

# Arte Público Press

## Teacher's Guide

Hector P. García:  
In Relentless Pursuit of Justice

### **Book Synopsis**

*Hector P. García: In Relentless Pursuit of Justice* covers the life of one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's leading contributors to the advancement of Latino groups in American society and institutions. This biography recounts García's political, social, and personal journey - from his birth in Mexico to becoming a physician, a soldier and war veteran, and the founder of the American GI Forum, a civil rights organization which rallied Mexican American veterans to effectively utilize the U.S. political process to fight for their rights in the post World War II years.

García's accomplishments as an institution builder and Mexican American community leader have often been overlooked, particularly in the wake of the Chicano Movement. This book provides important insights into how García's philosophical approach and tactics helped pave the way for social reform that benefited Mexican Americans (and by extension other Hispanic groups) over the long term.

### **Teaching Overview**

#### *Intended Audience and Disciplinary Connections*

This guide seeks to facilitate the exploration of Latino/Hispanic contributions to U.S. civic culture among high school and junior college students (as well as lower division university 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, leadership development, and community empowerment.

#### *Important Curricular Themes*

*Hector P. García: In Relentless Pursuit of Justice* is valuable as a tool to strengthen student comprehension and understanding of several important themes, including:

- the power of individuals and organized advocacy groups to transform American political and civic institutions;
- the different ways in which individuals can advocate for civil rights – in this instance, by appealing to a community's patriotism and respect for American democracy as a means to advance their political, economic, and social position; and
- the contributions of Latinos, particularly Mexican Americans, to American democracy and social justice.

## Reading Comprehension Strategies

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

- The American Dream: key thinkers and its evolution
- The Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848
- The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917 and its impact on Mexicans in the U.S. (including a review of significant leaders such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa)
- World War II and the participation of Mexican Americans
- The Chicano Movement – a summary of major issues, events, and leaders
- Orientation to landmark civil rights legislation and government programs, including: the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the Voting Right Act of 1965; the Great Society and War on Poverty programs; and Affirmative Action
- Segregation: focusing on important judicial decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and other court decisions that specifically affected Mexican Americans (e.g., the *Méndez* and *Delgado* school decisions, and the *Hernández* jury desegregation decision, mentioned in this book)

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

**As Reading Progresses:** *Pose questions to students designed to improve reading comprehension. Sample questions include:*

### Introduction

- Why is Hector P. García worthy of a biography? Why is he not considered to be an “ideological hero” by some people today?
- What is the duality that many Mexican Americans face? How does it affect their American identity?
- What impact did World War II have on the identity of Mexican Americans? How did it bring about new Mexican American leadership? What were the key ideals and strategies of this leadership?
- What were Hector’s beliefs and key accomplishments? How were these related to his views on the American Dream? Why did Hector and the American G.I. Forum’s success decline over time?

### Coming to El Norte

- How were Hector’s beliefs and values shaped by his family? By their move to El Norte?
- What were some of the social, economic, and political realities for border area Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the 1920’s, when the García family moved to the U.S.?
- What advantage did the García children have over other Mexican and Mexican American children that contributed to their success in school? How were they better prepared to navigate between the Anglo and Mexican worlds? How did this serve them later in their lives?

- What was Hector’s experience with racism in his school years? How did this differ from his siblings?

### **“An Excellent Education”**

- Why did Hector choose to pursue an education in medicine? Why didn’t he choose to be a teacher?
- Why did Hector say that he received an “excellent education” at Edinburg?
- Why was Hector’s experience at the University of Texas, Austin so rewarding? Who were some of the Mexican American students and faculty that he met while there?
- How did Hector and others, such as Ernesto Galarza, Ed Idar, Jr., and Edward Roybal, feel about their higher education experiences? How did they feel about Anglo Americans? How did their feelings differ from activists of the Chicano Movement?
- How was Hector’s behavior different during his education years from his activist years? How did he handle conflict? Was he a groundbreaker during his school years?
- Why did he become more active in his community over time? How did his concept of diversity develop during his internship and residency?
- How did Hector’s educational experience affect his notions of self? Of community? How did it help him to prioritize his goals in life?

### **“A Desire to Serve My Country”**

- Why did thousands of Mexican Americans want to serve the U.S. in World War II?
- What important lessons did Hector learn while in the Civilian Military Training Corp (CMTC) and the army reserve?
- What rank and position did Hector receive upon entry into the Army? Why was he not assigned to the Medical Corps?
- What did Hector learn about himself during the war years? Why did he decide to marry Wanda?
- How was Hector’s experience during the war different from other soldiers of color? How did this affect his outlook on life?

### **Barrio Americanism: Constructing a Veterans’ Movement**

- What challenges did Hector face in setting up his first medical practice? What did he learn about the post-war experience for many Mexican American veterans in treating them as patients?
- How did his experience with rural poverty differ from his experience with urban poverty? What problems did he encounter in the barrios and with farmworkers that pushed him into the public arena and into social reform work?
- What was “barrio Americanism”? How did this identity or attitude fit with Hector’s view of social reform?
- How was the American G.I. Forum created? What were its initial aims and objectives? Where did civil rights fit into the agenda?
- What were some of the Mexican American veterans’ issues with the Veterans Administration (VA)? How did the VA respond to their concerns and allegations? How was Hector involved? How did he appeal to Mexican American veterans to get involved in the Forum’s work?

- How did Hector differ from other Mexican American social reformers? How did his perspective on the status of Mexican Americans in U.S. society differ before and after the war?

### **The Felix Longoria Incident**

- Who was Felix Longoria? What was the Felix Longoria incident? How did Hector and the Forum become involved?
- Why did legislative representatives, particularly Senator Johnson from Texas, become involved in the Longoria incident? How did the local Three Rivers community react to their involvement? How did Anglo Texans attempt to appeal to the Longoria family?
- How did Anglos view conditions facing Mexicans and Mexican Americans? How did they characterize their relations with Mexicans and Mexican Americans? How did their views differ from those of Mexicans and Mexican Americans?
- What did the Texas legislative committee investigation into the Longoria affair conclude? How did Hector react to the legislative report?
- Why was the Longoria incident an important accomplishment for Mexican Americans? How did the victory in the Longoria incident contribute to the fight against discrimination and for civil rights in Texas? Nationally?

### **The Beginning of a Protracted Struggle**

- How was segregation practiced against Mexican Americans? How was it different from segregation against African Americans?
- Who were some of the key Mexican American leaders who joined in the desegregation battle?
- How did the *Méndez* and *Delgado* lawsuits contribute to the battle against the segregation of Mexican American schoolchildren? How did they represent victories? How did public school officials react to the rulings?
- How was the Forum involved in the public school desegregation efforts? What other issues did Hector and the Forum take up on behalf of Mexican Americans? What strategies were employed to address these issues?
- What were some of the challenges that Hector and the Forum faced, particularly in getting Mexican American children to attend school in higher numbers? From teachers? From parents?
- What were poll taxes? How did Hector lead the fight against the poll tax in Texas?
- What was the Bracero Program? How did Hector and the Forum challenge the program? What victories did they achieve?
- How did the Forum become more organized? What structure did it take on? What was Hector's role in that structure? What were some of the Forum's early resolutions?

### **The Fifties: Best of Times, Worst of Times**

- How were circumstances in Texas better for Mexican Americans in the 1950's? How were they worse? What new form of prejudice emerged?
- How did Mexican Americans in Texas view Hector at this time? How was Hector able to address their issues?

- What kind of leaders emerged at the Forum in the 1950's? How was Hector involved in cultivating their leadership skills? Who were some of the prominent male and female leaders that emerged? What role did they play in the Forum's work?
- Why was litigation prioritized by the Forum as a strategy to challenge discrimination? What was the significance of the *Driscoll* case and *Hernández* rulings, in particular?
- What were some of the conflicts that divided the Forum's leadership? For example, what was the controversy over "The Wetback in the Rio Grande" report and the *What Price – Wetback?* pamphlet? What were some of the unintended effects of these publications? How did Chicano intellectuals view them during the 1960s and 1970s?
- What was Hector's first encounter with discrimination, according to the author? Why was it significant that it took place in Gonzalez, Texas?

### **Unity as Politics but No Unity in Politics**

- How did Hector become involved in Texas politics in the late 1940's and 1950's? What were Hector and the Forum's key priorities and tactics?
- Why did Hector choose to become a Democrat? How did Hector think Mexican American support to the Democratic Party should be compensated?
- How did Hector's and the Forum's priorities shift over time, particularly in terms of class focus? How was this consistent with the work of other civil rights advocates at the time?
- How did the Forum become involved in the Kennedy presidential campaign? What were the Viva Kennedy Clubs? What did Hector and the Forum get in return for helping Democrats, such as Kennedy, in their campaign efforts? Did Mexican Americans benefit under the Kennedy administration?
- Why were organizations such as the Mexican Americans for Political Action (MAPA) and the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASO) established? Were they effective political organizations? Why or why not? How was Hector involved in their efforts?
- What was the political significance of the victory in Crystal City?
- Who were some of the key Mexican American leaders who emerged during the 1950's? What were their issues in working together? What were their differences in strategy?

### **From the Halls of D.C. to the Barrios of Aztlán**

- What did the PASO experience reveal about Mexican American political leadership at the time? What was the impact of the organization over the long term?
- Why was Hector a supporter of Lyndon B. Johnson? What was the nature of Hector's relationship with Johnson? How were they politically aligned? How were they politically at odds? How did Hector become involved in Johnson's presidential campaign?
- Did Mexican Americans benefit from Johnson's presidency? Were they included in Johnson's administration and federal bureaucracy? What legislation did Johnson support to demonstrate his commitment to Mexican Americans?
- Did Hector and other Mexican American civil rights leaders join efforts with African American leaders? Why or why not?
- What was the effect of the war in Vietnam on civil rights efforts?

- Why were the Committee Hearings on Mexican American Affairs in 1967 so controversial, particularly among Mexican American leaders?
- How was Hector's American foreign policy perspective different from his domestic policy perspective?
- What was the Chicano Movement? Why did it evolve? How did the priorities and tactics differ between Chicano activists and Mexican American reformers?
- How did Hector view Chicano militant tactics? How did Chicanos view Hector's approach?

### **Lifelong Pursuit of Justice**

- What was the significance of Hector's removal from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights?
- What was Hector's view on the Nixon administration's policies toward the poor and racial minorities?
- On what issues did Chicano activists and the Forum work together? Why did the rift between their forms of social reform grow over time?
- What were Hector's priorities in the late 1960's and 1970's? What challenges did he face in his efforts, such as in his work to reenergize the Forum?
- Why did Hispanic organizations seek to create greater ties with corporate America? What were some of the consequences of these ties?
- How were Forum priorities in the 1980's different from its earlier priorities?
- Why was receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1984 a bittersweet experience for Hector?
- What did Hector give up for his activism and commitment to social reform? What did he gain? What were the primary gains he helped to secure for the Mexican American community?
- How did Hector's outlook and tactics serve his cause? How did they work against him?

### **Writing/Composition Ideas**

- What do you think were Hector's most important contributions? Why?
- How does Hector's path differ from other Mexican American leaders? Write an essay comparing Hector with another Mexican American political leader (e.g., Carlos E. Castañeda, Félix Tijerina, Reynaldo Garza, etc.)
- What is the difference between *de facto* and *de jure* policy? Give an example of each.
- Who are the key people, places, and events that have influenced who you are as a person (e.g., family members, where you grew up, where you went to school, jobs you have held, etc.)?
- What beliefs and personal values guide the way in which you live your life?
- Describe a personal experience with racism/discrimination and how this influenced your identity.
- Write a biographical summary of a person who has impacted your view on civil rights.

### **Word and Terms Study**

- *American Dream*: An American ideal of a free, happy, and materially successful life to which all may aspire.

- *Anglo*: An informal expression for an Anglo-American -- an English-speaking person, especially a white North American who is not of Hispanic or French descent.
- *Aztlán*: The mythical homeland of the Aztecs, said to have been situated geographically in the area of the five southwestern states obtained by conquest from Mexico as a result of the Mexican-American war (ceded to the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848). This concept heavily influenced Chicano activism – to undo the injustice against Mexican Americans that started with U.S. imperialism and the unfair taking of land from Mexico.
- *Barrio*: In the United States, the term refers to a chiefly Spanish-speaking urban district or neighborhood that is economically depressed. *Barrio* has similar connotations to the terms *slum* and *ghetto*.
- *Bracero Program*: Established in 1943 through an international agreement between the United States and Mexico, the Bracero Program imported temporary Mexican workers to the U.S. for agricultural production.
- *Chicano*: A term for a Mexican American that took on political meaning when it was appropriated by many U.S. Mexican activists in the U.S. Southwest. While it was originally used as a derogatory label for Mexicans who had recently arrived in the United States, it became a term of ethnic pride among Mexican activists during the 1960's and 1970's. Today, there is debate over continued use of the term.
- *Gringo*: A slang term for a foreigner in Latin America, especially an American or English person. In the U.S., the term is often used interchangeably with *Anglo*.
- *Hispanic*: Of or relating to Spain or Spanish-speaking Latin America. Often used to refer to a U.S. citizen or resident of Latin American or Spanish descent.
- *Indigenous*: Being a member or the original inhabitants of a particular place. The term is often used interchangeably with the term *native*.
- *La Raza*: Literally means “the race” in English. A common term for being of Mexican descent.
- *Latino*: A person of Latin-American descent, often one living in the United States. While *Latino* and *Hispanic* are often used interchangeably, *Hispanic* refers more broadly to culture and persons descended from both Spain and Latin America. *Latino* and *Hispanic* also have strong geographic and political connotations, whereby some prefer the use of one of the terms to the other.
- *Wetback*: A derogatory term for a person born in Mexico.

*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 paperback and on-line dictionary and encyclopaedia sources. García's text also contains other Spanish language words that can be further explored using a Spanish-English dictionary. These strategies may also serve to enhance student reading comprehension.*

### **About the Author**

Ignacio M. García is Professor of History at Brigham Young University. He is the author of *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party* (University of Arizona Press, 1990), *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans* (University of Arizona Press, 1997), and *Viva Kennedy: Mexican Americans in Search of Camelot* (Texas A&M University Press, 2000), which won the Coral H. Tullis Award for best Texas history book in 2000.

## Related Media/Literary Tools

### Audio-Visual/Background Research:

Many original documents, letters, pamphlets, political announcements, radio scripts, telegrams, and magazine articles used in preparing this book can be found in the Hector P. García Collection at Texas A&M University in Corpus Christi Special Collections. Other relevant collections include: the Dennis Chávez Collection at the University of New Mexico; the Edward R. Roybal Collections at UCLA and California State University at Los Angeles; the George I. Sánchez Collection at the University of Texas; and the University of Texas' Mexican American Collection.

In addition to these materials, instructors and readers interested in García may wish to view the PBS documentary "Justice for My People: The Dr. Hector P. Garcia Story" produced by Corpus Christi public television station KEDT in 2002. This important film documentary is available in both VHS video and DVD format and may be purchased on the Internet at [www.JusticeforMyPeople.org](http://www.JusticeforMyPeople.org) or by calling 1-800-307-KEDT.

### Books:

- Allsup, Carl. 1982. *The American G.I. Forum: Origins and Evolution*. Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies.
- Alamaraz, Félix D. 1999. *Knight Without Armor, Carlos Eduardo Castañeda 1896-1958*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- Anders, Evan. 1982. *Boss Rule in South Texas: The Progressive Era*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Fisch, Louise Ann. 1996. *All Rise: Reynaldo G. Garza, the First Mexican American Federal Judge*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- García, Ignacio M. 1997. *Chicanismo, The Forging of a Militant Ethos Among Mexican Americans*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. *Viva Kennedy, Mexican Americans in Search of Camelot*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- García, Mario T. 1989. *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gómez-Quíñones, Juan. 1990. *Chicano Politics: Reality & Promise 1940-1990*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Gutiérrez, José Angel. 1998. *The Making of a Chicano Militant*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Kreneck, Thomas H. 2001. *Mexican American Odyssey: Felix Tijerina, Entrepreneur and Civil Leader, 1905-1965*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- Montejano, David. 1987. *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*. Austin: The University of Texas Press.
- Navarro, Armando. 1998. *The Cristal Experiment: A Chicano Struggle for Community Control*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Pycior, Julie Leininger. 1997. *LBJ & Mexican Americans, The Paradox of Power*. Austin: The University of Texas Press.
- Quezada, J. Gilberto. 1999. *Border Boss*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.



\*Ramos, Henry A.J. 1998. *The American GI Forum, In Pursuit of the Dream, 1948-1983*. Houston: Arte Público Press.  
San Miguel, Guadalupe, Jr. 1987. *“Let All of Them Take Heed.”* Austin: University of Texas Press.

\*Other Arte Público Press book.

### **Acknowledgements**

This teaching guide has been prepared by Arte Público Press, the largest and most established publisher of Hispanic literature in the United States, with support from the Kauffman, Mott and Rockefeller Foundations. Arte Público Press is also the publisher of *Hector P. García: In Relentless Pursuit of Justice*.