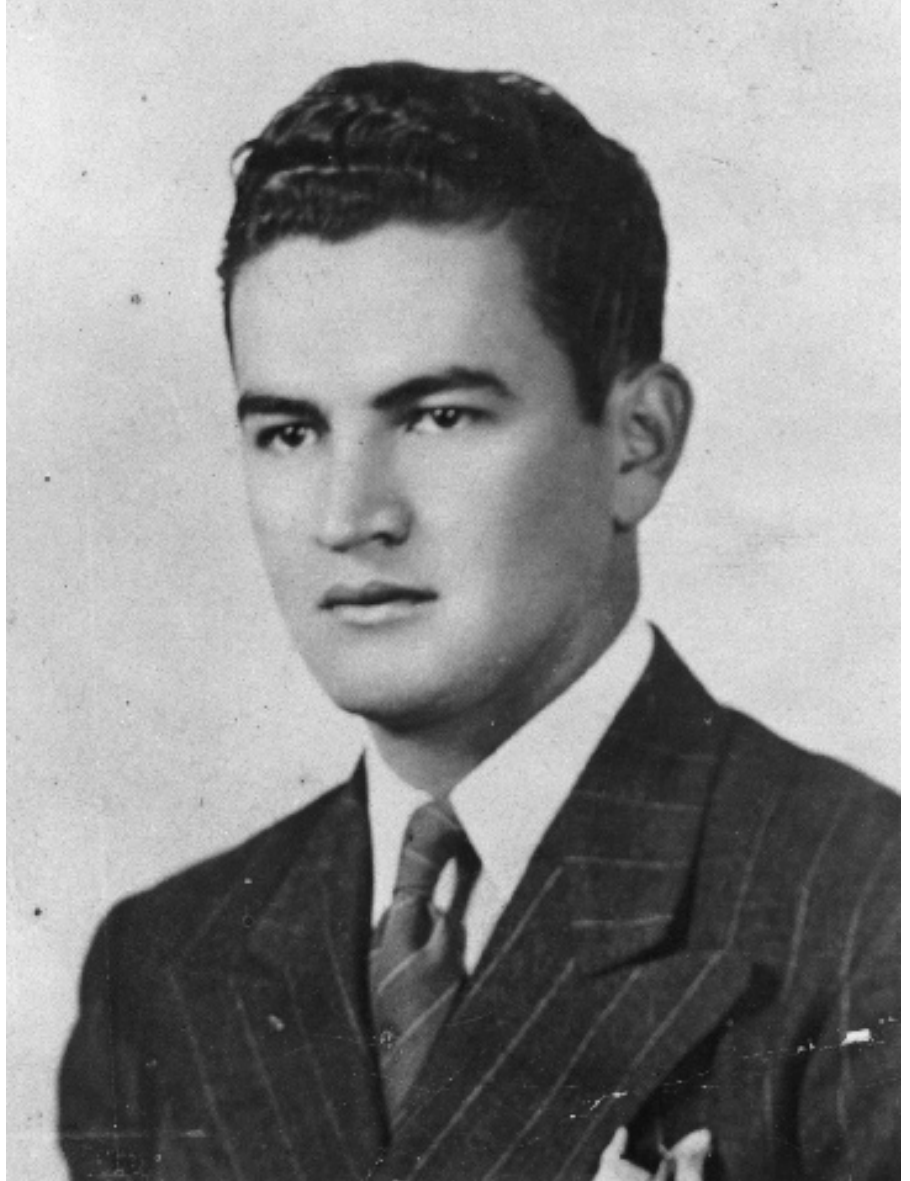


CHARACTER RESOURCE CARDS AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION CARDS



Héctor upon graduation from Mercedes High School in 1932. For the next two years, he hitchhiked 30 miles to attend Edinburg Junior College.

Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.5)

HÉCTOR GARCÍA

BEFORE THE WAR

Born in 1914, Héctor García was just four years old when his family immigrated to the U.S. to escape the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution.

In Mercedes, Texas, the Garcías lived across the railroad tracks from the white neighborhoods. As a young child, Héctor attended a segregated “Mexican school.” Héctor’s high school was integrated, but teachers treated him differently from white students. His English teacher told him that “no Mexican will ever get an A in my class.”

Héctor developed his love of learning from his father. After supper, José, a professor, taught the children lessons in Mexican history, world literature, and mathematics. In 1936 Héctor left for medical school in Galveston—the only Mexican American out of 100 students.



The García family, Mercedes, Texas, ca. 1926. Héctor is in the back row, far left.

Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.1)

I went to a segregated Mexican school, which was in the heart of the Mexican area across the tracks.

Héctor García



Héctor’s father, José, joined his brothers in running the A.G. García store in Mercedes, Texas, ca. 1920s. The Great Depression forced the brothers to close the dry goods store.

Collection of Amador García, Courtesy of Jeff Felts (NCPD.38.2005.1)

My father was a historian. We learned about the Iliad, and Homer, not in school, but at home. You have to understand his love for Mexico and the fact that he named three of his sons after the last three Mexican emperors—Cuauhtemoc, Xicotentactl, and Cuitlahuac. He loved his country that much, he felt proud to be a Mexican.

Héctor García



Héctor’s class, University of Texas School of Medicine in Galveston, 1940.

Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.6)

HÉCTOR GARCÍA

DURING THE WAR

With the bombing of Pearl Harbor, 28-year-old Héctor felt it his duty to volunteer. Héctor was needed for service with the 591st Engineer Boat Regiment and was sent overseas to Europe.

As a medic, Héctor treated evacuated American soldiers and local civilians: North Africans, French, Spanish, and Italians. He spent much time with his patients, learning their different cultures and languages. Héctor wrote home constantly, excited to tell his father about new things he had learned and people he had encountered.

But Héctor was also concerned about the disease and poverty afflicting his patients. After three years of moving between war-torn villages, Héctor was anxious to return home to fight for better conditions in his own community.



Héctor and fellow medics of the 591st Engineer Boat Regiment, Italy, ca. 1944-45.

Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.46)

These three long weary years of suffering and pain and hardships and heartaches have taught me how to be tolerant and how to be patient. I have seen poverty and have seen cruelty and I want to place myself above both of them. I must not magnify my own problems and misery because in all the countries I have been, there are millions of families worse than ours. So like I say Father I have changed for the best.

Héctor García, letter to his father, 1945

We were trying to put an end to a man named Hitler. And actually, it meant making the world a better place to live, for people to have more freedom, more liberty. To me, it was a battle for American democracy.

Héctor García



Héctor embarks on a personal crusade to combat venereal and tropical diseases overseas, Italy, ca. 1944-45.

Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.16)

HÉCTOR GARCÍA

AFTER THE WAR

Returning from Europe, Héctor García was astonished to see the deteriorating living conditions of Mexican Americans in Corpus Christi, Texas. In 1948 Héctor called a meeting to speak out against anti-Mexican prejudice, and the American G.I. Forum was formed. It soon became one of the most influential civil rights organizations in the United States.

Héctor set out to end segregation in the Texas school system. By taking photographs of the decrepit “Mexican schools,” organizing petitions, and speaking at community gatherings, Héctor lobbied for Mexican Americans’ rights to a fair and equal education. Because education had been important to generations of the García family, Héctor believed that “education is freedom, and freedom should be everyone’s business.”



Héctor García and early American G.I. Forum members attend funeral of fallen World War II soldier, Rosehill Cemetery, Texas, 1949.
Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.20)



Sign hanging outside a café in South Texas, ca. late 1940s.
Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.59)

Mexican American soldiers shed at least a quarter of the blood spilled at Bataan... What they want now is a decent job, a decent home, and a chance to live peacefully in the community. They don't want to be shot at in the dark.

Balton Llanes,
U.S. Marine Corps veteran



Héctor García at his office in Corpus Christi, ca. late 1980s. Héctor continued to speak out about Mexican American rights until his death in 1996.
Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.19)

BEFORE WORLD WAR II

YOU'RE FORCED TO LEAVE THE U.S. . . .

Mexican laborers could pass freely into the U.S. until the Immigration Act of 1917 limited their immigration for the first time. In 1924 the Border Patrol was established, and the term “alien” was used to describe Mexican laborers.

With the Great Depression, over one-third of the American workforce was unemployed. Competition for low-wage jobs increased. In a period known as Mexican Repatriation, approximately two million Mexican laborers and their citizen children were forced to leave the United States. Highly publicized deportation raids by government officials and mob violence induced many to move to Mexico.

YOU ATTEND A SEGREGATED SCHOOL . . .

In 1896 African American Homer Plessy challenged a Louisiana state law that required separate railroad cars for black and white passengers. In a landmark ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld that “separate but equal” facilities were constitutional.

Segregation was a widespread practice. Children attended “Mexican,” “Indian,” “Colored,” and “Oriental” schools. These segregated schools had more crowded classrooms, poorer facilities, and fewer supplies.



Mexican American farm laborers and children work in the fields of California, ca. 1920s.

Los Angeles Public Library (00031694)



Mexican American families await trains departing for Mexico, Los Angeles, California, March 9, 1932.

Los Angeles Public Library (00052947)



Inside a segregated classroom at a “Mexican school,” Southern Texas, ca. 1940s. Mexican American children are not allowed to speak Spanish in the classroom. Those children who are caught are punished severely.

Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.60)

*They take us to the border. They eject us from this country.
But we are not bandits. We came to toil.*

Excerpt from “Los Deportados” song

DURING WORLD WAR II

AMERICANS ALL

Over 500,000 Latinos served in all branches of the American military. Unlike African Americans and Japanese Americans, Latinos were not segregated but sent to either white or black units based on their skin color.

On the homefront, racial difference was perceived to be anti-American. In spring 1943, clashes between U.S. servicemen and Mexican American youth occurred two to three times a day in a period known as the “Zoot Suit Riots.” Mexican American, black, and Filipino youths were stripped of their clothes and beaten by mobs of American servicemen and civilians.

BUILDING THE ROAD

Evelio Grillo spoke Spanish at home and attended Catholic Church on Sundays. As a black Cuban American from Tampa, Florida, he was sent to the segregated African American 823rd Engineer Aviation Battalion.

Few commanders would accept black units for combat, and Evelio’s unit was charged with building the Ledo Road—a needed supply route that stretched from Ledo, India, to Kunming, China. These engineer units cut through treacherous mountain terrain and over swollen rivers to build the 1,000-mile supply route. Monsoon conditions brought fatal tropical diseases and led to deadly mudslides. Evelio struggled with 14 bouts of malaria while in service.



Carmen Contreras and fellow Women’s Army Corps members before shipped to Algeria, Daytona Beach, Florida, 1942. Because of Carmen’s knowledge of multiple languages, she works as a Teletype operator transmitting encoded messages to the battlefield. U.S. Latino and Latina & WWII Oral History Project, University of Texas at Austin (NCPD.11.2004.1)



Rioting U.S. servicemen conduct “search and destroy” raids looking for any youth wearing zoot suits. Library of Congress (LC-USZ62-75515)

We’re tired of being pushed around... I don’t want anyone saying my people are in disgrace. My people work hard, fight hard in the army and navy of the United States. They’re good Americans and they should have justice.

Alfred Barela,
on his teenage years as a
Mexican American



Roosevelt High School friends return from service, Los Angeles, California, 1946. All five served overseas during World War II. Gift of Ray Aragon, Japanese American National Museum (2000.273.4)



We realized that we would not face enemy fire...we resented that we were not assessed as able, perhaps even potentially heroic soldiers, competent and trusted to acquit ourselves well under fire. Our job was building and maintaining roads and bridges.

Evelio Grillo,
823rd Engineer Aviation Battalion

Evelio Grillo after basic training, Fort Meade, Maryland, June 1941. As part of the 823rd Engineer Aviation Battalion, Evelio helps to build the Ledo Road connecting India to China.

U.S. Latino and Latina & WWII Oral History Project, University of Texas at Austin (NCPD.11.2004.19)

AFTER WORLD WAR II

BATTLING INJUSTICE

In 1948 Mexican Americans in Texas won a victory in the federal court case *Delgado v. Bastrop Independent School District*. The *Delgado* case proved that the practice of segregating Mexican American children, in fact, violated their Constitutional rights. When local schools were slow to integrate, Héctor traveled across the state of Texas, taking photographs as evidence of continued segregation.

Challenges to segregation were occurring nationwide. In 1947 the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in the California case *Mendez v. Westminster* that the segregation of Mexican American schoolchildren was unconstitutional. "Separate but equal" policies for African American schoolchildren, however, were not overturned until the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954.



Mathis "Mexican school," photos taken by Héctor García to show the poor, unsanitary conditions that Mexican American children face in the classroom, 1948.

Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.71,72)



Mathis High School, photos taken by Héctor García to show better conditions of white school, 1948.

Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.69)

AFTER WORLD WAR II

FIGHTING FOR A VETERAN'S RIGHTS

Felix Longoria had been killed in action in the Philippines. When Felix's family approached the only funeral home in Three Rivers, Texas, to perform a wake, they were refused because they were Mexican American.

As spokesperson for the American G.I. Forum, Héctor García alerted the media, and the Longoria case drew national attention. This publicity brought the G.I. Forum thousands of new members. A young Texas Senator and future U.S. President, Lyndon B. Johnson, intervened and arranged for Felix Longoria to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery.



At burial ceremony of World War II soldier, Felix Longoria, Arlington National Cemetery, 1949.

Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.27)

We protest energetically the refusal of funeral services to our War Hero Felix Longoria at Three Rivers, Texas. And, certainly, A DEAD WAR HERO LIKE LONGORIA, whose body has been brought back all the way from the Philippines, AND WHO SACRIFICED HIS LIFE FOR OUR COUNTRY, should NOT be denied a decent Christian burial...

R.A. Cortez,
President of League of United
Latin American Citizens, 1949

FIGHTING FOR THE WORKERS

In 1942 the U.S. and Mexican government implemented the Bracero Program, which brought four million Mexican workers to the United States for primarily agricultural jobs. They lived in squalid camps and labored in harsh conditions. Once their contracts expired, they were forced to return home.

To protect laborers' rights, César Chávez and Dolores Huerta organized the United Farm Workers (UFW) in the 1960s. Using non-violent strategies of fasts, strikes, and boycotts, the UFW drew national attention to the farm labor movement.



Héctor García investigates Mexican American labor camp near Mathis, Texas, 1948. He is shocked by the deplorable conditions he finds.

Dr. Héctor P. García Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Bell Library (NCPD.1.2004.73)



César Chávez demonstrates for better wages and benefits for farm workers, outside a Safeway Market, Los Angeles, California, ca. 1980.

Los Angeles Public Library (00033787)

A hundred and fifty-five years ago, in the state of Guanajoto, Mexico, a padre proclaimed the struggle for liberty. He was killed, but 10 years later Mexico won its independence. We Mexicans here in the United States are engaged in another struggle for the freedom and dignity which poverty denies us. But it must not be a violent struggle, even if violence is used against us.

César Chávez, U.S. Navy veteran