

Vicente Ximenes, LBJ's Great Society, and Mexican American Civil Rights Rhetoric

Michelle Hall Kells

"Ximenes's importance to the Mexican American struggle for civil rights has always been clear. But Kells provides a fuller picture of the roles that Vicente Ximenes played [and] helps clarify Ximenes's use of language in various contexts, [furthering] our understanding of the complexity of the Mexican American civil rights battles."—Anthony Quiroz, editor of *Leaders of the Mexican American Generation: Biographical Essays*

The rhetorical history of a pivotal activist

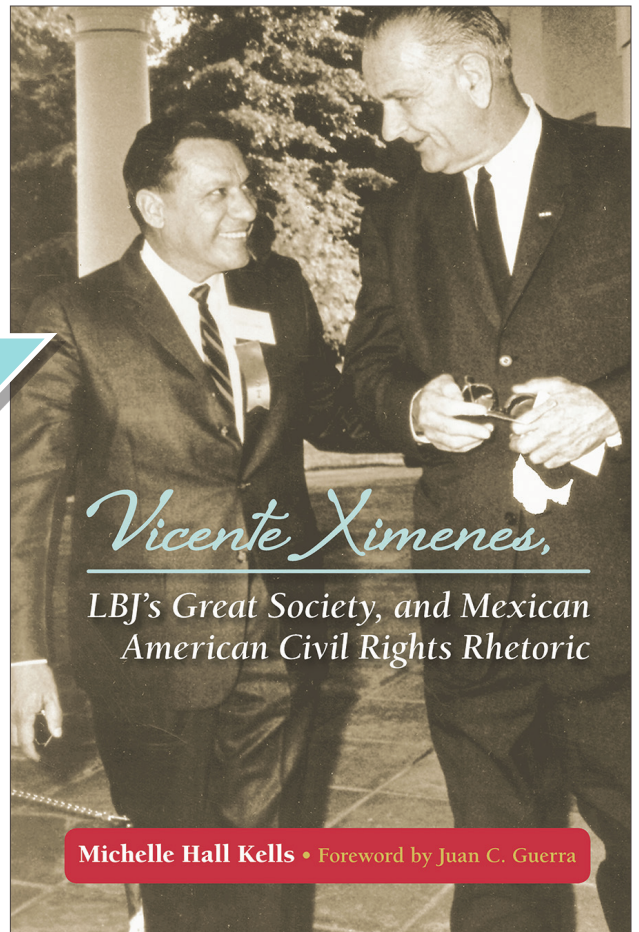
Beginning as a grassroots organizer in the 1950s, Vicente Ximenes was at the forefront of the movement for Mexican American civil rights through three presidential administrations, joining Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society and later emerging as one of the highest-ranking appointees in Johnson's administration. Ximenes succeeded largely because he could adapt his rhetoric for different audiences in his speeches and writings. Michelle Hall Kells elucidates Ximenes's achievements through a rhetorical history of his career as an activist.

Kells draws on Ximenes's extensive archive of speeches, reports, articles, and oral interviews to present the activist's rhetorical history. After a discussion of Ximenes's early life, the author focuses on his career as an activist, examining Ximenes's leadership in several key civil rights events, including the historic 1967 White House Cabinet Committee Hearings on Mexican American Affairs. Also highlighted is his role in advancing Mexican Americans and Latinos from social marginalization to greater representation in national politics.

This book shows us a remarkable man who dedicated the majority of his life to public service, using rhetoric to mobilize activists for change to secure civil rights advances for his fellow Mexican Americans.



Michelle Hall Kells is an associate professor of rhetoric and writing at the University of New Mexico. She is the author of *Héctor P. García: Everyday Rhetoric and Mexican American Civil Rights* and the lead editor of *Latino/a Discourses: On Language, Identity, and Literacy Education* and *Attending to the Margins: Writing, Researching, and Teaching on the Front Lines*. Her articles focusing on civil rights rhetoric, community literacy, and ethnolinguistic diversity have appeared in many edited collections and journals.



Paper: 978-0-8093-3639-5
E-book: 978-0-8093-3640-1
\$40, 346 pages, 21 illus.

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Foreword by *Juan C. Guerra*

Acknowledgments

Introduction: The Cultural Rhetorical Ecology of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement

Surveys the vibrant and engaged generation of Mexican American leaders born during the two first decades of the twentieth century who extended the work of their predecessors beyond the barrios of their communities toward national reform.

1. “Chente”: Interrogating Histories, Negotiating Rhetorics

Examines the rhetorical education and career of Ximenes, beginning with his early life in Floresville, Texas. As fifth-generation Texan, the Ximenes family did not belong to the *recien llegados* (recently arrived immigrants). They belonged to the class of the enfranchised, the entitled, the citizen, the leaders, and the lawmakers of the outposts of Texas.

2. New Mexico and the Political Imagination of the American GI Forum

Chronicles the expansion of the American GI Forum outside the boundaries of Texas into New Mexico and examines the impact of the sociocultural context on the rhetorical imagination of the American GI Forum.

3. The Public Rhetoric of Vicente Ximenes: Citizen Scholars and Mexican American Civil Rights Activism

Examines the rhetorical legacy of Ximenes and his role as organizer of the American GI Forum in Albuquerque, New Mexico, from the mid-1950s through 1960. The decade of Ximenes’s public life in Albuquerque represents a period of apprenticeship and alliance building.

4. *Latinidad*: The Question of Democracy and the Americas

Focuses on Ximenes’s role in mobilizing Mexican American counterpublics toward national inclusion. Between 1964 and 1967, Ximenes acquired increasing authority and built a reputation of solid achievement on both a national and an international stage, through leadership roles in the 1964 Viva Johnson campaign and his subsequent White House appointments in 1967.

5. Constructing the “Great Society”: The *Topoi* of the 1967 El Paso Hearings

Examines Ximenes’s leadership role in the 1967 White House Cabinet Committee Hearings on Mexican American Affairs in El Paso, Texas.

6. Public Memory and the Reconstruction of History: The 1972 Civil Rights Symposium

Five years after the historic cabinet committee hearings in El Paso, former President Johnson and Ximenes participated in the first civil rights symposium hosted by the newly established Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas.

Conclusion: Vicente Ximenes—Engaging Public Rhetoric, Cultural Ecologies, and Civic Literacies in the Twenty-First Century

Notes

Selected Bibliography

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