

"¡La Batalla Está Aquí!":  
The Making of the August 29th National Chicano Moratorium  
Against the War in Vietnam

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The 30-minute Chicano film *Requiem 29* opens with a scene of thousands of people marching down Los Angeles' Whittier Boulevard in a protest demonstration. The marchers are carrying banners, which allows onlookers -- and viewers of the film -- to know who is participating and what are some of their political concerns. Visible are many signs that say MEChA, for *el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán*, which was and is a Chicano college student group. Also visible is the Black Aztec eagle of the United Farm Workers, as well as signs that declare "*Viva Che,*" "*Viva la Causa,*" and "*Queremos Paz.*" The sun is shining brightly and the people look a little hot and they are probably tired, but the film chiefly conveys a mood of intense joy: it shows people who are walking proud and sounding militant. Every few seconds, the crowd yells: "Chicano!" and then, "Power!" The words are thunderous because this is the largest number of people assembled during the entire course of the Chicano movement. They have come to participate in an anti-war demonstration

organized by a group called the National Chicano Moratorium Committee Against the War In Vietnam.<sup>1</sup>

That day the protest march was supposed to conclude with a festive gathering at a park at the end of the march route. As the film title suggests, however, August 29, 1970, was to have a tragic end. *Requiem 29* shows the brutal tation between Chicanos and law enforcement agents that started that afternoon in the park. A minor disturbance at a liquor store near the park was the igniting event. When a few of those people involved in the incident were pushed by sheriff deputies back toward the massive crowd at the park, law enforcement declared the entire assembly illegal and charged the gathering. The decision to physically remove protesters spawned several hours of violence that ultimately left three people dead, including Rub Salazar, the Mexican American journalist who was shot through the head by a deputy sheriff's tear-gas projectile. The remainder of *Requiem 29* -- which is to say the majority of the film -- then chronicles the inquest into Salazar's death. In this regard the film parallels what little has been written about the Chicano moratorium in history books. When the Chicano moratorium gets mentioned at all, its tragic ending -- the violence, the police assault, the death of Salazar -- is routinely the focal point.<sup>2</sup>

While these are important, and certainly dramatic events, the attention they have commanded has left some other important questions unexplored For

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<sup>1</sup>David Garcia, *Requiem 29* (1970). A copy of the film, now out of print, may be found in the University of California at Los Angeles' Chicano Studies Library.

<sup>2</sup>Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics, Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico, 1990) 124-128; Alfredo Mirandé, *Gringo Justice* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1987) 173-179; Armando Morales, *Ando Sangrando* (La Puente, CA: Perspectivas Press, 1972) 91-122. For an analysis of police-community relations in Los Angeles, especially in the wake of the August 29th moratorium, see Edward J. Escobar, "The Dialectics of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement, 1968-1971," *Journal of American History* 79 (March 1993): 1483-1514. The most detailed analysis by a historian regarding the circumstances of Salazar's death is found in Escobar, 1501-1503. Escobar's conclusion is that "the investigation that officials conducted left the circumstances of Salazar's death unclear," yet in his careful marshaling of witness accounts, he emphasized the possibility that Salazar's death was deliberate.

instance, what prompted this march in the first place? Why did so many Mexican Americans -- 20,000 according to the *Los Angeles Times*, 30,000 according to some Chicano estimates -- chose to participate in a demonstration against the war in Vietnam? Why Vietnam? Positing some answers to these questions is the subject of this essay.

To better understand the role of the Vietnam War within the Chicano movement, it is helpful to know a little more about the Chicano movement itself and the timing of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. As two social scientists noted in 1966, "a new wind [was blowing] from the Southwest." Although Mexican Americans had struggled against second-class citizenship for much of the twentieth century, the struggles of labor leader César Chávez and land-grant claimant Reies López Tijerina put Mexican Americans on the national stage. Inspired by these heroes and the black civil rights and power movement, young Mexican Americans, most of them ranging in age from their late teens to their late twenties, began to protest against an array of social injustices confronting the Mexican American population, injustices rooted in discrimination and poverty.

As they engaged in this protest, the foremost political and cultural concept they espoused was Chicanismo, or a cultural nationalism that proposed that reclaiming a powerful sense of cultural identity and pride would reinvigorate and unite the Mexican American population which would then become stronger culturally and politically. Cultural nationalism would be the means of, in the words of a founding Chicano document, "total liberation" from the oppressive conditions many Mexican Americans faced.<sup>3</sup> *Chicanismo* set apart the political struggle of Chicano movement participants from earlier struggles by Mexican Americans. So did the political tactics activists were willing to employ.

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<sup>3</sup>From *El Plan de Aztlán*. A copy of this key document of the Chicano movement is found in F. Chris Garcia, ed., *Chicano Politics: Readings*, (New York: MSS Information Corporation, 1973)170-173.

Marches, boycotts and sit-ins replaced a long-standing faith in the power of the ballot box and court system. The Chicano movement and the years of heaviest fighting in Vietnam were nearly co-eval. Johnson made his decision to commit U.S. troops in massive numbers in the summer of 1965. That fall, under the leadership of César Chávez, the National Farmworkers Association voted to go on strike against grape growers.<sup>4</sup> And it was in supporting this union, that many young Chicanos cut their political teeth.

Yet in those early years of the Chicano Movement, 1966, 1967, and into 1968, Vietnam was not high on the agenda of most Chicano activists. To be sure, as early as 1966, Chicano heroes like César Chávez, Reies López Tijerina, and Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, founder and leader of a Denver group called the Crusade for Justice, had each made clear his opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam.<sup>5</sup> Starting in 1967, some Chicano activists, especially in California and Colorado, also began to attend anti-war protests organized by other groups and write against the war in movement newspapers.<sup>6</sup> As they protested the war, Chicanos expressed regret that the cost of the war at home was diverting funds from domestic programs, especially War on Poverty programs. From the start, Chicano movement opposition to the war was also rooted in genuine sympathy

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<sup>4</sup>Joan London and Henry Anderson, *So Shall You Reap* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970) 151.

<sup>5</sup>In 1965, Chavez, a believer in non-violence, explained to college student volunteers that farm workers were not "saints" and so, therefore, supported the war. *El Malcriado*, the farm worker's newspaper, also began to print articles critical of the war by 1966. Tijerina's *Alianza de Mercedes Federales* passed an anti-war resolution at its 1966 convention; Corky Gonzales spoke at an anti-war rally in Denver in August, 1966, a decision, according to one researcher, that marked "his entry into the files of the FBI." Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975) 197; Peter Nabokov, *Tijerina and the Courthouse Raid* (Berkeley, Calif.: The Ramparts Press, 1969), 218-219; manuscript on the Crusade for Justice by Ernesto Vigil, lent to author. Vigil has obtained documents through the Freedom of Information Act that he has allowed the author to view.

<sup>6</sup>Author's oral history interviews with Ernesto Vigil (25 March 1993, San José, Calif.), José Calderón (28 May 1993, Claremont, Calif.); Lea Ybarra (18 January 1993, Fresno, Calif.) and Salomón Baldenegro (26 January 1993, Tucson, Ariz.); and Raul Ruiz (27 May 1993, Northridge, Calif.), all in author's possession; *El Informador* (Berkeley, Calif.) año 1, número 2, 2 December 1967, p. 1; *El Gallo*, vol. 1, no. 3, 31 August 1967, p. 1.

for the Vietnamese people -- a sympathy that operated as much on an emotional as a political level. Many Chicanos opposed the war because they were simply horrified at the massive carnage inflicted upon the Vietnamese by U.S. bombing raids; others were specifically opposed to what they considered an unjust war against an impoverished, third world country. Opposition to the Vietnam war on the part of Chicanos was thus multifaceted, but it was also diffuse. Activists were mostly concerned about local issues, primarily the farm workers struggle, fighting for educational equality, but also protesting police violence, and in New Mexico, the land grant issue.

In fact, at first some Chicano activists even saw the war issue as counterproductive. In 1967, for example, MAYO activists in Texas took the lead in squelching debate on the war within liberal Mexican American circles. MAYO, or the Mexican American Youth Organization, set the stage for *El Partido de La Raza Unida*, the Chicano political party in Texas. Its organizers were known for making outrageous statements during press conferences. One of the most well-reported -- and misinterpreted of these remarks was that Mexicanos might have to come together to resist and "eliminate the gringo."<sup>7</sup> Such statements earned MAYO a radical reputation. Nevertheless, it was MAYO jefes [bosses] who worked to make sure that Vietnam did *not* become an issue at a special interstate Mexican American conference held in Texas during October 1967, a conference which was also dubbed *La Raza Unida*. Why did MAYO oppose opposing Vietnam? MAYO activists made it very clear they did not wish to cloud their nationalist political movement with what they termed a "white issue."<sup>8</sup> For that reason, Mario Compean, one of the original MAYO members,

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<sup>7</sup>Ignacio M. García, *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party* (Tucson: Mexican American Studies Center, University of Arizona, 1989) 28.

<sup>8</sup>Notes taken by author during a conversation with Homer D. C. García, 23 March 1993 (San Jose, Calif.)

also forbade Chicano college students from allowing the MAYO name to appear at those few anti-war demonstrations that took place in Texas in the late 1960s.<sup>9</sup>

Texas was and is one of the more conservative states in the union, and certainly Mexican Americans were part of and affected by that conservatism. But this scenario did not play out just in Texas. In Tucson, Arizona, Salomón Baldenegro, was in 1967 kicked out of the campus Mexican American student group he helped found after he spoke out at an anti-war rally. Similarly, at UCLA, the Mexican American student group declined to speak out against the war in 1967.<sup>10</sup> There was a real sense that protesting the war would divert attention away from more pressing concerns.

So although many Chicanos within the movement were committed to protesting the war, others were downright resistant to even broaching the subject. Most clearly, no one was making the war issue a priority. Not even evidence of grossly disproportionate casualty rates compelled Chicanos to do so. In early 1967, Rafael Guzmán, a political scientist who was working on a massive data collection project on the Mexican American sponsored by the Ford Foundation, issued a report that showed that although Spanish-surnamed individuals made up only 11.8 percent of the total population in the five states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California and Colorado, they made up 19.4 percent of these state's casualties in Vietnam.<sup>11</sup> According to Guzmán, this indicated that Mexican Americans "have a higher death rate in Vietnam than other G.I.'s."

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid. Author's telephone conversation with Mario Compean, 3 March 1995.

<sup>10</sup>Salomón Baldenegro interview. Author's telephone conversation with Carlos Montes, 20 September 1993.

<sup>11</sup>Guzmán's findings were published in *La Raza Yearbook*, (Los Angeles) no. 13, 1968, 33, but were circulated among Mexican American and Chicano activists before then. Additional casualty information from December 1967 to March 1969 confirmed Guzmán's original findings. The supplemental report was printed in *La Raza* magazine, (Los Angeles), vol. 1, no. 1, 1969, 12-16. Guzmán used "Spanish-surnamed" because the U.S. military during the Vietnam War did not classify soldiers according to ethnicity.

While Guzmán's statistics later became part of the rhetorical arsenal of the Chicano moratorium committee, at first they were just as likely to be used by supporters of Lyndon Johnson's policy in Vietnam as by opponents. While anti-war Chicanos saw Guzmán's statistics as proof of the gross injustice of the war, to older Mexican Americans, they proved the extraordinary patriotism of Mexican American youth. During the Johnson administration, Mexican Americans elites took it as a point of honor that members of their ethnic group were not out protesting the war (at least not in greatly visible numbers). For example, Ignacio Lozano, owner and editor *La Opinión*, the Spanish-language daily of Los Angeles, published editorials that celebrated the "loyalty of Mexican American youth" in this time of war. He specifically praised young Mexican Americans for avoiding what he called the "excesses" of anti-war activists as well as those black power folks.<sup>12</sup> Older Mexican Americans elites like Lozano clearly hoped to make political headway by emphasizing the patriotic role of the Mexican Americans in this latest American war.

In doing this, Lozano was advocating an idea made popular among Mexican Americans by their experiences in the Second World War. And that was the idea that wartime sacrifice merited peacetime. The conviction that a soldier's willingness to risk his life on the battlefield should further his better treatment as a civilian, had been promoted by other minority groups, particularly African Americans for several wars running. As far back as the revolutionary war, slaves fought hoping for freedom. After the Emancipation Proclamation, black men hoped military service would gain them first-class citizenship. Once a black man had served in the army, Frederick Douglas once contended: there was "no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in

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<sup>12</sup>*La Opinión*, 22 April 1967, p. 6 and 5 November 1967, sec. 2, p. 2



the United States."<sup>13</sup> Except it turned out for the power of Jim Crow, but blacks and other minorities continued to put forth this argument. Another example were the Japanese American Nisei, who left internment camps to accrue one of the most heroic fighting records in World War II.<sup>14</sup>

Mexican Americans took up this idea that legitimacy was gained through soldiering with particular fervor during that conflict. The stated aims of the Second World War, "a war fought for democracy," had a profound impact on a community struggling against second-class citizenship and their place in American society. Demographics played a role. Many Mexican Americans who fought in the Second World War were the children of immigrants. The heaviest years of Mexican migration into the United States had taken place during the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>15</sup> That meant that a large generation of native-born were coming of age, of conscriptable age, in the early 1940s. These Mexican Americans struggled to mediate the divide between their Mexican culture and their American birth, which promised equality but rarely guaranteed it. For them, the war was a watershed experience.

Simply put, Mexican Americans were more aggressive in their pursuit of first-class citizenship after fighting a war for democracy. In the years after World War II, Mexican American politicians frequently mentioned the war time service of their ethnic group as a point of pride and legitimacy. It helped that Mexican Americans established a particularly commendable service record during the Second World War. Somewhere between a quarter-million and a half-million served, which was probably a higher percentage proportionately than any ethnic

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<sup>13</sup>David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989) 161.

<sup>14</sup>William Hosokawa, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans* (Rahway, N.J.: Quinn and Boden, 1969), especially chapter 23, "Proof in Blood."

<sup>15</sup>José Hernández Álvarez, *A Demographic Profile of the Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1910-1950* (Berkeley, CA: International Population and Urban Research, 1966) 477.

group.<sup>16</sup> And Mexican Americans came home with medals of their chest: 11 were granted Congressional Medals of Honor. If wartime service was a way to gain respect as equals, Mexican Americans were eager that others know that they were more than deserving of fair treatment.

This legacy of World War II and later Korea, where again Mexican Americans performed, as one author describes “valiantly,” engendered a political strategy: that wartime service equaled peacetime equality.<sup>17</sup> During the Vietnam conflict, as early as 1966, the wartime service record of Mexican American and their bravery as soldiers was again being trotted out by some Mexican American politicians as they voiced their support for the Vietnam war.<sup>18</sup> In early 1968, president Lyndon Johnson had noted that more Mexican Americans in Vietnam were volunteers rather than draftees. Although the source of that information was unclear, Vicente T. Ximenes was swift to repeat it.<sup>19</sup> Ximenes headed the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican Affairs, an agency established by the Johnson administration in response to Mexican American demands for attention. Asked by a reporter to comment on draft card burners in February 1968, Ximenes replied that he couldn't really speak to that issue, because, in his

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<sup>16</sup> The U.S. Department of Defense estimates that between 250,000 to 500,000 Hispanics participated in the conflict, and so comprised between two to five percent of all troops. As used by the Defense Department, “Hispanics” is a term that includes Puerto Ricans and other Latinos but in World War II predominantly meant Mexican Americans. (The Department of Defense knows that 53,000 Puerto Ricans served.) In 1940, Mexican Americans probably accounted for no more than two percent of the total U.S. population. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, the total U.S. population was just over 132 million while an estimate by Juan Gómez-Quiñones (page 31) puts the total U.S. Mexican-origin population at 2.5 million. Determining the number of Mexican Americans in the United States during World War II with more precision is difficult given the unreliable nature of U.S. census data.

<sup>17</sup> Raul Morin, *Among the Valiant* (Alhambra, CA: Borden Publishing Co., 1963).

<sup>18</sup> Newspaper clippings from the *San Antonio Express News*, 2 July 1966 and *Corpus Christi Caller*, 3 July 1966, Box 8, Scrapbook 8.3, in the Dr. Hector P. Garcia Collection, Special Collections, University Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

<sup>19</sup> Again, the U.S. Department of Defense did not keep records on Mexican Americans specifically during the Vietnam war.

words, "Mexican Americans don't burn draft cards because we have none to burn. We volunteer."<sup>20</sup>

Ximenes noted that his comment was warmly applauded by the Mexican American audience who overheard it. There was just one problem. Ximenes was wrong. When he made that statement, Ernesto Vigil, from Denver, was on the verge of burning his second draft card. The first one he did not burn. He had sent it back with a letter saying he did not want to go.<sup>21</sup> Vigil soon had some company. Probably the most well-known draft resister was Rosalío U. Muñoz, the former student body president of UCLA, who in 1969 refused to be drafted in a public ceremony that coincided with *el deiciseis de septiembre*, Mexican Independence Day. Muñoz's draft refusal on the steps of the downtown Los Angeles' induction center was the first organized event of a group that became the National Chicano Moratorium Committee. Over the course of the next year, from September 1969 to August 1970, the moratorium committee was to organize a series of smaller demonstrations in anticipation of the August 1970 march. In Texas, even Compean who used to block debate on the war had come around. He chose to participate in a local ceremony in San Antonio. Compean told the college crowd that it was time for "all Chicano brothers to manifest themselves in opposition to the Vietnam War , and it give up all this patriotic . . . ." [Newspaper chose ellipses instead of printing the next word evidently because Compean's noun choice was considered foul language.] More interestingly, Compean also said that if it weren't for Mexicans dying, he

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<sup>20</sup>Memo, Vicente T. Ximenes to Marvin Watson, 5 February 1968, FG 687 (Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs), Box 386, Folder Marked: Executive FG 687, WHCF, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Tex.

<sup>21</sup>*El Gallo* (Denver), vol. I. no. 1, 10 May 1968, 1-2. (Issues of most Chicano movement newspapers can be found on microfilm in the Chicano Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. Because these are alternative and sometimes irregular publications, the author has decided to include all publishing data to help other researchers locate them.) Vigil interview.

wouldn't care if the war lasted another ten years.<sup>22</sup> While his was a hyper-nationalistic stance against the war, it was more evidence of Chicano anti-war sentiment even from formerly resistant quarters. So what changed? Why did the war issue move up the Chicano movement priority list by late 1969 and early 1970? And so a return to the original query: Why Vietnam?

For one reason, Chicanos were taking a cue from national events. Vietnam protest had become impossible to ignore. In the fall of 1969, massive anti-war demonstrations had taken place in cities across the country. In San Antonio, Compean had been speaking at a local event that was one of several dozen, if not more than a hundred, coordinated through the Vietnam Moratorium Committee, a national group. The next month, enormous anti-war rallies took place in San Francisco and Washington D.C. Maybe as many a quarter-million people participated in the west coast, half a million on the east. These demonstrations were an inspiration to Chicanos. According to David Sánchez, founder of the Brown Berets and one of the original members of the Chicano Moratorium committee, anti-war protest was "a trend, a national trend, and we just made it into a Chicano trend."<sup>23</sup> In the same manner, Ramsés Noriega, a man who was a key behind-the-scenes director of the entire moratorium effort, explained that organizing around the war among Chicanos began because "the war was very hot and people were willing to talk about it and deal with it."<sup>24</sup>

Chicanos saw the mainstream peace movement organize rallies, and reached the conclusion: we can do that. Yet Chicano Vietnam protest was not

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<sup>22</sup>Newspaper clipping from *San Antonio Evening News*, 16 October 1969, 2, Box 2, Folder Marked: Vietnam Moratorium, San Antonio, in the Joe Bernal Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>23</sup>Author's oral history interview with David Sanchez, 20 April 1993, in the author's possession.

<sup>24</sup>Author's oral history interview with Ramsés Noriega, 1 November 1993, in the author's possession.

just a matter of mimicry. Along with inspiration, comes the question of motivation. Clearly, one stated goal of Chicano anti-war protest was to see an immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Southeast Asia. Their main emphasis, however, was to use Vietnam as a kind of springboard to reach out to the those Mexican Americans who weren't part of the Chicano Movement. They wanted to spread an understanding that "*la batalla está aquí.*" To repeat the words of Noriega, if people willing to talk about the war and deal with the war, maybe they would also start talking about and dealing with other issues: school inequality, welfare reform (which had a different meaning a generation ago) and police brutality. If that happened, then formerly unpoliticized folks might even feel compelled to join the Chicano movement to do something about these other long-term problems. Most emphatically, moratorium members wanted to "mobilize" the Mexican American population not just against the war, but against the social injustices Mexican Americans faced on home front.

The war proved a good candidate for this mission for three reasons. First and foremost, the war was an excellent entry into a whole array of domestic issues. Moratorium members used Vietnam as their starting point, and carefully crafted a much broader appeal. Second, Mexican Americans proved a receptive audience. By 1970, the war was old news among the population and it apparently was not well-received. Third, rather than permitting the legacy of World War II to be a stumbling block, Chicano moratorium committee members actually appropriated these ideas but with a twist. They mentioned familiar themes of Mexican American bravery at times of war and Mexican American validation through military service, but they put these ideas toward anti-war ends.

The first reason the moratorium committee was able to attract so much support, 20,000 to 30,000 marchers, was that they built an anti-war demonstration that revolved around home front issues. Suddenly, those casualty rates that

Guzmán had recorded several years before were of prime importance. Moratorium members routinely began their presentations by telling audiences a simple statement: Mexican Americans are dying in Vietnam in numbers disproportionate to their population in the U.S. And then they would ask: "Why?" One contributing trend was that Chicano youth received an inferior education. In elementary school they were stripped of their cultural background; in high school they were tracked in vocational classes. The result was that few Chicanos were on college campuses, and so, they were ineligible for student deferments to the draft. Moratorium volunteers also linked the casualty rate to the problem of poverty. A degrading welfare system, plus a lack of job opportunity, pushed Mexican American men toward military service. Even police brutality was a "push" factor. To a young man from East Los Angeles, the LAPD was supposedly a lot more scary than the Viet Cong. As Rosalío Muñoz, chair of the Chicano Moratorium Committee, contended when he refused the draft, "I accuse the law enforcement agencies of the United States of instilling greater fear and insecurity in Mexican youth than the Viet Cong ever could, which is genocide."<sup>25</sup> Finally, all these problems, and thus the casualty rate itself, was rooted in a basic lack of Mexican American political clout.

In constructing this appeal, moratorium members were tapping into the central cause of growing public dissatisfaction with the war: mounting casualties. By late 1969, public opinion across the country had swung against U.S. involvement in Vietnam. According to a 1988 army study completed in 1988, a where-did-we-go-wrong type of study, diminishing support for the war was directly linked to increasing casualty rates.<sup>26</sup> It appears that Mexican Americans

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<sup>25</sup>Muñoz's speech refusing the draft was published in several Chicano newspapers, including Los Angeles' *La Raza*, 10 December 1969, 6.

<sup>26</sup>William M. Hammond, *United States Army in Vietnam. Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968* (Washington, D.C.: 1988) 387.

were part and parcel of this shift against the war. In fact, like blacks, Mexican Americans may have even been ahead of the curve.<sup>27</sup> This is a second reason, the August moratorium march attracted so much support: a substantial amount of anti-war sentiment already existed among Mexican Americans.

For although, in the earliest years of Vietnam involvement, Mexican American elites professed their support of the war, the general Mexican American population may have been less firm in their support of the war. Just like the rest of the country, hawkish attitudes may have dissolved in the face of mounting casualties and the realization that the if there was a light at the end of a tunnel, that tunnel was a lot longer than anyone had been told.

Unfortunately, unlike the general population which was polled several times a year over several years about the situation in Vietnam, only one poll specifically targeted Mexican American attitudes on the war. Taken in Santa Barbara a few weeks before the August moratorium, it showed that Mexican Americans were much more likely than the general population to favor immediate withdrawal than Vietnamization, that is, the measured substitution of South Vietnamese troops for American combat units. In addition, a majority said they would discourage any sons they had from entering the army and roughly half said they supported student and anti war protests.<sup>28</sup>

Certainly, moratorium committee volunteers recall receiving an overwhelming positive reception as they went from group to group asking for support. These included war on poverty agencies, college groups, neighborhood councils, and political advocacy agencies. Possibly moratorium committee volunteers only remember what they want to remember. But it is also true, that

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<sup>27</sup> For information on black American attitudes toward the war see William L. Lunch and Peter W. Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War In Vietnam" *Western Political Quarterly* (1973): 35-36.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Ornelas and Michael González, "The Chicano and the War: An Opinion Survey in Santa Barbara" *Aztlán* 2 (1971): 23-35.

although most people marching on August 1970 were young people in their late teens and twenties, many people old enough to be their parents and some people old enough to be their grandparents came too.

Although doubtful that the Chicano moratorium committee entirely overcame generational resistance among Mexican Americans to anti-war protest, what it did do was neutralize it. Criticism of the moratorium effort emerges from older Mexican Americans only after the violence of August 29, 1970. In their anti-war crusade, moratorium members built upon existing anti-war sentiment by a carefully-crafted appeal that emphasized home front themes. Not even the legacy of World War II and the considerable pride and patriotism that Mexican American gained from that experience stood in the moratorium committee's way. Rather members recycled some of these ideas and so made sure their anti-war effort recycled familiar themes. This was the third reason that the moratorium committee was able to attract so many marchers the day of the August march.

In a newspaper interview, Rosalío Muñoz, chairman of the moratorium committee, summarized the traditional formula and then explained the Chicano moratorium's departure from it. In his words, "Chicanos came back from World War II and . . . they put on their uniforms and medals, and they'd say, 'We served; you can't call me a wetback, you can't tell me where to go.'" But the result, Muñoz said, was that "we developed this cultural and psychological thing. You prove yourself . . . by going through the service." The Chicano's machismo was channeling Mexican Americans toward military life. Rather than accept this situation, Muñoz argued, the moratorium committee, as he put it "had to go *directly* the other way against it."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>*The Militant*, 4 September 1970, p. 6. (The interview took place before August 29 but was not printed until September because the paper was closed for three weeks during a vacation period for staff.)



Specifically, Muñoz was suggesting that moratorium members cast anti-war protest as an honorable, courageous cause, and, in particular, present resisting the draft as an act of bravery.

Under these circumstances, Muñoz contended that the moratorium committee's "first priority was educating the community" to abandon the traditional high value Mexican Americans presumably had placed upon military service. By criticizing the Vietnam War, the moratorium committee rejected the military as an avenue of social advancement and personal glory for Mexican American men. But nothing in the moratorium's message went directly against the conception -- and acclamation -- of Mexicanos as "*muy machos*," as very manly. To the contrary, refusing to serve was another route to the same end. As one young scholar, who spoke highly of the moratorium effort, contended, "To resist, is in the strongest sense of the word a TEST of manhood, personal courage and honor, *machismo*."<sup>30</sup>

Nor was praising the machismo of draft resisters a phenomenon restricted to men. Women who wrote articles in support of the moratorium offered similar arguments as men who spoke to audiences from up on stage. Enriqueta Vásquez was one. She was co-editor of New Mexico's *El Grito del Norte*, a leading anti-imperialist voice in the Chicano movement. In her article, Vásquez explained that since World War II Mexican Americans had been extremely patriotic. But now Chicanos had been doing some rethinking. As she wrote, "We hear the first lines of the Marine hymn from the Halls of Moctezuma, and we think, What the hell were the marines doing in the Halls of Moctezuma?" But Vásquez incorporated traditional elements in her overall critique. "Now our soldado razo [Mexican soldier] knows his machismo belongs to his people, to

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<sup>30</sup>Ron Vera, "Observations on the Chicano Relationship to Military Service in Los Angeles County" *Aztlán* 1 (Fall 1970): 35.

be used for his people, . . . to be used right here in the heartland of mi Raza (of my people) in Aztlán," Vásquez wrote. The "real soldado razo" was no less a macho, it was just that he arose, as she put it "with all his manhood, in his machismo to say . . . 'No [to killing in Vietnam]'.<sup>31</sup> Vásquez, who was making some of the earliest attempts to develop a Chicana feminism, continued to uphold ethnic stereotypes that glorified the Mexican American soldier.

A central theme of the moratorium effort was to ask Mexican American men to question the traditional value they had placed on military service and consider being drafted into the Chicano movement instead. This message was able to strike a powerful emotional chord with the Mexican American population. By mentioning casualty rates, by referring to the ideas of World War II, moratorium members anchored their appeal to the same grave injustice that Mexican Americans had noted since World War II: they were dying overseas for the United States while still subject to discrimination at home. This main thrust of the moratorium demonstration remained clear enough to one Mexican American woman who explained that she had marched on August 29 because she wanted her son, a soldier in Vietnam, to come home. But Cora Barba continued to use her son's military service to validate her own reach for equality. As she understood the purpose of the demonstration: "If my boy has a right to be out there . . . and has to be suffering . . . . I demand my rights and I want justice done."<sup>32</sup>

Barba's comments indicated that the moratorium campaign had achieved, in part, what it set out to do. It had convinced Mexican Americans, even those not involved in the Chicano movement, that the "batalla", the battle for

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<sup>31</sup>*El Grito del Norte* (Española, N. M.) vol. 3, no. 10, 29 August 1970, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, 25 September 1970, sec. 1, p. 3.

Chicanos was not in Vietnam, but as one newspaper advocated, "in the struggle for social justice in the U.S."<sup>33</sup>

That achievement was incomplete, however. August 29, 1970 was the apex of moratorium organizing. Successive moratorium marches were never able to capture the numerical strength of the August march. Harassed by police and suffering a reputation damaged by repeated clashes between police and Chicanos, the moratorium committee continued to lose support and direction.

Yet we have uncovered some reasons why so many Mexican Americans marched down the streets of Whittier Boulevard 25 years ago. Inspired by the success of national events and determined to build from the war issue a broader-based movement for social justice, Chicanos active in the moratorium committee were able to convince people to attend a march against because middle Mexican America, not to mention most Chicano movement participants, were already opposed to the war, because anti-war activists were careful to cultivate support for their work by recycling familiar themes from World War II, and because the moratorium committee used the war primarily as a starting point. Their crusade was much broader. It linked the war to domestic issues and thus had a much broader appeal.

Again, this is not to say that by using the war issue as a way to focus people's attention on problems at home, Chicano moratorium committee members and the Chicanos who marched did not care at all about the Vietnamese. Many did. But always their first concern was the plight of Mexican Americans in the United States.

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<sup>33</sup>La Voz del Pueblo (San Diego) vol. 1, no. 1, August 1970, p. 1.