

Arte Público Press

Teacher's Guide

Voices of Chicano Leaders: A Comparative Analysis of Three Arte Público Press Hispanic Civil Rights Series Works¹

Message to Aztlán: Selected Writings by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales
They Called Me “King Tiger” by Reies López Tijerina
A Gringo Manual on How to Handle Mexicans by José Angel Gutiérrez

Synopsis

Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, José Angel Gutiérrez, and Reies López Tijerina were three of the most influential leaders of the 1960s and 1970s Chicano Movement, a period marked by heightened activism among Mexican Americans seeking recognition as equal members of American society. While all three were at the forefront of community advocacy and mobilizing efforts, they also made important contributions to the movement through their writing.

- *Message to Aztlán* represents a compilation of speeches, plays, poetry, and correspondence by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, intended to inspire Mexican Americans to become engaged in efforts to improve their condition in the United States.
- *They Called Me “King Tiger”* is the memoir of Reies López Tijerina, presented as a testimonial to his efforts to take back the lands obtained by North American Anglos in violation of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which ended the Mexican-American War.
- *A Gringo Manual on How to Handle Mexicans* is the work of José Angel Gutiérrez, developed to educate Mexican Americans about the injustices and discrimination that they encounter at the hands of predominantly white “gringos.”

These books are presented together to facilitate a comparative exploration of the political ideologies, priorities and organizing tactics that key Chicano Movement leaders employed to inspire a generation of U.S. Mexicans in their fight for justice and equality in this country. Not only do these texts shed light on the events of this critical time in history, but also they provide readers with access to the controversial perspectives and experiences of several of the most significant figures in modern Latino civil rights history in their own words.

¹ The Hispanic Civil Rights Series seeks to educate and inform Americans of all backgrounds, particularly youth, about the many Hispanic contributions to U.S. civil rights advancement since World War II. The series is made possible with generous support from the Charles Steward Mott Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

Teaching Overview

Intended Audience and Disciplinary Connections

This guide is intended to facilitate the exploration of Mexican American contributions to U.S. civic 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

As part of the Arte Público Press Hispanic Civil Rights series, these three books are valuable tools to strengthen student comprehension and understanding of several important themes, including:

- the influence of individual leaders in promoting social and political equality;
- the differences in ideological orientation and tactics that leaders and institutions can bring to a common struggle; and
- the importance of literary works as expressions of political thought and in catalyzing social movements.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

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

- Passages of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution including: the Bill of Rights; important amendments that guaranteed rights to women, former slaves, and other minorities; and sections that cover treaties
- The History of Aztlán and its relevance to the Chicano Movement
- Manifest Destiny and how this ideology influenced U.S. involvement in the Mexican-American War
- 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 Zapata and Villa)
- Key events and leaders of the Black civil rights movement
- The Chicano Movement – a summary of major issues, events, and leaders
- La Raza Unida Party – its rise and relevance as part of the Chicano Movement

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

As Reading Progresses:

Individual Text Analysis: *Pose questions to students designed to improve reading comprehension of each book. Sample questions include:*

Message to Aztlán

- What inspired Gonzales to write?
- How and why was the Crusade for Justice formed?
- How does the epic poem *I Am Joaquín* convey the struggle for identity among Chicanos? What are some of the common images and symbols he uses in this and his other poetry?
- How do the plot lines and sources of conflict in Gonzales' plays reflect the social, political, and economic struggles of Mexican Americans during the 1960s and 1970s? How do the characters symbolize different factions among Mexican Americans at the time?
- Do you think Gonzales' speeches and editorials conveyed realistic expectations for change? How successful do you think they were? Should he have changed his message with different audiences? Why or why not?
- What poem, play, editorial, or speech inspires you the most? Why?

They Called Me "King Tiger"

- Why did Tijerina become a land grant activist?
- How and why was Alianza formed?
- Why was Tijerina called "King Tiger"? Who gave him that name?
- Do you think Tijerina and his followers were justified in their actions, particularly the taking of San Joaquin and Tierra Amarilla? Why or why not?
- How were Tijerina and his followers victims of violence? How were they perpetrators? How did Tijerina justify his use of violence?
- What were the various tactics that Tijerina and Alianza employed to get the U.S. government to investigate land grant claims in the Southwest?
- How was Tijerina affected by his time as a fugitive? By his time in prison? What specifically, were some of his revelations while in prison? How did Tijerina's role in the movement change after his time in prison?

A Gringo Manual on How to Handle Mexicans

- What is the purpose of the *Gringo Manual*? How do Gutiérrez' "tricks" provide useful information to educate Chicanos about discriminatory policies and practices?
- How does Gutiérrez define the term *gringo*? How is this different from how the term is usually defined? How can Mexican Americans be *gringos*?
- Why, in Gutiérrez' analysis, are Chicanos powerless? What are the primary causes of their powerlessness? How does Gutiérrez think Mexican Americans can overcome the conditions that make them powerless?
- What are his issues with how Mexican Americans are labeled (e.g., Hispanic, Latino, illegal, etc.)? How does he suggest this affects their identity?
- How does he feel that Anglo-dominated political decisionmaking contributes to Mexican American powerlessness (e.g., related to the Census, redistricting, etc.)? How do government institutions and political parties contribute to this?
- How, according to Gutiérrez, do institutions and systems (e.g., foundations, the criminal justice system, the courts system, Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), the FBI, the CIA) discriminate against Mexican Americans? How does he feel that Mexican Americans are victims of voter, educational, media/entertainment,

employment, and legislative discrimination? What can they do to address these challenges?

- What are some of the community assets that Gutiérrez feels that Mexican Americans can leverage to address institutional and systemic discrimination? What are some of the ways that he suggests that they should use the system to prevail?

Comparative Analysis: *Pose questions to students to build their comparative understanding of the texts and of the perspectives of the three authors. Ask students to give specific examples that point to commonalities and differences.*

- Who are the intended audiences of the books? Do you think the authors are successful in reaching those audiences?
- What was their appeal among Mexican-American audiences in general during the 1960s and 1970s? Among youth specifically?
- What were their primary messages and issues?
- Do you think their political demands were realistic? Did they believe in political compromise?
- How did they look to founding U.S. documents, such as the Constitution, to justify their beliefs and actions?
- How were their leadership styles similar? How were they different? How do their leadership styles come across in their writing?
- How does each author feel about Mexican Americans who join efforts with the Anglo establishment?
- How did they work together? How did they work with other civil rights leaders?
- How did their personal backgrounds influence their perspectives?
- Who were their heroes?
- Who did they see as enemies? How did each wage war against their enemies? Did they use violence? Did they believe in using the system? Did they believe in revolution?

Writing/Composition Ideas

Ask students to prepare a written assignment that demonstrates their comprehension and understanding of key concepts presented in the books. Sample paper topics include:

- Write a mock eulogy for Gonzales, Gutiérrez, and/or Tijerina, highlighting what you think were their most significant accomplishments.
- Compare and contrast the authors' views on two or three of the following themes: Aztlán, cultural identity, family, nationalism, education, and revolution.
- Compare and contrast the authors' perceptions on how the following institutions and systems contribute to the discrimination of Mexican Americans (pick two or three): the Catholic Church, the two party political system, the criminal justice system, Corporate America, Capitalism, whites, Anglos, gringos, the FBI, the CIA, the INS, the media, Congress, and The Supreme Court.
- Explain what you think is the significance of these texts today (e.g., their value as historical record, to inspire readers to activism, etc.)
- Write a poem, speech, op-ed, or monologue on your pride in your cultural heritage.
- Write two or three journal entries that describe an experience with racism – either personal or something you have witnessed – and explain what you think needs to change to prevent it from happening.

- Write one or two “tricks” that describe how the cultural group with which you identify is discriminated against in American society. Include your assessment of what can be done to address this.

Word and Terms Study

- *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. In these texts, the term takes on derogatory meaning, referring to those who comprise the U.S. power base and conspire to oppress indigenous people.
- *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 1960s and 1970s. Today, there is debate over continued use of the term.
- *Gringo*: A disparaging 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*. Some consider the term *gringo* to be more offensive than the term *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 of the original inhabitants of a particular place. The term is often used interchangeably with the term *native*.
- *IndoHispano*: A person of Mexican descent. The term is used to highlight the combined indigenous and Spanish cultural heritage of Mexican people.
- *La Causa*: Literally means “the cause” in Spanish. A common term for the struggle for Mexican-American rights.
- *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.

- *Manifest Destiny*: A policy of imperialistic expansion defended as necessary or benevolent. The notion evolved from 19th-century doctrine that the United States had the right and duty to expand throughout the North American continent.

Word Study Note: Because many of these words possess deep socio-political meaning, encourage students to conduct more in-depth analysis of these terms through paperback and on-line dictionary and encyclopaedia sources. Given the heavy use of Spanish terms in these texts, make sure that students have access to Spanish-English dictionaries.

About the Authors

Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, a one-time national boxing champion, is a founding member of the Crusade for Justice, a Denver-based civil rights organization, school, and community center.

José Angel Gutiérrez is the author of *The Making of the Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal*, editor and translator of *They Called Me “King Tiger”*: *My Struggle for the Land and Our Rights*, and the founder and former director of the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas at Arlington. Currently, he is a professor of political science at the University of Texas at Arlington. He also practices law in Dallas, Texas, where he lives with his family.

Reies López Tijerina, a onetime minister and traveling revivalist, founded the militant Alianza Federal de las Mercedes (the Federal Land-Grant Alliance) in 1963.

Related Media/Literary Tools

Audio-Visual:

CHICANO! A History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement. 1996. A Co-production of Galán Productions, Inc. and the National Latino Communications Center, in association with public television station KCET/Los Angeles.

I Am Joaquín: An Epic Poem by Rodolfo Gonzales. 1972. A production of El Teatro Campesino reproduced in videocassette format by the La Escuela Tlatelolco Board of Trustees in 1991. Available from La Escuela Tlatelolco Centro De Estudios, 2949 N. Federal Blvd., Denver, Colorado, 80211.

After Joaquín: The Crusade for Justice. 1985. A production of Front Range Media Corporation by Daniel Salazar.

Books:

Acuña, Rodolfo F. 1998. *Sometimes There Is No Other Side*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Acuña, Rodolfo. 2000. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*. New York: Longman.

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- *Rosales, F. Arturo. 1997. *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. University of Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press.
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- Vigil, Ernesto B. 1999. *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government's War on Dissent*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

*Other Arte Público Press books.

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 assistance from the Kauffman, Mott, and Rockefeller Foundations. Arte Público Press is also the publisher of *Message to Aztlán: Selected Writings*, *They Called Me "King Tiger": My Struggle for the Land and Our Rights*, and *A Gringo Manual on How to Handle Mexicans*.