes/Education%20Deseg.pdf>



American Latino Heritage Initiative (ALHI).

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- NHL designation will bring overdue recognition to the unique and compelling aspect of Latino civil rights and school desegregation largely overshadowed by the African American story.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known.

Landmarks Committee Comments:

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of):

Advisory Board Recommendation: