



# THE WAR



## A KEN BURNS FILM

DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY KEN BURNS AND LYNN NOVICK

## The Hispanic Experience in World War II

### Subjects:

Language Arts, Social Studies

*I know I'm a Mexican, but I know that I was born and raised here and I consider myself strictly an American. And anybody asks me, what's my nationality, I say, well I'm a Mexican but I'm still an American. And I'll fight for America.*

— Pete Arias, THE WAR

### Background:

Break students into groups and have them complete a research exercise on the Hispanic experience in America during World War II.

Resources to consider include:

- AARP Segunda Juventud: Capturing the History of Hispanic Civil Rights ([http://www.aarpsegundajuventud.org/english/nosotros/2005FM/05FM\\_Civil\\_Rights.html](http://www.aarpsegundajuventud.org/english/nosotros/2005FM/05FM_Civil_Rights.html))
- American Experience: Zoot Suit Riots (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot>)
- American Federation of Teachers Hispanic Heritage Resources (<http://www.aft.org/teachers/hispanic-fighting.htm>)
- Teaching Tolerance: Latino Civil Rights (<http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?p=0&car=708&pa=2>)

As they research, encourage students to reflect on the connections between Hispanic and other minority groups' experiences during World War II, including African Americans, Japanese Americans and Native Americans. Have them consider how people from different backgrounds — racial, social and religious — have contributed to our national identity and how hard they have had to struggle to maintain their own identity. As a class, discuss that despite the intense discrimination and racism of the time (citing as examples the Zoot Suit riots and Sleepy Lagoon trial), World War II was a pivotal moment for many minority groups and paved the way for the civil rights movement in America.

For Hispanics in particular, World War II led to considerable progress in desegregating public institutions and reducing racial tensions. As defense industries boomed and many workers went off to war, Hispanics gained entry to jobs that had been virtually closed to them in the past and were able to move away from traditional occupations such as agriculture. Hispanics also found opportunities for military service. According to the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Hispanics were not identified as a race on military records until the Vietnam War — so the exact number who served during World War II is unknown — however unofficial estimates range between 250,000 and 500,000.

Discuss how progress continued after the war. The G.I. Bill of Rights gave all veterans benefits such as educational subsidies and loans for business and housing. Moreover, many Latino servicemen returning from the war felt they had proved themselves equal citizens on the battlefield and were ready to fight for equality on the home front as well.

### Activity:

Watch “The Hispanic Experience in WWII”. Then have students access a large repository of oral history narratives of the Hispanic experience during World War II at the University of Texas’ U.S. Latinos and Latinas & World War II Web site (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/ww2latinos>) and the Library of Congress Veterans History Project (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/search?query=race:Hispanic>).

### GO TO CLIP

([http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search\\_details.php?id=5375&type=3](http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_details.php?id=5375&type=3))

Encourage students to explore the background of the projects and read through the various oral histories and accompanying resources. Students should also search through related photographs and archival materials.

Then have students select one oral history subject that is of particular interest to them and research that person's story. As they research students should look for not only their

subject's wartime experience but also his or her feelings on racism and discrimination, civil rights and citizenship as well as the war's impact on individuals and families including for example, stories of Mexican-American women entering the work force for the first time to support themselves and their families.

When they have completed their research, students should prepare to present their subject to the class using the visual and textual information they have compiled. Students can assemble one of the following:

- a PowerPoint slide show;
- posters using cut-and-paste images and color markers to fulfill objectives of activity;
- a pamphlet or booklet;
- a short video using archival footage, voiceover narration, musical soundtrack and/or re-enactments of key events.

*I believe that at the end of the war Latinos had proven their worth and I think that most other Americans, non-Latino Americans accepted them. It was a huge thrust forward in the relationship of the Latino to others and they had proven the right to be treated like any American.*

— Bill Lansford, THE WAR

### Extension Activities:

Students can also:

- Write a short newspaper article on an oral history subject.
- Film and edit a documentary-style interview of an oral history subject. One student can act out the role of the subject, using the oral history as his/her lines, and one student can play the role of the documentary interviewer/filmmaker.
- Write a short ballad or corrido based on the narrative elements of the oral history.
- Create a visual art piece (using paint, markers, clay, etc.) that depicts essential or important aspects of the oral history using abstract or figurative imagery.
- Research the Bracero program, which allowed Mexican nationals to take temporary agricultural work in the United States from 1942 to 1964. Have students debate the program — was it an opportunity or exploitation? (<http://www.farmworkers.org/bracerop.html>)

Visit the “SEARCH AND EXPLORE” ([http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search\\_home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_home.htm)) section of THE WAR web site for more information about the Hispanic experience in World War II.

## Resources

### Sacramento:

- (<http://www.sacramentohistory.org>)
- (<http://crm.cr.nps.gov/archive/20-11/20-11-12.pdf>)
- (<http://www.answers.com/topic/history-of-hispanic-people-in-the-united-states>)

### Braceros:

- ([http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove/themes/story\\_51\\_5.html](http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove/themes/story_51_5.html))
- (<http://echo.gmu.edu/bracero/docs/overview.pdf>)

### Farm Labor/Union Organization:

- (<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/fightfields/index.html>)
- ([http://www.pbs.org/weta/myjourneyhome/armando/armando\\_bg.html](http://www.pbs.org/weta/myjourneyhome/armando/armando_bg.html))
- (<http://www.ufw.org>)
- (<http://www.chavezfoundation.org/cesarechavez.html>)

## Standards

Language Arts, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel) at (<http://www.mcrel.org>)

### Standard 1: The Writing Process

- Uses prewriting strategies
- Drafts and revises; redrafts for readability, style, content and linguistic structures.
- Edits own and others' writing
- Uses strategies to address different audiences
- Writes fictional, biographical, autobiographical and observational narrative compositions...
- Writes descriptive compositions; reflects on personal experience.
- Writes in response to literature; analyzes and interprets

### Standard 2: Uses Stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

- Uses precise and descriptive language
- Develops effective paragraphs in logical sequence; uses supporting detail
- Varies sentences structures
- Uses a variety of transitional devices
- Develops personal styles and voice

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