

*My photography feels organic to me, arising from my very blood. From the moment I bought my first pawn-store camera as a teenager, I pivoted to capture my barrio, my familia, and our everyday lives. Other subject matter, even for the years I worked as a newspaper photographer covering all sorts of stories, never much interested me. These photographs only, of Latinos in America, are the true extension of my self.*

*My approach is simple. I seek to honor the moment. I want to capture it without disturbing it, altering it, or embellishing it. I use spare amounts of film. I have to react quickly while blending into the background. I rely on the largess of the people I photograph to allow me to enter their private moments. I respect that by not drawing attention to myself.*

*Doing this exclusively over the past 40 years has also given me a purpose beyond my own life span. I am creating an historical record: the long view of what Latino life has been like across the United States across the decades. Through photographs taken at various times in a multitude of places, but all here in this country, I have been studying our behavior. How do new immigrants adapt? How do their children navigate a bilingual, bicultural existence? How do their grandchildren display their American-ness with a tense mixture of social savvy and longing for the past?*

*All of these realities exist in the same space and time. I am a third or fourth-generation Mexican American (depending on which ancestor you choose) and when I was a kid, my father took me out to the fields to help him pick cotton. So this man I am photographing amidst the tobacco is not me, nor is he my father or my grandfather, but he could have been. He and I are not so far removed from each other. We are essentially made of the same material and woven into the same cloth.*

*Thus, the responsibility not to say anything false about the lives of everyone I photograph reverberates within me. Instead, my work almost defiantly shows regular, mundane life. I like how people naturally arrange themselves against their environment. I am attentive to posture, dress, interaction, and the lines on faces that speak of difficulties and joy.*

*Ultimately when I place my work before the viewer, I am not in control of his or her reaction, nor do I seek to be. At best, I hope only to create more conversations: conversations between Latino parents and children about the past and future; conversations between neighbors of disparate backgrounds filled with a shared hope; conversations that transcend the shallow political rhetoric that passes for domestic policy debate; conversations that inspire young people to empower themselves.*

*I hope too that the viewer as well as the viewed can sense the respect and love that underscores my commitment to this documentary work. I hope I have done justice to who we as Latinos really are, have been, and are becoming. - José Galvez*