

*Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II.* By Emilio Zamora. Foreword by Juan Gómez-Quiñones. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi, 318. Photographs. Tables. Appendices. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$60.00 cloth; \$27.95 paper.

World War II was a watershed for the Mexican Americans who fought in the U.S. armed services and worked on the home front to defeat the enemies of democracy. In the past five years scholars have increasingly turned their attention to how the war years affected Latino civil rights. The Latinos and Latinas in the World War II Project at the University of Texas, Austin produced three anthologies: *Mexican Americans in World War II* (2005) and *A Legacy Greater than Words* (2006), both edited by Maggie Rivas Rodríguez, and *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero* (2009), which Rivas Rodríguez edited with Emilio Zamora. In addition, Zaragoza Vargas studied labor unions' influence in *Labor Rights are Civil Rights* (2005), while Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard Steele looked at how the war affected civil rights of Mexican Americans throughout the Southwest in *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights* (2008). This most recent study by Emilio Zamora is the most in-depth scholarly study thus far of the complex forces at work among the Mexican Americans in Texas during the war.

Zamora's thesis is meticulously crafted by careful examination of a large body of primary sources, including many collections of government documents, the most important of which are the records of the Fair Employment Practice Commission (FEPC) and the Office of Inter-American Affairs. He also examines Mexican government sources, the records of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the private papers of key Latino leaders, and the records of war industries in Texas. Zamora finds that the federal government's agencies had both positive and negative roles in promoting the civil rights and the economic advancement of Mexican Americans. In Texas, LULAC leaders often worked with Mexican government officials and the FEPC to try to carry out the ideals of the Good Neighbor Policy. Throughout the war, they tried to challenge deep-seated prejudices and discrimination towards Mexicans, but they were largely unsuccessful in making meaningful changes. Nevertheless, the wartime experience of working with Mexican and U.S. government offices to implement ideals of democracy and racial equality energized LULAC leaders and led to continued postwar activism. For the first time the Mexican government took an active interest in promoting and defending the rights of Mexicans in the U.S. whether or not they were Mexican citizens. Working with Latino leaders, Mexican consuls lodged complaints of discrimination with U.S. agencies. Similarly Tejano leaders felt empowered by their recognition on both sides of the border.

This is a sophisticated study that interprets the many international political and economic currents that shaped the Tejano wartime experience. A fascinating part of the story involves the attempts by the FEPC to implement nondiscrimination policies in Texas industries, specifically the Gulf coast oil companies and manufacturing plants in Corpus Christi. In both cases unionized Anglo workers cooperated with company officials to oppose non-discrimination measures. They feared job competition from Mexican American workers and were motivated by enduring racial prejudices.

Zamora finds that wartime prosperity did not affect Mexican Americans as much as other groups. The U.S. Employment Service allied with growers to discourage Tejanos and Mexicans from leaving low paying agricultural jobs for better paying industrial jobs. At the same time the Mexican government refused to allow bracero workers into Texas because of widespread anti-Mexican prejudice and discrimination. The incidents of discrimination and blatant racism towards Mexicans in Texas were documented by Tejano leaders allied with the Mexican consuls—Alonso Perales, George I. Sánchez, Manuel C. Gonzales, and Carlos E. Castañeda were all deeply involved with the politics of the FEPC, the Good Neighbor Policy, LULAC and the fight for civil rights.

This study is an important contribution to understanding what has been called “America’s Greatest Generation.” It provides further evidence that Mexican Americans were in the forefront of fighting for American freedoms and the ideals of democracy. They emerged as primary stakeholders in the American Dream. The failures of wartime rhetoric to effect domestic realities created contradictions that would give power to subsequent struggles to achieve equality.

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## CULTURAL & LITERARY STUDIES

*Sociología Guatemalteca: El Problema Social del Indio*. By Miguel Angel Asturias. Edited with an introduction by Julio César Pinto Soria. Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 2007. Pp, 116. Bibliography. Appendix. Notes. Paper.

Recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1967, Guatemala’s Miguel Angel Asturias (1899-1974) is internationally celebrated for such novels as *El señor presidente* (1946), *Hombres de maíz* (1949), and the so-called Banana Trilogy—*Viento fuerte* (1950), *El papa verde* (1954), and *Los ojos de los enterrados* (1960). By comparison, the present work, which was presented in 1923 as the author’s thesis for a degree in law at the national university, is all but unknown. A Spanish edition came out in France in 1971, and an English version was published in the United States in 1977, but this is the first time the book has been published in Guatemala since its original appearance.

In 1923, Asturias was not yet the mature voice that the world would later come to know and honor, but he wrote with passion about his country’s large native population, the harsh realities of village life, and the obstacles to the formation of a modern nation-state presented by the continued indigenous presence. Reminiscent of Bolivian writer Alcides Arguedas’s *Pueblo enfermo* (1910), Asturias conceived the Indian problem in terms of social pathology. If Guatemala was sick, for Asturias its condition was susceptible to scientific diagnosis and treatment. Essentially, the young writer’s proposed remedy was a program of eugenics focused on the assimilation of Guatemala’s Indians into its mestizo (in local usage “ladino”) population, a process he would promote by encouraging European immigration.