



# World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights

*Richard Griswold del Castillo*

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## **World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights** Richard Griswold del Castillo

World War II marked a turning point for Mexican Americans that fundamentally changed their expectations about how they should be treated by the greater U.S. society. The experiences of fighting alongside white Americans in the military, as well as of working in factory jobs for wages equal to those of Anglo workers, made Mexican Americans less willing to tolerate the second-class citizenship that had been their lot before the war. Having proven their loyalty and "Americanness" during World War II, Mexican Americans in the postwar years wanted to have the civil rights they knew they had earned. In this book, Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard Steele investigate how the World War II experiences of Mexican Americans galvanized their struggle for civil rights and how the U.S. government responded to the needs and aspirations of Mexican Americans. The authors demonstrate, for example, that the U.S. government "discovered" Mexican Americans during World War II and set about addressing some of their problems as a way of forestalling a sense of grievance and disaffection that might have made the Mexican American community unwilling to support the war effort. The authors also show that, as much or more than governmental programs, the personal wartime experiences of Mexican Americans formed their civil rights consciousness. The book concludes with a selection of key essays and historical documents from the World War II period that collectively gives a first-person understanding of the civil rights struggles of Mexican Americans.

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