

# Arte Público Press

## Teacher's Guide

### **Eyewitness: A Filmmaker's Memoir of the Chicano Movement** by Jesús Salvador Treviño

#### **Book Synopsis**

*Eyewitness: A Filmmaker's Memoir of the Chicano Movement* chronicles the Mexican-American civil rights movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s and offers the reader a firsthand account of the pivotal events during those years. Treviño, a filmmaker and a journalist, participated in and documented the most important events of the Chicano Movement. In this autobiographical work, he weaves a chronicle of historical events and political philosophy with his own political and artistic development.

#### **Teaching Overview**

##### *Intended Audience and Disciplinary Connections*

This guide is intended to facilitate the exploration of Latino/Hispanic contributions to U.S. culture among high school and junior (as well as lower division) college students in history, social studies, and civics classes. It is also intended to educate general adult readers interested in issues of civil rights, racial equality, and community empowerment.

##### *Important Curricular Themes*

*Eyewitness: A Filmmaker's Memoir of the Chicano Movement* is valuable as a tool to strengthen student comprehension and understanding of several important themes, including:

- The emergence of the Chicano Movement in the context of the overall civil rights struggle in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s
- The successes, as well as challenges that particular groups have faced in the pursuit of equal opportunity and mobility within American society
- The power and limits of politics organized around race or other identities
- The extent of Mexican Americans' disenfranchisement from American society

#### **Reading Comprehension Strategies**

**Before Reading:** *Initiate in-class discussions with students on important topics that underscore the social and historical relevance of the work. Sample topics should include:*

- The Chicano Movement with other progressive movements at the time (ie: anti-Vietnam War, Black Power, and Feminism)
- The implications of forming a political movement on the basis of ethnic identity
- Examination of the political and economic experiences of people of color in the United States in the decades prior to the 1970s

- Arguments for and against the mainstreaming of topics concerning race and gender in schools

*Many of the media and literary tools listed in this teaching guide can be readily incorporated into pre-reading activities.*

**As Reading Progresses:** *Pose key questions from each chapter that focus on comprehension. Sample questions include:*

### **Forward and Preface**

- What does Treviño mean when he calls Chicanos the “invisible minority”? How does the media influence this status?
- What were the ways in which Treviño’s presence in the media was crucial to shaping his perspective?
- What are some of the political accomplishments of Mexican Americans that have been overlooked? Why have they been?

### **Chapter 1: Walkout!**

- How does Treviño describe his childhood and family origins?
- What was the turning point in his boyhood? How did this keep him from falling into truancy and crime?
- How does he first react to the militancy and anti-white sentiment of the movement?

### **Chapter 2: Delano**

- How does Treviño come to see his status within the Mexican-American community?
- How does he approach changing it?
- What does Treviño think about religion and, specifically, the Catholicism so central to Mexican culture?

### **Chapter 3: A Hidden History**

- Through his political awakening, how does Treviño view his prior education?
- How does Treviño seek to educate himself anew?
- What does he mean when he talks about “battling my own racism?”

### **Chapter 4: Adrift**

- What was the “New Communicators” and how was Treviño’s participation a watershed in his life?
- Why did Treviño refuse to support the war in Vietnam? How did he intend to avoid it and with what arguments?

### **Chapter 5: Sit-In**

- What is Treviño’s “Chicano Initiation?”
- How does his experience with political protest and police brutality alter his perspective on political engagement and the Mexican-American community?

### **Chapter 6: Denver Youth Conference**

- What was the Denver Youth Conference and what was Treviño’s experience of it?

- How does his opposition to the war in Vietnam mesh with his increasing involvement with the Chicano Movement?
- How do other movements for liberation (involving African-Americans and Women) seem to clash at times with the Chicano Movement? What are Treviño's impressions?

### **Chapter 7: *Ahora!***

- What was the typical Mexican image on film and television in the early 1970s? What was Treviño's response to it?
- What was *Ahora!* and how was it "revolutionary"?
- Why was there initial resistance to *Ahora!* from the Mexican-American community? Did this change? Why?

### **Chapter 8: The Chicano Moratorium and**

### **Chapter 9: The Salazar Inquest**

- What was the "Moratorium March" and what went wrong?
- What was the Salazar Inquest? Why were community members and lawyers outraged?

### **Chapter 10: Soledad**

- What was Soledad and why did Treviño and his partner want to film there?
- What does Treviño mean by "the culture of poverty"?
- The "hole" was the same name for the "adjustment center." Who was behind each name and what were their perspectives on prisoners and prison life?

### **Chapter 11: *América Tropical***

- How does Treviño propose to "restore the past" through the restoration of a mural?
- What does it mean when Chuck Allen helps Treviño avoid the draft?
- What is the significance to Allen's comment on "white power structure *gabachos*"?

### **Chapter 12: *Yo Soy Chicano***

- What was the meaning of the story "The Cricket and the Lion"? How were various groups and individuals fighting for their people?
- What was Treviño's experience in meeting his biological father?
- Treviño mentions the feminism within the Chicano Movement. What were the implications of such a stance? Did the women's concerns seem to be integrated into the larger political agenda?

### **Chapter 13: New Forms, Old Visions and**

### **Chapter 14: *La Raza Unida Party***

- How did Treviño and other activists propose to put the Chicano Movement in the national eye?
- Treviño and his colleagues wanted to create a weekly television news show focused on Chicano issues. Why did he feel this format was so important?
- What was La Raza Unida Party and what were its objectives?

### **Chapter 15: *Acción Chicano***

- What were the successes of *Acción Chicano*?
- What did Treviño ultimately find limiting about its format?
- In what direction does Treviño decide to turn his activism?

### **Chapter 16: *El Teatro Campesino***

- What were the challenges and the triumphs of working with *El Teatro Campesino*?
- What was the New Latin American Cinema and how was it similar to Treviño's work? How was it different?
- How does Treviño come to view the identity politics of the Chicano Movement? How does he describe the three stages of activism?

### **Chapter 17: *Infinity Factory***

- What were the problems with *Infinity Factory* and how did they reflect the larger social problems in the United States and radical politics?
- How did Treviño solve the problems and create a successful show?

### **Chapter 18: *The Road Ahead***

- What conclusion does Treviño come to about his effectiveness as a social activist?
- What does Treviño describe as the "legacy of positive change"?
- What does he feel is the only hope for overturning an oppressive social system?

### **Writing/Composition Ideas**

- Treviño considers himself to have been spared the life of the ghetto by chance. What does he feel saved him and why?
- Do you believe that successful politics can be derived from racial or ethnic identification? Explain your answer using specific examples.
- Do you believe the socioeconomic status of Mexican Americans in the United States has changed? Please cite specific examples and statistics to reinforce your argument.

### **Word and Terms Study**

- *Chicano*: Politically empowered and socially conscious Americans of Mexican descent.
- *Gabacho*: Chicano slang for White Man
- *El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA)*: Founded in 1968, *El Movimiento* was a political, social, and cultural movement among college students to recapture what had been lost through the socialization process imposed by US schools, churches, and other institutions.
- *Plan de Aztlán*: Built from the mythic story of the Aztec homeland in the five Southwestern states. A whole generation of Chicano youths would take control of their lives and reclaim their ancient homeland.
- *Rasquachis*: slapdash
- *Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)*: Founded in 1960 in Raleigh, NC to support and organize protests against segregation and white oppression. Became involved in the anti-war movement and from 1966 onward became increasingly radical and separatist in theory and tactics. Out of SNCC came some of

today's black political leaders, such as U.S. Representative John Lewis and former Georgia state Senator Julian Bond.

*Word Study Note: Given that many of these words possess deep and complex meanings, encourage students to conduct more in-depth analysis of these terms through paper and on-line dictionary and encyclopedia sources. This may also serve to enhance student reading comprehension.*

### **Key Figures in the Civil Rights Movement**

- *César Chávez*: A migrant worker and labor leader who successfully organized agricultural workers in California and launched nationwide boycotts against growers. In 1972 the United Farm Workers (UFW), with Chávez as president, became a member of the AFL-CIO.
- *Dolores C. Huerta*: Cofounded the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO ("UFW") and played a major roll in the American civil rights movement. In 1955, she helped found the Stockton chapter of the grass roots Community Service Organization ("CSO") and became a lobbyist for Mexican-Americans. By 1965, she organized a major grape-pickers strike and negotiated farmworker contracts.

*Key Figures Note: Given that many of these words possess deep and complex meanings, encourage students to conduct more in-depth analysis of these terms through paper and on-line dictionary and encyclopedia sources. This may also serve to enhance student reading comprehension.*

### **About the Author**

Jesús Salvador Treviño was born in 1946 in El Paso, Texas, and moved with his mother and American stepfather to Los Angeles when he was three. As an activist filmmaker and journalist, he participated in and documented the most important events of the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Coming of age during the turmoil of the sixties, Treviño was on the spot to record the struggles to organize students and workers into the largest social and political movement in the history of Latino communities in the United States. He has further pursued his activism as the executive producer of a recent four-part PBS series, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, and as the Co-Executive Producer of the SHOWTIME drama series, *Resurrection Boulevard*. He has also directed such Hollywood television dramas as *NYPD Blue*, *The Practice*, *Third Watch*, *Star Trek Voyager* and many others. He is the author of a collection of stories, *The Fabulous Sinkhole and Other Stories*.

### **Related Media/Literary Tools**

#### **Audio-Visual:**

Treviño, Jesús Salvador. *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. Four-part PBS series; *Ya Basta!* 1968; *Ahora!* Weekly television broadcast, 1969; *Soledad*, 1971; *América Tropical*, 1971; *Yo Soy Chicano*, 1972; *Acción Chicano*, 1972.

#### **Books:**

- Gonzales, Rodolfo. *Message to Aztlán: Selected Writings of Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales*. Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, 2001.
- Maldonado, David. *Crossing Guadalupe Street: Growing up Hispanic and Protestant*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001.
- Mendoza, Louis Gerard. *Historia: The Literary Making of Chicana & Chicano History*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001.
- Ramos, Henry A.J. *The American GI Forum: In Pursuit of the Dream, 1948-1983*. Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, 2001.
- Treviño, Jesús Salvador. *The Fabulous Sinkhole and Other Stories*. Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, 1995.
- The Multicultural Southwest: A Reader*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001.

### **Acknowledgements**

*Eyewitness: A Filmmaker's Memoir of the Chicano Movement* and this companion teaching guide are published by Arte Público Press, the largest and most established publisher of Hispanic literature in the United States, with assistance from the Kauffman, Mott, and Rockefeller Foundations.