70th Anniversary Commemoration of *Hernandez v. Texas*

STATE BAR of TEXAS

State Bar of Texas Hispanic Issues Section
St. Mary's University School of Law, San Antonio
Thursday, January 25, 2024



Honorable Justice David M. Medina (Ret. Texas Supreme Court)



Honorable Chief Justice Dori Contreras (13th Court of Appeals)



Honorable Justice Gina M. Benavides (13th Court of Appeals)

Co-Sponsored By







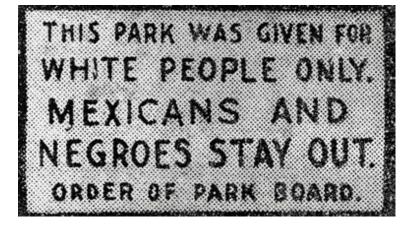




Texas: "Juan Crow" Laws



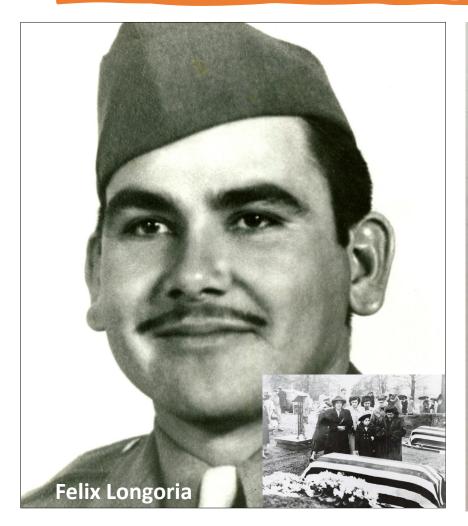




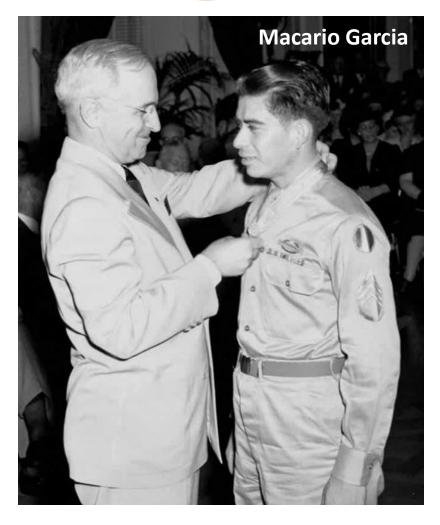
- Top Left: Lonestar Restaurant Association, Dallas, Texas. Printed "Jim Crow" sign, Black History Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/segregation-era.html#obj024.
- Top Right: Restaurant sign, Dimmitt, Texas, 1949, Russell Lee Photograph Collection, The Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
- *Left*: The Birth and Growth of Racism against Mexican-Americans, American Experience, https://video.kqed.org/video/american-experience-birth-and-growth-racism-against-mexican-americans/.



Texas: Mexican-Americans and WWII







Legal Team: Gustavo Garcia

 Born 1915 in Laredo and raised in San Antonio.

 Graduated from UT Austin in 1936, and with his law degree in 1938 as the only Hispanic in his class.

• Served in WWII as a first lieutenant with the Judge Advocate General's Corps in Japan.

 Served as legal advisor to LULAC; for the family of Felix Longoria; and counsel in *Delgado v. Bastrop ISD* challenging Mexican-American school segregation in Texas.

 Counsel of record in Hernandez v. Texas.

Died in 1964 at age 48.











Legal Team: Carlos Cadena

- Born in San Antonio in 1917.
- Earned his law degree from UT Austin in 1940; only Hispanic in his class.
- Served during WWII in the U.S. Army Air Force as a radio operator in the Pacific.
- Worked as city attorney for San Antonio.
- Joined *Hernandez v. Texas* legal team.
- First Hispanic to serve as a chief justice in Texas, with his appointment to 4th Court of Appeals in 1977. Served 25 years.
- Died in 2001.

Legal Team: John J. Herrera

- Born in 1910; his great-great grandfather signed the Texas Declaration of Independence in 1836, one of only two native Tejano signers.
- Graduated from South Texas Law School in 1940.
- Joined Hernandez v. Texas legal team.
- First Hispanic political candidate in Harris County.
- Served as national LULAC president, 1952-1953.
- Active in Viva Kennedy clubs.
- Died in 1986.

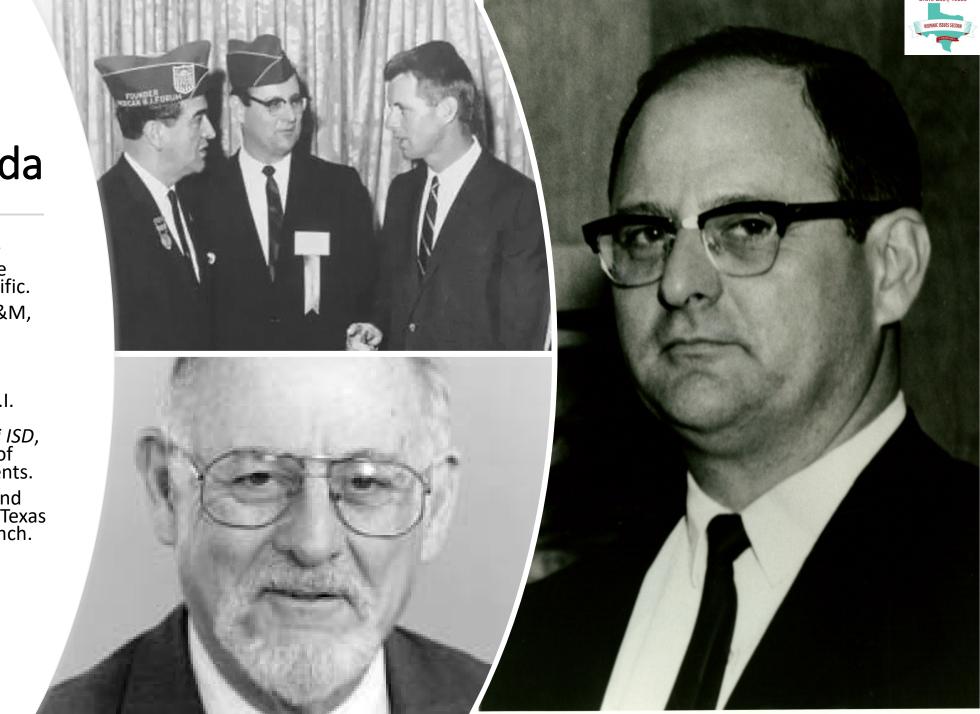






Legal Team: James De Anda

- Born in 1925 in Houston.
- Served in the U.S. Marine Corps in WWII in the Pacific.
- Graduated from Texas A&M, and UT Law in 1950.
- Youngest member of the Hernandez team at trial.
- Attorney for American G.I.
 Forum; lead counsel in
 Cisneros v. Corpus Christi ISD,
 challenging segregation of
 Mexican-American students.
- In 1979, he was the second Mexican-American from Texas named to the federal bench.
- He died in 2006.





Others Involved Behind the Scenes

- **Abel Cisneros:** Radio commentator from Wharton, TX, attended oral argument, and reported on the story in East Texas.
- Manuel B. Lopez: Attorney and U.S. Army solider stationed in Virginia, guided the legal team around Washington, DC.
- Anthony Garcia: Attended as an observer on behalf of LULAC.
- Chris Aldrete: Attorney and chairman of American GI Forum, attended oral argument.
- Sarah McClendon: Reporter who attended oral argument. Wrote the only eye-witness news account about the oral argument.
- Others who assisted the legal team in Washington, DC: U.S. Senator Dennis Chavez (NM) and staff; U.S. Senator Price Daniels (TX) and staff; U.S. Senator Lyndon Johnson; attorneys Harvey Rosenberg from Texas and Al Wirin from California.
- Organizations and individuals who donated or raised funds: San Antonio LULAC Council No. 2; Alonso Perales; Judge J.T. Canales; Texas Good Relations Association.



Joe Espinoza and Pete Hernandez



Caetano "Joe" Espinosa

WGBH, www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/mexicanamericans-who-made-difference/.



Pete Hernandez (center) with Gus Garcia (left) and John J. Herrera (right)

Dr. Hector Garcia Papers, Special Collection, Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



City of Edna, Jackson County, Texas





Jackson County Courthouse

1906 courthouse, circa 1939. Photo courtesy TXDOT, http://www.254texascourthouses.net/018-jackson-county.html

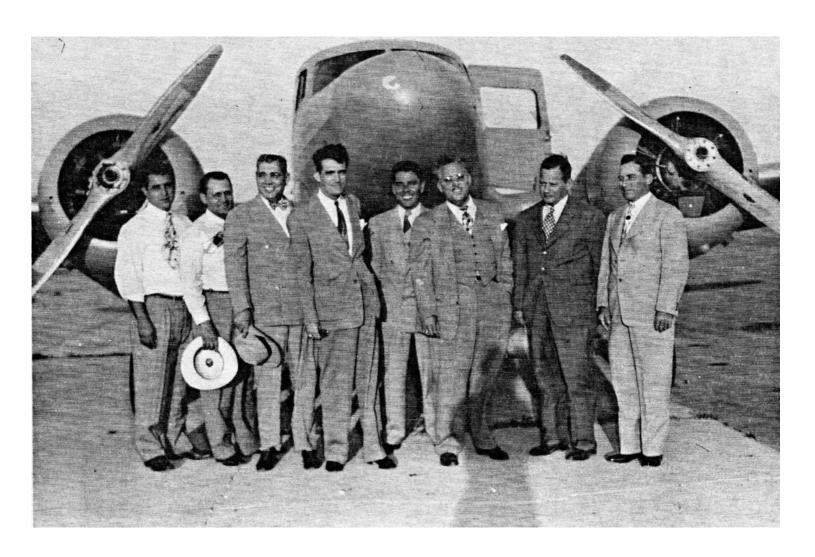


Jackson County Bathroom Sign*





The Legal Team Comes Home



"Gus Garcia, center left, returns to San Antonio in January 1954 after successfully arguing a landmark anti-discrimination case before the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C." (Photo by J. Jimenez)

Paula Allen, "San Antonio lawyer Gus Garcia's career peaked with landmark Supreme Court victory," San Antonio Express News, Nov. 23, 2023, www.expressnews.com/news/article/gus-garcia-san-antonio-supreme-court-18513339.php



Sarah McClendon's News Account

- McClendon, a reporter, wrote the only known in-depth account of the oral argument; it was published in the San Antonio Light on January 12, 1954.
- Her account is now an invaluable resource because there is no transcript of the oral argument.
- McClendon's news reports includes questions from the Supreme Court justices and the attorneys' answers.
- In Gus Garcia's account, he writes that Carlos Cadena was not given enough credit in news reports because the case was called one hour early, and reporters missed Cadena's "historical opening argument."

Jury Bias Put to **High Court**

Garcia Argues Jury **Bias Before Top Court**

cial practices against Texans Mexican descent. Was it anher battle of San Jacinto in

stances during the argument,

"Evidently the justice not aware that in Texas the the petit jury."

"Just give the Mexicans a throughout Texas and you will find Mexicans will not dodge jury service as so many white people do." COURTS IRONIC

sidered legally but we want actually to be so considered legally and socially."

Against the array of Latin-American talent, the Texas at-

REGRET SITUATION

"We in Texas regret the We deny, however, there was

14 per cent of the population and no Mexican is called for account for approximately 14 per cent of the county popula. To speak before supreme cour

The San Antonio attorney contend that in previous cases that "the long and continued failure to call members of the negro race for jury service. where it is shown that negroes were available and qualified for cluded from all juries jury service, was sufficient to ory exclusion" and denial of rights under the fourteenth

In ruling against Hernandez, the Court of Criminal Appeals at Austin held the "equal protection clause" of the fourteenth amendment "contemplated and recognized only two classes as prising the other class."

members of and within the clusion of Latin-Americans. as distinguished from members derlined in the brief with the of the negro race," and continued, holding that "appellant seeks to have this court recognize and classify Mexicans as a special class and entitled to special privileges in the organi-

EARLIER SITUATION The local attorneys argue

They contend that Latin that in an earlier case the state a separate group in the county, could not be systematically excluded from juries. They continue in their brief for the Su

> "Petitioner does mand that persons of Mexican descent sit on any particular jury. He merely asks that they not be systematically ex-

> "This can be achieved with out destroying our jury system and without violating the fourteenth amendment. It has been achieved in Texas in cases involving negroes and Roman Catholics and the jury system has not been de

coming within that guarantee: the fourteenth amendment does The white race, comprising one not require proportional repr It held that "Mexicans are argue against complete ex

"In an estimated 50 Texas tion of persons of Mexican descent, persons of Mexican service.'

Other members of mittee which has raised funds for the court fight include Jose R. Nunez, Max Penner, Dr Ramiro P. Estrada, Matt Garcia and Pena. Civic groups participating include the Texas Good Relations assn., local Lulac council and the GI Forum.

Sarah McClendon, "Jury Bias Put to High Court," San Antonio Light, January 12, 1954, p. 1, https://www.law.uh.edu/hernandez50/mcclendon.pdf



Waiting for the Decision

SUPREME COURT ASKED TO SAY WHETHER MEXICANS ARE LEGALLY WHITE UNDER STARS AND STRIPES

Texan, Convicted of Murder, Says Members Of His Race Denied Right to Jury Service

ALABAMA CASE STUCK UNDER NOSE OF JUDGES

(By Alice A. Dunnigan)
WASHINGTON — (ANP) — The United States Supreme Court was asked last week to determine whether American born Mexicans are considered members of the white race, or are they, like Negroes, looked upon as a separate group?

The question arose in the case of Pete Hernandez, an American citizen of Mexican ori-

gin, who was convicted in the courts of Texas and sentenced to requiring him (because he is not life imprisonment for murder. | a Negro) to show exprest dis-

Nation Eyes County Issue By CARL HOOPER Advocate Staff Writer A charge that U. S. citizens of Latin-American descent are systematically excluded from jury duty in Jackson County will be argued before the Supreme Court in Washington Monday, The Associated Press reported Saturday. The issue was raised at a news conference Friday by Gus Garcia of San Antonio, attorney for Pete Hernandez, 26, laborer, who faces a life term for the murder of Joe Espinosa, 46, tenant farmer, in Edna Aug. 7, 1951.

Supreme Court Is Asked To Rule On **Mexican Question**

WASHINGTON (P)-The Supreme Court was asked Monday to reverse a murder conviction because persons of Mexican blood are excluded from jury service in Jackson County, Texas.

The court heard argument on the appeal of Pete Hernandez, 26, of Edna, who was convicted of the slaving in 1951 of Joe Espinosa, 46, a cotton planter, also of Edna.

Deprived Of Protection Arguing the appeal were Carlos C. Cadena and Gus C. Garcia, San

Antonio lawyers.

Cadena said the jury procedure in Jackson County had deprived Hernandez of the protection provided under the 14th Amendment, which provides no person shall be deprived of his rights because of his race.

Mexicans File **Civil Rights** Case From Texas

WASHINGTON -(INS)- The Supreme Court heard final arguments in the first case to reach the high tribunal involving the civil rights of three million Mexican-Americans in border states

The Court was asked to reverse a murder conviction against Pete Hernandez in Jackson County, Texas, because no Mexican-Americans have been on the county's jury lists in the ast 25 years.

Gus Garcia, attorney for Hernandez, said citizens of Mexican extraction are "systematically excluded" from furies in 50 Texas counties and in parts of New Mexico. Arizona and California.

Left to right: (1) The Black Dispatch (Oklahoma City, OK), 23 Jan 1954; (2) Victoria Advocate (Victoria, TX), 10 Jan 1954; (3) Lubbock Morning Avalanche (Lubbock, TX), Jan 13, 1954; (4) Alabama Tribune (Montgomerv, AL), 15 Jan 1954.

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

No. 406.—OCTOBER TERM, 1953.

Pete Hernandez,
Petitioner,
v.
The State of Texas.

On Writ of Certiorari to the Court of Criminal Appeals of the State of Texas.

[May 3, 1954.]

Mr. Chief Justice Warren delivered the opinion of the Court.

The petitioner, Pete Hernandez, was indicted for the murder of one Joe Espinosa by a grand jury in Jackson County, Texas. He was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals affirmed the judgment of the trial court. — Tex. Crim. Rep. —, 251 S. W. 2d 531. Prior to the trial, the petitioner, by his counsel, offered timely motions to quash the indictment and the jury panel. He alleged that persons of Mexican descent were systematically excluded from service as jury commissioners, grand jurors, and petit jurors, although there were such persons fully



Hernandez v. Texas, 347 U.S. 475 (1954)



¹ Texas law provides that at each term of court, the judge shall appoint three to five jury commissioners. The judge instructs these commissioners as to their duties. After taking an oath that they will not knowingly select a grand juror they believe unfit or unqualified, the commissioners retire to a room in the courthouse where they select from the county assessment roll the names of 16 grand jurors from different parts of the county. These names are placed in a sealed envelope and delivered to the clerk. Thirty days before court meets, the clerk delivers a copy of the list to the sheriff who summons the jurors. Vernon's Tex. Code Crim. Proc., 1948, Arts. 333–350.

The general jury panel is also selected by the jury commission. Vernon's Tex. Civ. Stat., 1942, Art. 2107. In capital cases, a special venire may be selected from the list furnished by the commissioners. Vernon's Tex. Code Crim. Proc., 1948, Art. 592.

Hernandez v. Texas: Holding

"Circumstances or chance may well dictate that no persons in a certain class will serve on a particular jury or during some particular period. But it taxes our credulity to say that mere chance resulted in their being no members of this [Mexican-American] class among the over six thousand jurors called in the past 25 years. The result bespeaks discrimination, whether or not it was a conscious decision on the part of any individual jury commissioner. The judgment of conviction must be reversed."



Hernandez v. Texas: Headlines

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, FRIDAY, MAY 7, 1954

Mex-Americans

Ban From Juries

Is Held Illegal

LIKE THE DEW

PRICE SEVEN CENTS

Court Ruling On Mexican Rights Case "May Foreshadow" School Bias Decision

High Court Upsets Texas In Civil Rights Decision

tant civil rights decision, ruled the first civil rights case involving unanimously Monday that Jackson County, Texas, has been violating fore the Supreme Court. the constitution by keeping Mexican-Americans off juries.

Its decision, written by Chief Justice Earl Warren, overturned ous form the conviction of Pete Hernandez, reasons of

WASHINGTON, May 3-UP-+Texas and a number in New Mexi The Supreme Court, in an impor- co. He said Hernandez' case was a Mexican-American to come be

The decision is the latest in growing number of cases in which

Texas Exclusion Of Mexican Jury Members Banned



Supreme Court Case

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American cotton

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keeping Mexijuries. en by Chief Jusoverturned the Hernandez, 25 American of for the fatal

May 5 (UP)—

rt, in an imports decision, ruled

lay that Jackson been violating

was sentenced

ACTION TAKEN BY HIGH COURT

Discrimination of Juries

WASHINGTON, May 3-UP-The Supreme Court, in an important civil rights decision, ruled unanimously Monday that Jackson ununimously Monday, Jackson to life imprisonment, county, Tex. has been violating the constitution by keeping Mexiean-Americans off juries can-Americana off juries.

Justice Earl Warren, overturned Its decision, written by Chief's the conviction of Pete Hernandez, Justice Earl Warren, overturned Gus C. Garcia, attorney for Her-25, of Edna, Tex., an American of Mexican descent, for the fatal shooting in May, 1951, of Joe Espinosa, a Mexican-American cotton planter, Hernandez was sentenced Mexican descent, for the fatal Texas and a number in New Mexito life imprisonment

WASHINGTON, May 3-UP-shooting in May, 1951, of Joe Espi-co. He said The Supreme Court, in an importanta, a Mexican-American colton the first civi tant civil rights decision, ruled planter, Hernandez was sentenced a Mexican-A

county. Tex., has been violating It has the effect of outlawing the constitution by keeping Mcxi-the exclusion of Mexicans from jury duty.

Exists Elsewhere

the conviction of Pete Hernandez, nandez, said recently the practice 25, of Edna, Tex., an American of exists in more than 50 countles in

fore the Sup The decis growing nur

the high co ous forma reasons of a It did no

biggest civi



What Happened to Pete Hernandez?

GUS C. GARCIA ATTORNEY AT LAW TRANSIT TOWER

Transit Tower

CAPITOL 2-2932

February 12, 1960

Honorable Jack Ross Board of Pardons and Paroles Austin, Texas

Dear Jack:

It was with much chagrin that I learned a couple of days ago that Pete Hernandes, No. 136125, who served as our guinea pig for our appeal to the United States Supreme Court on the question of jury discrimination, is still confined in the penitentiary.

Pete has been confined continuously since August 1951. At the time that he was sentenced in December, 1955, to twenty years after his first case was reversed, he was given credit for 62 months good time. What his record has been since that time, I do not know but I do know that he is now located at Harlem State Prison Farm. Lishall be grateful if you could garner such information as you may be able to get on such short notice and let me know next week, by long distance collect, when it would be convenient for you to discuss this matter with me percentally in Austin.

I really feel conscience-striken, Jack, about this matter, and I would like to do everything within my power to gain freedom for this boy who was willing to risk a possible death sentence upon the second trial of his case in order' to help us establish a very important principle of law and civil rights for Latin Americans everywhere.

Kindest personal regards.

Vonne worm toulu

A Dus C. Darcia

Gus C. Garcia

GCG:dmr

cc: Dr. George I. Sanchez
John J. Herrera, Esq.
Dr. Hector P. Garcia
Mr. R. A. Cortez

From the desk of GUS C. GARCIA

June 8, 1960

I have just received a letter dated June 7, 1960, from the Honorable Jack Ross of the Board of Pardons and Paroles informing me that the Board is recommending parole for Pete Hernandez, our guinea pig in the Mexican jury exclusion case before the United States Supreme Court.

While I do not wish to claim credit for the final successful conclusion of our historical issue, I have pestered Jack Ross for several months now via letters, long distance calls and two personal visits in Austin. I can now truthfully say that my conscience is clear in this matter.

GUS C. GARCI

GCG:dmn

cc: Dr. Hector P. Garcia
Dr. George I. Sanchez
A.J. Herrera, Esq.
Frank Jasso
James De Anda, Esq.
Judge Manuel V. Lopez
Anthony Garcia

- In 1955, Hernandez was retried and convicted, and sentenced to 20 years.
- Gus Garcia continued to advocate for Hernandez. In 1960, Hernandez was released on parole.

Left image: Garcia, Gustavo C. [Letter from Gus C. Garcia to Jack Ross - 1960-02-12], letter, February 12, 1960; (https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth24 8884/), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History.

Right image: Garcia, Gustavo C. [Letter from Gus C. Garcia to Hector P. Garcia and others - 1960-06-08], letter, June 8, 1960; (https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth24 8885), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History.



Sources to Learn More

Contemporary Sources

- Hernandez trial transcript, US Supreme Court (pdf).
- <u>Briefs filed in Hernandez</u>, US Supreme Court (pdf).
- A cotton picker finds justice!: the saga of the Hernandez case, compiled by Ruben Munguia (May/June 1954).
- Sarah McClendon, "Jury Bias Put to High Court," San Antonio Light, January 12, 1954, p. 1.

Compilations

- "Colored men" and "hombres aquí": Hernandez v. Texas and the Emergence of Mexican-American Lawyering. Olivas, Michael A., ed. (2006). Houston, TX: Arte Público Press.
- Hernandez v. Texas at Fifty, University of Houston Law Center and Arte Publico Press Conference.
- 1954: Hernandez v. Texas, Library of Congress.

Sources to Learn More – Cont.

Video Presentations

- A Class Apart, PBS American Experience, 2009 (50 min).
- Hernandez v. Texas, Hilda G. Tagle and Veronica Villalobos, May 1, 2014 (1 hour).
- Hernandez v. Texas, State Bar of Texas, Law Related Education Committee (13 min).

Articles/Stories

- Gabriel Valle, <u>A Hero Forgotten: Gus Garcia and the Litigation of Hernandez v. Texas (1954)</u>, Journal of Supreme Court History 48 (2023) 31–53.
- Carlos Soltero, <u>Hernandez v. Texas (1954) and the Exclusion of Mexican Americans from Grand Juries</u>, Latinos and American Law, University of Texas Press, 2006.
- <u>Hernandez v. Texas: A Class Apart</u>, Bullock Museum.
- Hernandez v. the State of Texas, Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas.





70th Anniversary Commemoration of *Hernandez v. Texas*

Course Materials are online at <u>TexasBarSections.com/CourseMaterials</u>

This course has been approved for 1.00 hour MCLE credit.

COURSE NUMBER: 174222464

Please submit your CLE credit online via your MyBarPage.com.

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https://texashispanicissuessection.com/join-us/

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