

ABSTRACT

El Movimiento and Vietnam: The Causes and Consequences of Chicano Protest of the Vietnam War

Carlos Roberto Lopez, M.A.

Committee Chairperson: T. Michael Parrish, Ph.D.

The Chicano Movement, a radical offshoot of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement, came forth upon the national scene during the turbulent 1960s. After a promising start, the movement fizzled, and by the middle of the 1970s was finished. One of the main reasons for the decline of the Chicano Movement was its opposition to the Vietnam War.

This thesis looks at the rise and fall of the Chicano Movement and how the Vietnam War played a part in that demise. First, the paper looks at the historic plight of Mexican-Americans, particularly in Texas. Next, the thesis documents the rise of the Chicano Movement and the movement's reasons for protesting the Vietnam War, followed by how the opposition to the Vietnam War caused a backlash against the Chicano movement—both by the Anglo majority and

within the Mexican-American community. Finally, the thesis documents the consequences of the Chicano Movement's anti-war stance.

El Movimiento and Vietnam: The Causes and Consequences
of Chicano Protest of the Vietnam War

by

Carlos Roberto Lopez, B.A.

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Approved by the Department of History

Jeffrey S. Hamilton, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Approved by the Thesis Committee

T. Michael Parrish, Ph.D., Chairperson

Stephen M. Sloan, Ph.D.

Victor J. Hinojosa, Ph.D.

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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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To Melissa

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Chicano Movement

At the onset of the 1960s, Mexican-Americans were poised to claim their share of the American Dream. Groups such as the League of Urban Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the American GI Forum had successfully worked to end segregation and disenfranchisement. After more than a century of being second-class citizens, their dream of equality was within their grasp. Hope grew even greater with the presidency of John F. Kennedy, who, in 1961, made several important promises to Mexican-Americans, such as increasing civil rights and federal increasing appointments.

When Kennedy failed to deliver on these promises, Mexican-Americans became embittered by the whole political process. As historian Manuel Machado wrote, "Instead of improved wages, working conditions, status, they were patently ignored by an Anglo politician who had manipulated

them for political gain."¹ Dissatisfied with the political process, Mexican-Americans broke with the established approaches to empowerment that had defined their struggle for civil rights in the post World War II era.

Mexican-American community leaders used a moderate approach which advanced the cause of Mexican-American rights for years. The newly emerging generation of Mexican-Americans, however, subscribed to a more radical political agenda than those of the established organizations such as LULAC. As Amador C. Garcia, historian for the American GI Forum recalled, "These younger men, led themselves to believe, and others, that they were in a hurry. They were moving faster. [The Forum's] forte was consensus. Let's work with the system...Your philosophy and whatever you did is outdated. It's time for us, to do our thing, so to speak"²

This radical movement, commonly called the Chicano Movement, quickly found itself at odds with the established Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement. As José Angel Gutiérrez, one of the most prominent and outspoken leaders of this movement later said, "We were eliminating their

¹ Manuel A. Machado, *Listen Chicano: An Informal History of the Mexican American* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978), 95.

² Amador C. Garcia, interviewed in "Justice for My People: The Dr. Hector P. Garcia Story," available from <http://www.justiceformypeople.org>.

broker role. We had nothing, but contempt for these Anglo politicians who we thought were bigger than gringos. They could have solved these problems before and they still weren't solving them then."³ This antagonistic and confrontational attitude brought many young, liberally-educated Mexican-Americans to the Chicano cause.

Chicanos and Vietnam

The Chicano Movement began as a way for young, Mexican-Americans to have their voices heard on a national stage. The Chicano Movement encompassed a broad cross section of issues—from restoration of land grants, to farm workers' rights, to enhanced education, to voting and political rights, as well as emerging awareness of collective history. Soon, however, the focus of the Chicano Movement came to be mainly on the Vietnam War. Chicanos saw the war as a racist means of "creating a funnel which shoots Mexican-American youth into Vietnam to be killed and to kill innocent men, women, and children."⁴

Chicanos protest against the Vietnam War was unlike any other protest. While Anglos and African-Americans had protests against the war, no other race tied the Vietnam

³ José Angel Gutiérrez, interviewed in Ibid.

⁴ Leah Ybarra, *Vietnam Veterans: Chicanos Recall the War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 6.

conflict to their cause like Chicanos. African-American leaders like Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., had protested the war since the early 1960s. Meanwhile, Anglo working class citizens largely disapproved of the war.⁵ Like the Chicanos, African-Americans and poor Anglos and saw a disproportionate amount of their youth drafted, sent off to war, and killed in action. Like Chicanos, these groups were against the war. Unlike Chicanos, however, neither group would fully commit to protesting against the war. African-Americans would focus on other social issues, while Anglos were even more dead-set against the protest of the Vietnam War than they were against the war itself.⁶ For Chicanos, anti-war protest became a cornerstone of their movement.

Chicanos did not see anti-war protest as simply a political statement or a social issue. To the Chicanos, protesting the war was a matter of life and death. During the course of the war, a vastly disproportionate amount of Mexican-Americans died in action.⁷ Chicano protesters were, in their eyes, fighting to save their race. Anti-war

⁵ Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 19-20.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Leah Ybarra, *Vietnam Veteranos*, 7.

protest became a part of the essence of being a Chicano; you could not support the war and be a Chicano or vice-versa.

This thesis will attempt to prove that it was this strong bond between the Chicano Movement and anti-war protest that eventually led to the demise of the movement. The Chicano Movement ultimately failed in its lofty goals because of their opposition to the war. By tying itself so much to a position that became increasingly unpopular, the Chicano Movement was doomed to fail. Before they took arms against the government policies in Vietnam, the Chicanos were simply a radical group of Mexican-Americans, seen as an annoyance by the larger population. By protesting the war, however, they became vilified and marginalized.

The thesis will first look at the decades of Mexican-American oppression that ultimately led to the rise of the Chicano Movement. Next, it will examine the way Chicanos came to oppose the Vietnam War with such fervor. Then, the thesis will look at the response, both within and outside of the Mexican-American community. Finally, the thesis will present the final consequences of the anti-war protest.

CHAPTER TWO

Origins of the Chicano Movement

History of Mexican-American Oppression

Various factors led to the creation of the Chicano Movement. The most significant included: the long and persistent history of Anglo racism and oppression against Tejanos; the chronic conservatism of the American GI Forum, LULAC, and other established Mexican-American advocacy groups, willing to tolerate second-class status; severe and abject poverty; substandard education; and lack of political power.

The Chicano movement, particularly the movement in Texas, had deep roots in Anglo anti-Mexican prejudice that intensified during the Texas Revolution in 1836. The Republic of Texas was never recognized by the government of Mexico, and during its brief existence, it teetered between collapse and invasion from Mexico. In order to protect itself from economic collapse, Texas was annexed by the United States of America in 1845, and war came soon after. At the end of the Mexican-American War, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo—along with the charter of the state of Texas—gave or Tejanos equal rights under the law. Anglo-

Americans, however, did not see Tejanos as equals and did not honor those guarantees.

In the years during the Mexican-American War, many Tejanos who had fled to Mexico for safety returned to find their homes ruined, taken over by Anglo settlers, or both.¹ Anglos also stripped land and citizenship rights from Mexican-Americans whom they called disloyal. Fear and intimidation was used to keep Tejanos from voting when laws could not be passed to legally disenfranchise them.² This hostility and discrimination became commonplace against Mexican-Americans.

During the mid-1850s, aggression between Anglos and Mexicans escalated into what is known as the "Cart War." During this time, Mexicans and Tejanos had built a successful business of hauling food and merchandise through southern Texas. Using ox carts, Mexicans moved freight more rapidly and cheaply than their Anglo competitors. Some Anglos retaliated by destroying the Mexicans' ox carts, stealing their freight, and reportedly killing and wounding

¹ Arnoldo De Leon, *Mexican Americans in Texas: A brief History* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1999), 38.

² F. Arturo Rosales, ed. *Testimonio: A Documentary History of the Mexican American Struggle for Civil Rights* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2000), 33.

a number of Mexican carters.³ In 1855, eleven Mexican merchants were lynched in San Antonio. In 1857, Anglo merchants ambushed and killed 75 Mexican cartmen. That same year, Uvalde County made it illegal for Mexican-Americans to travel within the county without a passport.⁴ By 1859, the Mexican cartmen had been driven out of business.⁵

Far outnumbered by Anglo settlers, Mexican-Americans in Texas became a silent minority and a marginal society for decades. Schools, churches, unions, and other Anglo-dominated institutions largely ignored Mexican-Americans. As a result, immigrants from Mexico resisted Americanization, choosing instead to live within their own segregated communities.⁶ Beginning around the turn of the century, a huge influx of immigrants finally gave Mexican-Americans sufficient numbers to set up power bases in South Texas and to begin developing the desire to become fully empowered American citizens.

³ Manuel G. Gonzales, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 107.

⁴ Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Longman, 2000), 62.

⁵ Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 107.

⁶ De Leon, *Mexican Americans in Texas*, 50.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the United States confronted an unprecedented amount of immigration from Mexico. When the Mexican Revolution broke out in 1910, waves upon waves of Mexicans crossed the Rio Grande seeking jobs and safety. Along with entering World War I, the U.S. had limited the immigration of European laborers with the Immigration Act of 1917, which led to Mexicans becoming a cheap and viable labor force. More than 600,000 people immigrated between 1910 and 1930.⁷ With this massive wave of immigration came a renewal of the Mexican-American community. When the Mexican-American populations grew, there came the need for clubs, newspapers, churches, and labor associations that catered to this growing community. It was in this generation that the seeds for civil rights reform were sowed. As Jovita Gonzalez, a Mexican-American writer at the end of the 1920s put it,

Young Texas Mexicans are being taught at American schools. Behind them lies a store of traditions of another race, customs of past ages, an innate inherited love and reverence of another country. Ahead of them lies a struggle in which they are to be champions. It is a struggle for equality and justice before the law, for their full rights as American citizens. They bring with them the broader view, a clearer understanding of the good and bad qualities of both races. They are converging element of two

⁷ Anthony Quiroz, "The Quest for Identity and Citizenship," in *Twentieth Century Texas: A Social and Cultural History*, ed John W. Storey and Mary L. Kelly (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2008), 43.

antagonistic civilizations; they have the blood of one and have acquired the ideals of another.⁸

The chance to fight for equality would have to wait, however. During the years before the Great Depression, many federal acts were passed to curb the tide of immigration. While these acts originally were intended to stop the flow of European immigrants, soon Mexican immigrants became targets. As the job market for low skilled Whites diminished, Mexican immigrants came to be seen as unfair competition. New laws were proposed to end the influx of Mexicans into Texas. Even though West Texas farmers initially resisted these attempts, eventually Mexican immigration was placed on a quota.⁹ With the Great Depression, all Americans struggled for survival. Not until the beginnings of World War II would Mexican-Americans truly get a chance to make their case for equality.

The Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement

World War II became the major turning point in the Tejano experience. While there is no concrete number on how many Mexican-Americans were involved in World War II, it is estimated that over 500,000 Mexican-Americans joined

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 215.

the armed services during the war.¹⁰ Along with these American citizens, thousands of Mexican citizens who resided in the U.S. were also eligible for military service. Of these, an estimated 15,000 joined the military as well.¹¹ On the domestic front, thousands of workers came to the cities to work in factories to help the war effort. However, this was no bastion of equality. Most found that jobs were unavailable to them. Others found only unskilled, low-paying jobs.¹²

Full military service seemed the only real escape for Tejanos. While many Tejanos were in segregated units, such as the Company E. 141st Regiment of the 36th Division, most were put into integrated units.¹³ It was in these units that Mexican-Americans saw themselves as equals to Anglos. Raul Morin, a Tejano soldier in World War II, later wrote, "Most of us were more than glad to be given the opportunity to serve...the war soon made us all *genuine* Americans,

¹⁰ Richard Griswold del Castillo, "The War and Changing Identities," in *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 50.

¹¹ Ibid. 51

¹² De Leon, *Mexican Americans in Texas*, 106.

¹³ Ibid., 107.

eligible and immediately available to fight, and to defend our country..."¹⁴

After World War II, Mexican-Americans came home to find that their years of service were not enough to erase the prejudices against them. After years of service fighting for the United States, Tejano soldiers would return to Texas and find the same discriminations as before the war. As Maria Elisa Rodriguez, a civilian clerk for the Army from Waco, Texas stated after the war, "...they'd see these boys go off to war and they'd come back and they couldn't get good jobs...they didn't give us the opportunity. Because our boys went out and died on the battlefield, and I thought we were entitled to everything. But as it was, we weren't; discrimination still existed."¹⁵ In Texas, Anglo neighborhoods, eateries, swimming pools, and schools were considered off-limits for Tejanos. Police agencies throughout the state, such as the Texas Rangers and the Border Patrol routinely intimidated and harassed Tejanos to remind them of their second class citizenship.¹⁶ Politically, Tejanos were still required to pay poll taxes

¹⁴ Griswold del Castillo, "The War and Changing Identities", 51.

¹⁵ Ibid., 59.

¹⁶ De Leon, *Mexican Americans in Texas* 114.

and faced restrictions on the elective offices they could hold.

Although World War II veterans had diverse experiences during the war, there was a shared awareness of their situation. Because of their military service during the war, this generation of Mexican-Americans across the country could not reconcile their sacrifices as loyal Americans with their treatment as second class citizens. The magnitude of their outrage was greater than at any other point in Mexican-American history. This time, the people would unite and make their voices heard. After World War II, Mexican-Americans dedicated themselves to working for equal rights. These groups included: the American Council for Spanish Speaking People, the Alianza Hispano-Americana, the Mexican Civil Committee, unions like The International Mill, Mine, and Smelter Workers, as well as local clubs and organizations.¹⁷

It was during these turbulent years around World War II, that the direct precursors to the Chicano Movement came to prominence. In Texas, the two main groups that fought

¹⁷ Richard Steele and Richard Griswold del Castillo, "Epilogue: Civil Rights and the Legacy of War," in *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, ed Richard Griswold del Castillo (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 105.

for Tejano equality were the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the American GI Forum.

LULAC originated in the years before World War II. In 1927, Alonso Perales, an attorney in Harlingen, Texas, created a group called the League of Latin American Citizens so that "[Tejanos] could enjoy all the rights and privileges of the Anglo"¹⁸ At the same time in Corpus Christi, the Order of the Sons of America (OSA), was trying to unite all Mexican-American organizations under one title, one set of objectives, and one constitution.

In 1929, the League, still under the leadership of Perales, was invited by Ben Garza, President General of The Order of the Sons of America, to merge as a primary step toward ultimate unification of all Mexican-American organizations. Despite some internal skepticism, the idea was approved by The League of Latin American Citizens and a resolution for merger was adopted. The merging organizations added the term "united" to the League's name thus, the League of United Latin American Citizens or LULAC.¹⁹

¹⁸ Arnold C. Vento, *Mestizo: The History, Culture, and Politics of the Mexican and the Chicano - The Emerging Mestizo-Americans* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), 178.

¹⁹ Ibid.

LULAC founders were determined to fight off these misconceptions and become a guide for all Mexican-Americans. During the first general convention of LULAC in May of 1929, the group adopted a constitution that clearly stated its goals. It stressed the attainment of political, economic, and social equality for all Mexican-Americans.²⁰ Despite these radical goals, LULAC adhered to a conservative and pragmatic doctrine that stressed an incremental approach to achieving Tejano objectives. The founders of LULAC were determined to work within the system to create change. The *LULAC Aims and Purposes* stated, "We accept that it is...the obligation of every member of this organization to uphold and defend the rights and duties vested in every American citizen by the letter and the spirit of the law."²¹

LULAC's conservatism became clearly evident when, in the 1930s, when the organization took a stand against immigration from Mexico. Throughout the 1920s, immigrant workers came from Mexico as farm labor. As the amount of immigrants grew, however, it created tensions in the Anglo community. While many in the Tejano community were

²⁰ Machado, *Listen Chicano!*, 86.

²¹ Benjamin Marquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of an American Political Organization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 19.

sympathetic to the plight of the immigrant, LULAC took an anti-immigrant stance. It was decided that LULAC would only work only for the rights of "native-born" Tejanos. The leaders of the organization wanted to separate themselves from the stigma that the Mexican immigrants brought. As one member put it, "The native borns don't stand a chance. We have American ways and think like Americans, but to [the Anglos], we are just Mexicans."²²

LULAC would then fight to classify Mexican-Americans as "White." In Texas, certain counties required all "colored" citizens to pay a poll tax. LULAC opposed this practice, not on the basis of its discrimination, but on the principal that Tejanos should not be classified as colored. When the Census Bureau ruled to consider Mexican-Americans as "colored" instead of "White," LULAC led the charge against this practice. LULAC stated that attempts to take away Mexican-Americans' "White" designation was discrimination. As one Tejano put it, "In truth and fact, we are not only a part and parcel but as well the sum and substance of the white race."²³

²² Ibid.

²³ Robert Mesa to Jeff Bell November 1939, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

LULAC soon spread throughout the United States, despite the outbreak of the Great Depression. LULAC did, however, experience a malaise during World War II, as many of its members were fighting in the frontlines of Europe and Asia. At the end of the war, however, LULAC once again became a force in the Mexican-American community.²⁴

At the same time, LULAC gained a considerable ally in The American GI Forum. This new organization was established in Corpus Christi in 1948 by Dr. Hector P. Garcia, a prominent Mexican-American physician and World War II veteran, to address the concerns of Mexican-American veterans, who were segregated from other veterans groups. The American GI Forum's initial duties were to request services for World War II veterans of Mexican descent who were denied medical services by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.²⁵

The American GI Forum came to national prominence in 1949, with what came to be known as the "Felix Longoria Affair." In January of 1949, Dr. Garcia received a call from the sister-in-law of Felix Longoria. Longoria was a

²⁴ Richard Steele, "The Federal Government Discovers Mexican Americans," in *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, ed Richard Griswold del Castillo (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 27.

²⁵ Carl Allsup, *The American G.I. Forum: Origins and Evolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 33.

Mexican-American private who was killed in the Philippines in the line of duty in 1945. Longoria's body was finally returned to Three Rivers, Texas, in 1948. His widow was denied funeral services by a White American-owned mortuary. Responding to Dr. Garcia and the American GI Forum, United States Senator Lyndon Johnson arranged for the body of Pvt. Longoria to be interred in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.²⁶ Felix Longoria became the first Mexican-American serviceman to be awarded this honor.

With newfound fame, and a powerful ally in Washington D.C., Mexican-American leaders engaged in a crusade to improve the lives of Mexican-Americans everywhere. LULAC and the American GI Forum began to focus on education as a means for advancement. Members of these organizations believed that educational reform was the best way to create a lasting impact on the Mexican-American community and improve their socio-economic situation.²⁷ LULAC and the American GI Forum were active in the fight against school segregation and disenfranchisement. In order to affect this change, the two groups used the legal system to the fullest degree. Instead of public demonstrations, they took their cases to the highest courts. In *Delgado v.*

²⁶ Ibid., 40.

²⁷ Marquez, *LULAC*, 51.

Bastrop ISD (1948) and *Hernandez v. Driscoll Consolidated ISD* (1957), they won verdicts that deemed segregated schools as violating American Law.²⁸ The American GI Forum did their part for education reform within the Tejano community, by starting major education programs that would encourage parents to enroll and keep their children in school. These back-to-school drives became instrumental in raising graduation rates.²⁹ At the same time, LULAC would award college scholarships for Mexican-Americans, helping those with the merits but not the means for a college education.³⁰

At the same time as the Tejano advocacy groups were working for educational reform, the fear of communism was sweeping throughout the United States. Both groups were staunchly anti-Communist. The American GI Forum, with its members being veterans, was quick to defend the 'American Way.' They circulated among their group lists of known subversive groups and discouraged any agitation.³¹ For them, anyone that spoke out against the government was anti-American and possibly Communist. LULAC also fell into

²⁸ De Leon, *Mexican Americans in Texas*, 117.

²⁹ Allsup, *The American G.I. Forum*, 61.

³⁰ Marquez, *LULAC* 45.

³¹ Allsup, *The American G.I. Forum*, 79.

the red scare. Their college scholarship program was limited to Christians, as they felt that all Communists were atheists. The group also changed many of their policies and procedures, such as making the national anthem their official song, in order to prove their patriotism.³²

The two groups' mission was to reform society not to remake it. Many in the group were against any movements they saw as radical, preferring their methodical, conservative style. Because of this, many prominent Tejano leaders became critics of the Civil Rights Movement. They spoke out against any group that would want rapid change through tactics they deemed as confrontational. In 1963, LULAC president, Paul Andow said, "We have not sought out solutions by marching to Washington, sit-ins, or through other outward manifestations. We have always gone to the source of the problem and discussed it intelligently in a calm and collected manner."³³

Problems Facing Tejanos

Even though groups like LULAC and the American GI Forum were slowly and steadily making gains for Tejanos, there still persisted many problems up through the 1960s.

³² Marquez, *LULAC*, 46.

³³ *Ibid.*

Many Tejanos lived in abject poverty, experienced segregation—especially in education, and they often found themselves disenfranchised.

Poverty was an epidemic that spread throughout the Tejano community. In South Texas, Tejano families suffered through horrid conditions. Many Tejanos worked on large ranches and lived in communal labor camps. These farm workers earned little pay, ranging from fifty cents to \$1.25 for every hundred pounds of cotton they would pick.³⁴ Families resided in makeshift huts with dirt floors and no utilities. During a trip through South Texas, Dr. Garcia would comment, "I have never seen such general disregard anywhere in Europe or Africa, even in wartime."³⁵

Tejanos in urban areas did not generally fare much better. In South El Paso, adequate housing was impossible to find. Only 5 percent of houses had showers; three percent had tubs. The average number of people per toilet was 71.³⁶ In San Antonio, Tejanos lived in shacks with dirt floors, no plumbing, and no electricity. Streets in Tejano neighborhoods were unpaved. On top of this, San Antonio

³⁴ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 293.

³⁵ Carroll, *Felix Longoria's Wake*, 35.

³⁶ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 310.

had the highest rate of tuberculosis death in the country in the years after World War II.³⁷

Along with poverty woes, Tejanos also faced an uphill battle in receiving adequate education. As soldiers returned home from World War II, they came to find that their children were forced to attend inferior, segregated schools.³⁸ In Texas, Anglo schools were almost always better equipped and funded than Tejano schools. Teachers in Anglo schools were also paid more and had better credentials. Many Tejano schools lacked adequate supplies, playground equipment or even plumbing.³⁹ After World War II, studies showed that 47 percent of school-aged Tejano children received no education. In Austin, a study showed a total of 79 Tejano students graduating high school from 1937 to 1947.⁴⁰ Language barriers caused students to be left behind and drop out at alarming rates.⁴¹ Because of these poor educational conditions, postwar organizations made equal education a top priority. As stated earlier, LULAC was instrumental in having the segregated schools

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Quiroz, "The Quest for Identity and Citizenship," 53.

³⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁰ Allsup, *The American G.I. Forum*, 23.

⁴¹ Machado, *Listen Chicano*, 128.

deemed unlawful. This did not, however, end school segregation. While "Mexican" schools were slowly shut down, de-facto segregation arose through neighborhood schools which ended up being segregated themselves.⁴²

Educational discrimination was not the only discrimination that Tejanos still faced in the early 1960s. Social and political prejudices permeated throughout Texas. Even as Tejanos' rights expanded, Anglos—especially in rural areas—were fearful and resentful of the increasing freedoms of those they deemed as inferior.

Anglo neighborhoods, diners, movie theaters, swimming pools, and even hospitals were considered off-limits to Mexican-Americans. Police and other law enforcement agencies such as the Texas Rangers and the Border Patrol reminded Tejanos of their second-class citizenship through disparagement or intimidation.⁴³

Politically, Tejanos were still living under Jim Crow. They had to pay the poll tax and cope with other voting and office-holding restrictions.⁴⁴ The political condition of Texas Mexicans thus remained at a level only slightly improved since the 1920s. Tejanos believed in the

⁴² Quiroz, "The Quest for Identity and Citizenship," 55.

⁴³ De Leon, *Mexican Americans in Texas* 125.

⁴⁴ Quiroz, "The Quest for Identity and Citizenship," 57.

democratic system, however. LULAC and the American GI Forum still tried to entice the Tejano community to vote. When John F. Kennedy ran for president on a platform of equal rights, organizers held dances where the price of admission was a poll tax receipt.⁴⁵ It was during the Kennedy years that Tejanos were sure that their situation would dramatically improve. Kennedy and Johnson had promised Mexican-Americans a great deal, and the Mexican-American vote was instrumental in winning them the White House. In the short time that Kennedy was in office, however, much of the administration's attention turned to the plight of African Americans.⁴⁶ Mexican-Americans would have to be patient and keep working to attain their goals.

This was the world that the young leaders of the Chicano movement would inherit. After generations of oppression, full equality was within reach. The leaders of LULAC and The American GI Forum were content to continue working within the political system. It was these tactics that had won them so many victories; it would be the same tactics that would earn them full equality.

The younger generation, however, were ready to take everything they felt they deserved. As José Angel

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Vento, *Mestizo*, 195.

Gutiérrez would later say, "We were wide-awake and we were crying out loud. We had a wet diaper. We wanted to be changed right then and there. They weren't listening. So it's a combination of—of all of these things because we were that next generation to move them out of the way."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ José Angel Gutiérrez, interviewed in "Justice for My People: The Dr. Hector P. Garcia Story," available from <http://www.justiceformypeople.org>.

CHAPTER THREE

The Chicano Movement and Vietnam

Beginnings of the Chicano Movement

The Chicano movement grew out of the struggle that Mexican-Americans had endured. For decades, groups such as LULAC and the American GI Forum fought to allow Tejanos the same educational rights as Anglos. The Tejano groups also fought for equal opportunities as citizens, in business and politics. Because of this, a new middle class was formed in the Tejano community. By the mid-1960s, nearly 40 percent of the Tejano population was classified as "middle class."¹ Still, young Tejanos increasingly found themselves dissatisfied with their circumstances.

Even as their conditions had improved throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, there was still a sense of—and in some cases, actual—segregation from society as a whole. Young Tejanos found themselves without an identity. As Chicano leader José Angel Gutiérrez later wrote, "My world was comprised of three spheres, the parental Mexican world, the Anglo school, and my Chicano peer world. As I grew

¹ Arnoldo De Leon, *Mexican Americans in Texas: A brief History* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1999), 38.

older, I found it increasingly more difficult to move with ease in and out of my three worlds."²

At the same time, the United States was going through the major social upheaval of the Civil Rights Movement. Young Mexican-Americans looked at this struggle, especially the later militant aspect, as an inspiration and a call to action. In his book, *Listen Chicano: an Informal History of the Mexican American*, historian Manuel Machado writes that, "In all probability, the greatest impact upon the Mexican-American came in the 1960s. At a time when students were revolting, when Black militants screamed 'Burn, baby, burn,' and a general disintegration of values within the social fabric occurred, Chicanos viewed the turmoil as an opportunity to cash in on a good thing."³

Responding to their dissatisfaction, frustration, and the mood of the times, young Mexican-Americans, searching for an identity and eager to continue the civil rights struggles of the previous generations, young Tejanos became politically and socially active in the burgeoning *Chicano Movement*.

² José Angel Gutiérrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 51.

³ Manuel A. Machado, *Listen Chicano: An Informal History of the Mexican American* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978), 95.

This new movement drew upon the rich culture of Mexican-Americans. They used Chicano to denote their rediscovered heritage, their youthful assertiveness, and their militant agenda. Adding to the feeling of newness of leadership, participation, and hope, the term increasingly became the symbol of self-identification of many activists. Although the term has carried different meanings to different people, Chicano for many symbolized the militant actions and intense pride associated with the movement for Brown identity and power. Though these students and their supporters utilized the term "Chicano" to refer to the entire Mexican-American population, it is understood to have a more direct application to the young, politically active members of the Mexican-American community.⁴

Throughout the United States, young Mexican-Americans came together to fight against what they saw as an oppressive and racist system. The new movement drew energy from many new activist organizations, particularly from those of young people who formed the Mexican-American Youth Organization (MAYO), Mexicano Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), the Brown Berets, and other politically active

⁴ Francisco A Rosales, *Dictionary of Latino Civil Rights History* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2006), 82-83.

groups.⁵ Soon, leaders of the movement would emerge across various states. In California, where native and immigrant farm workers worked long hours for little pay, Cesar Chávez paved the way for change. By unionizing his fellow workers and organizing work stoppages and protest marches, Chávez was able to secure better pay and working conditions.⁶ In Colorado, Chicano boxer and poet Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales decided that the political system was not working for Chicanos. As an alternative, Gonzales established the Crusade for Justice, and organized high school and college students in walkouts, civil rights marches, demonstrations against police brutality, and anti-war protests.⁷ In New Mexico, Reies López Tijerina fought for Mexican-American land rights. Though he would be both a fugitive and an inmate throughout his struggle, he never quit seeking to improve the conditions of poor Mexican-Americans.⁸

In Texas, the most prominent Chicano leader came from the small south Texas town of Crystal City. José Angel Gutiérrez emerged as an important political force in 1963, while a student at Texas A&I university in Kingsville.

⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁷ Ibid., 188.

⁸ Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera, *The Chicanos: A History of Mexican Americans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), pp 257-258.

That year, during Crystal City's city council election, Gutiérrez and other Tejanos vowed to get full representation on the council. All five seats on the council were up for re-election. Gutiérrez and his fellow organizers backed Tejanos to contest for every seat. Through thorough voter registration, impassioned speeches, and imaginative fundraisers to pay the poll taxes still incurred upon Tejanos, Gutiérrez rallied the community behind *Los Cinco Candidatos* (The Five Candidates)—as they came to be known. Thanks in part to his efforts, the swiftly emerging Tejano majority elected all five of the candidates to the city council.⁹

Even though victory ultimately proved to be short-lived, it was a monumental event in the Chicano Movement. Young Tejanos had become politically active, inspired their fellow Tejanos, and affected real change.¹⁰

After the election in Crystal City, Gutiérrez returned to San Antonio, where he helped found MAYO (Mexican-American Youth Organization), a student-led group created for the sole purpose of improving the condition of Chicanos. MAYO volunteers led voter registration programs, organized student walkouts, and generally raised awareness

⁹ Gutiérrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant*, 68.

¹⁰ F. Chris Garcia ed, *The Chicano Political Experience: Three Perspectives* (Belmont, Ca: Duxbury Press, 1977), 14-17.

of the poor conditions of Mexican-Americans in the United States. MAYO quickly spread from its South Texas origins and became a national entity. By 1970, the leaders of MAYO had decided to branch out into direct political action by organizing a third party in American politics, La Raza Unida Party (RUP). RUP would focus on improving the economic, social and political aspects of the Mexican-American community throughout Texas. The Chicano Movement now had a political face and a platform from where to spread their ideals—ideals that contrasted sharply with those of the previous generation.

For decades, Mexican-American civil rights advocates were content to work within the system, using the laws and courts to improve their condition. The young men and women of the Chicano movement went in an almost opposite direction. Owing to the social upheaval of the 1960s, especially the urban Black Power movement and their own experiences growing up in a racially unjust system, the Chicano movement was extremely anti-establishment. In Texas, LULAC, the American GI Forum, and other such groups had made great strides. Young Chicanos felt there was limit as to what they could achieve with those groups' tactics, however. The Anglo dominated institution was socially conservative and resistant to change. Chicanos

knew they had to take steps beyond what had been done previously.¹¹

On top of these anti-establishment feelings, there was a sense of anger and frustration throughout the ranks of the Chicano youth. Many young men and women were ready to take up arms in a militant fashion. As one young Tejano wrote in a letter from prison, "All of the fellows have guns and the knowledge and guts to use them so I have heavily, heartily, and seriously been thinking about going into organizing guerillas and carry out a 'premature' armed struggle. P.S. Some of the fellows have the latest army models and make their own ammunition."¹²

While there were some instances of violent confrontations between Chicano protesters and policemen, such as riots in East Los Angeles,¹³ most Chicano protests did not go into a truly militant. For example, during the first Raza Unida National Convention, the election for leadership came down to "Corky" Gonzales, an extremely leftist and militant leader and José Angel Gutiérrez, a

¹¹ De Leon, *Mexican Americans in Texas*, 126.

¹² Jaime Garcia, to José Angel Gutiérrez, San Antonio 1 September 1969, letter in the hand of Jaime Garcia, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

¹³ Armando Morales, *Ando Sangrando - I am Bleeding: A Study of Mexican-American/Police Conflict* (La Puente, California: Perspectiva Publications, 1972), 91.

candidate who, while he might have had militant tendencies, was more moderate than his counterpart. Gonzales stood for the classic and traditional Marxist position that La Raza Unida ought to be the vanguard, revolutionary vehicle for the masses in the Spanish-speaking community within the United States. Gutiérrez, on the other hand, proposed a basic and pragmatic electoral approach to organizing in the Chicano community.¹⁴

For decades, Chicano leaders argued, the Democratic Party had taken Mexican-American votes for granted, but now, those days were over. As Gutiérrez wrote,

"We are called 'dumb bastards, dumb _____' for signing our petition, for our party in order to qualify our candidates. Tom Moore of the Dirty Thirty displays anger that Ramsey is 'running around gettin' the Mexicans all stirred up, voting against their own best interests.' I suppose we should feel bad. It never occurred to us to ask your permission and approval, sure you never asked ours.

The vote-lucrative days where Chicanos tuned out in record numbers for white candidates of the right, middle or left are gone. Chicanos, now increasingly turn out in record numbers only for their own candidates. The politics of the 70's will reveal that only white liberals who hitched their wagons to brown stats from the South survived."¹⁵

¹⁴ Meier and Rivera, *The Chicanos*, 126.

¹⁵ José Angel Gutiérrez, to *The Texas Observer*, 28 August 1972, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

RUP leaders focused on getting Chicanos elected to office, thereby setting up their own power base of Mexican-American voters. If the system was not going to change for the Mexican-Americans, the Chicanos were going to change the system. In Texas, RUP put forth their own candidates on city council, mayoral, and state congressional ballots during the various election cycles between 1970 and 1972. During the gubernatorial election of 1972, the RUP selected Ramsey Muñiz, a Waco lawyer and community activist, as their nominee for governor.

In the presidential election of that year, Raza Unida did not field a candidate. Instead, they wanted the two parties to reach out to Mexican-Americans and earn their vote. "I am not committed to any Presidential candidate of either party," Gutiérrez declared, "Perhaps, we are naïve but the Raza Unida Party is waiting for any and all Presidential candidates to make a commitment to La Raza.... All I'm saying is that our party is going to win local elections in several key states. In the process we may vote for President if we think we should-nationally there are enough of us to elect the next President."¹⁶

¹⁶ José Angel Gutiérrez, to Mr. Hank Lopez, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

Aside from the broad political changes the Chicano Movement wanted to enact, there were still plenty of everyday/localized issues that needed to be rectified. For example, in Crystal City in 1969, there was a disagreement with the local city school board over such issues as bilingual education, extracurricular activities for Chicanos, and the election of a separate Homecoming queen for Tejanos. When no agreement could be reached on these issues, the local RUP—led by Gutiérrez, it was decided to stage walkouts with the students. With the parents' permission, the students would walk out in regular intervals. Eventually, the walkouts were so disruptive that the federal government stepped in and brokered an agreement between the local leaders and school officials.¹⁷

Chicano protesters also went with tried and true methods of strikes and marches. One of the most famous marches was in Texas. In 1966, farm workers in Starr County unionized in order to gain a small wage increase and the right to collective bargaining. The farmers refused to recognize the union and soon the farm workers went on strike. The striking workers decided to make a pilgrimage march, as had been done in California, to dramatize to the

¹⁷ Renato Rosaldo, Robert A. Calvert, and Gustav L. Seligmann, *Chicano: The Beginnings of Bronze Power* (New York: Morrow, 1974), 42.

state and nations the conditions and wages and suffering that farm workers must endure, and to rally support for the cause among other farm workers and sympathizers.¹⁸ The march wound through South Texas. Thousands of farm workers joined in—some the whole way, others for a short period of time—as the march snaked through Corpus Christi, San Antonio, and finally Austin. The marchers made their way through the streets of Austin on Labor Day of that year, where over 15,000 people joined in the final length of the march to the steps of the capital.¹⁹

Whatever tactics these Chicano organizers used, both political maneuvering and outward protests, they were all done for the same goal - the betterment of the present and future of Chicanos. At the time there was no issue more pressing to youth across America than the Vietnam War, especially to Chicanos. With thousands of young Mexican-Americans being sent off to war, Chicanos became angrier. How could the United States expect for them to fight a war they did not support and yet still treat them as second-class citizens? Chicano rights and anti-Vietnam sentiment became intertwined.

¹⁸ John C. Hammerback, Richard J Jensen, and José Angel Gutiérrez, *A War of Words: Chicano Protest in the 1960s and 1970s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 86.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Opposition to the Vietnam War

The anti-war posture of Chicano youth represented a clear affront to the mainstream thinking of such organizations as the American G.I. Forum and LULAC. These traditional organizations were comprised of a great number of veterans from World War II and the Korean War. These groups took great pride in their military service. The record of their valor reflected itself in the disproportionate number of Congressional of Honor winners from the Mexican community. To these Mexican-Americans, their proven patriotism was a valuable asset in the struggle for equal rights. The older Mexican-American leaders thought that because many from their community had died in previous wars, Anglos were more willing to dole out concessions.²⁰

The youth of the 1960s and early 1970s questioned the validity of that supposition. Time and again, they argued that patriotism called for opposition to the war on Vietnam; that Chicano well being, both social and economic, was being ignored to fight an unjust and unpopular war. They also felt that fighting and dying for "their" country was nonsense when contrasted with what they perceived to be

²⁰ Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Sí!, Guerra No! : Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 75.

a cultural and social genocide being inflicted on the Chicano people by the same government stressing the need for their involvement in Southeast Asia.²¹

There were many reasons for a defiant stance against the war. Perhaps the most obvious reason for their protest was the fact that most of the men and women involved with the various Chicano organizations were politically liberal. The Vietnam War was unpopular with young, left-leaning people across America, so leftist organizations were going to protest the war anyway. Because of their political leanings, the Chicanos found allies with other leftist organizations, no matter what their race. Even though there was a camaraderie with these other radical groups, the Chicanos felt they had deeper, more racially-specific reasons to protest against an unjust war.

One of these reasons was that many Chicanos saw a commonality with the Vietnamese people. The symbolism of ancient Mexico that the Chicano movement used as a source of pride was rooted in an indigenous past. The Vietnamese, they argued, were also an indigenous culture—one that shared many similarities and connections with their own past. Some Chicano leaders even argued that they were of the same biological heritage. Brown Beret founder David

²¹ Hammerback, Jensen, Gutiérrez, *A War of Words*, 89.

Sanchez told listeners on his radio show that, ". . . since Chicanos came down through the Bering Straits, part Oriental, and that Honky what's his name? Cortés, came across over and raped our women, so we're half Mongoloid and half Caucasoid, that makes the Vietcong our brothers."²²

In Vietnam, they saw a poor oppressed brown people like themselves. The majority of Chicanos lived in poor, rundown areas of large cities or on small farms in rural areas. Now, on television they would see the United States Army fighting against the Vietnamese who lived in poor, rundown cities and small farms. In Texas, while many Tejanos had settled into the *barrios* of large towns, like Dallas and Houston, many still lived in heavily-rural South Texas. The Vietnamese were not the foes of the Chicanos, they argued. Instead, they were all brothers involved in the same struggle for justice against a common enemy--the United States of America.²³

Chicanos could not support a war propagated by an Anglo aggressor. It had been a century before that the United States had invaded Mexico and taken over areas of California, New Mexico, Colorado and Texas, relegating the conquered Mexicans to second class citizens. This became a

²² Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Sí!*, 87.

²³ *Ibid.*, 89.

sore spot for the Chicanos who were proud of their Mexican heritage.

The Chicanos took great pride of their national heroes, Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, who had died for their struggle against Anglos. And now the United States was invading a small country in the name of "freedom", a freedom that was not fully given to them. Chicanos were being sent to fight for the Anglos against an enemy that was like them in many ways—and they were being sent off in droves.

Another reason that Chicanos did not support the war in Vietnam was the disproportionate amount of young Chicanos fighting and dying in Vietnam. Military service was very commonplace for the Mexican-American community. Ever since World War I, Mexican-Americans were always willing to be a part of the American Armed Forces. During World War II and the Korean War, Mexican-Americans fought with bravery and distinction. In World War II, no other ethnic group was more heavily decorated, per capita, than Mexican-Americans.

The army was one of few ways a Mexican-American could get ahead in life. In Texas, a young Tejano had very few opportunities for advancement in life. As José Angel Gutiérrez would later lament, "You find the military to be

a method for upward mobility and it wasn't that people really liked the military. It was the only avenue that was available."²⁴ With military service there came prestige, honor, and the American GI Bill. By serving one's time in the Armed Forces, a Tejano could gain the necessary skills and capital to provide a better life for his or her family. The Mexican-American median income at the time was around \$7,600, compared to the average income of \$10,000.²⁵ The Tejano middle class that had emerged in the Post World War II years consisted of a large number of former soldiers and sailors. The American G.I. Forum, one of the most influential Mexican-American civil rights groups was founded by Tejano World War II veterans. Young men and women went in as "Mexicans" and came out "Americans."

But there was a problem when the Vietnam War came. The youth no longer needed or wanted the military service. The Mexican-American had always gone to fight when called for, but now they were being asked to fight for a government they did not trust and a war they did not believe in. Worse, young Chicanos were dying in staggering

²⁴ José Angel Gutiérrez, *interview by Thomas L. Charlton, and Lyle C. Brown, 18 July 1971, interview 1, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, TX.*

²⁵ Ernesto Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero! (My People First!): Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 37.

numbers. In 1971, Ralph Guzmán, a professor at the University of California, published a study in *La Raza* magazine about the high number of deaths among Mexican-American soldiers in Vietnam. In his study, Dr. Guzmán found that while Mexican-Americans made up only about ten percent of the population of the Southwestern States in United States (Colorado, California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas), they accounted for almost twenty percent of the total dead from that area.²⁶ In Crystal City, Gutiérrez recounted that, "This community has suffered 12 Chicano deaths out of Vietnam, and there's only been one Anglo who died out of Crystal City—and he died by accident. It wasn't in any kind of combat situation. So that is a very sore spot for this community. They don't want any more Chicanos being drafted."²⁷

With so many of their peers going off to fight and coming back in caskets, Chicanos felt that they were losing a generation of Chicanos that could be contributing to the movement instead. As the anti-war publication, *La Batalla Esta Aquí* stated, "It is time that we begin to realize that our sons and brothers, husbands and boyfriends, cousins and nephews are the ones being used to fight a war from which

²⁶ Leah Ybarra, *Vietnam Veterans: Chicanos Recall the War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 7.

²⁷ Gutiérrez, interview.

La Raza gains nothing. We only lose."²⁸ The rhetoric against the war became more and more personal to Chicanos. The war was no longer about politics; it was about family and friends. Chicanos began to burn draft cards or declared themselves conscientious objectors. Cries of, "Chale, We won't go!" filled the air during protests. Organizations, such as the Vietnam Moratorium Committee would circulate petitions on college campuses which stated that, "If ordered for induction, we, the undersigned, will refuse. We will not serve in the military as long as the war in Vietnam continues."²⁹ Anti-war rallies and demonstrations came to be called "marches against death". They had a goal: to keep young Chicanos out of Vietnam and to "Bring our Carnales Home...Alive."³⁰

Protesting the War

When it came time to actively protest and take action against the Vietnam War, Chicanos used methods that had always worked for them. In areas where Mexican-Americans held power, especially those that were controlled by Raza Unida, they used their political power to keep the

²⁸ Ybarra, *Vietnam Veteranos*, 9.

²⁹ Vietnam Moratorium Committee, *Newsletter: February 13, 1970*, Washington DC, 1970.

³⁰ Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero!*, 39.

government at bay. For example, in Crystal City, the Tejano controlled School Council used a complex strategy to keep recruiters away from the Tejano youth.

Before the school board took action, military recruiters routinely came to the Crystal City high school and worked with the school secretaries to register all the eighteen year old males into Selective Services. The school board decided that what the recruiters were doing was unfair, so they barred recruiters from the secretary's office. When recruiters came to the school in 1969, they were forbidden from enrolling the young men into Selective Services.

To counter, recruiters demanded access to the school records. The school board had been prepared for such tactics and previously passed a law that kept all school records confidential. The only way anyone could have access to information was with a student or their parent's permission.

But they did not stop with a defensive strategy. In true Chicano fashion, the school board went on the offensive. After the invasion of Cambodia—which many Chicanos in the town saw as an expansion of the war—the school board passed a resolution barring military recruiters from entering the campus to test their students

for military purposes. They were also banned from putting up or handing out propaganda regarding the military.

Finally, in a bid to educate students about their options, the school board instituted a draft counseling course in the school. The board hired a local man who had experience with the draft board and was familiar with draft laws to talk to students. While the course was not part of the actual curriculum—"classes" were held in the evenings—it was still a valuable resource to the community.³¹

For Chicanos that were not in any position to change laws or use political means to protest the war, there were other methods of dissent. Literature was one of the more powerful tactics that Chicanos used. Poetry, songs, and short stories had always been employed by Chicanos as a source of culture and pride. Now, with Vietnam taking a central role in their lives, young authors used their words to express their remonstrations of the war. Some poets decided to highlight the way Chicano family and friends were dying in the war. In her poem, "Untitled," Maria Herrera-Sobek would mourn, "We saw them coming/in funeral black bags/body bags they called them/eyes locked

³¹ Gutiérrez, interview.

forever/they were our/brown men/shot."³² Other would extol the virtues of those who would not fight. In "Heroes," Gina Valdes wrote, "All my *tios* marched off to war/Except for one renegade/who went AWOL who said/he didn't want to be/cannon fodder/all my *tias*/waiting for heroes/welcomed him home."³³ While poems and stories helped, Chicanos also needed to hear the facts of the war. For that, they used independent, Chicano-oriented publications.

Chicanos felt that, for the most part, mainstream newspapers ignored their plight. Not only that, but many in the Mexican-American community could not read English very well—or at all. To rectify the situation, they took matters into their own hands and began publishing their own newspapers, magazines, and journals. These publications were aimed at the plight of the Chicano, and most—if not all—were published with both English and Spanish articles.³⁴ Many Chicanos held degrees in journalism, political science, and history, and they put these skills to good use. Dr. Guzman's famous study about Vietnam casualties among Chicanos, mentioned previously, was not published in

³² George Mariscal, *Aztlan and Vietnam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999), 234.

³³ *Ibid.*, 226.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

a major, Anglo-run newspaper or magazine. Instead, it was published in the premier issue of *La Raza* magazine. Other publications, like *La Batalla Esta Aqui* and *Aztlan* would examine the horrors of the war as it pertained to their own kind. Chicano poets and authors would also contribute their writings to these periodicals, spreading their messages to the masses. Chicanos would hand out their works wherever they could, from college campuses to Mexican-American businesses, to street corners. In San Antonio, protesters would hand out *La Raza* to Tejano youth that lived around the city's five military installations.³⁵ The message was clear and was being heard by Chicanos. But many Chicanos wanted to spread their message outside of their own community.

The cry to take the Vietnam protest to another level came from Chicano leader Rosalio Muñoz. In November of 1969, Muñoz heard Corky Gonzales speak at an anti-war demonstration in San Francisco to a crowd estimated at a quarter of a million people.³⁶ Gonzales' words and the anti-war issue drove Muñoz to action. After giving an impassioned speech in which he accused, "the entire political, economic, and social system of the United States

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Oropeza, *Raza Si!*, 81.

of America of creating a funnel which shoots Mexican youth into Vietnam to be killed and to kill innocent men, women, and children."³⁷ Muñoz and several other Chicano student activists from Los Angeles came together to call for a National Chicano Draft Conference.

At this meeting, Chicano leaders set up leadership committees to plan and coordinate protest rallies all throughout the United States. In Texas, the coordinator of the moratoriums was State Representative Joe Bernal from San Antonio. The subsequent effort was generally a success. As noted in one of the committee newsletters, "People around the country are responding to these activities. We will use this opportunity once again to make clear our opposition to present policies and their desire for a swift peace. At this time we know of activities being planned in at least 30 major cities and over 100 smaller communities."³⁸

All throughout Texas, Chicanos rallied against the war. In Edinburg, a peace rally held at Pan American College comprised of speakers who talked specifically about Chicano participation in the war; comparing the percentage

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Vietnam Moratorium Committee, *Newsletter Date Unknown*, Washington, D.C.

of Chicanos killed to that of white middle class students in the Rio Grande Valley. In West Texas, a rally in the Midland-Odessa was supplemented by a fast against the war. In Orange, high school students grew out their hair and wore peace buttons—resulting in at least one suspension³⁹

During this conference, plans were laid for the first of several Chicano moratoriums—large scale rallies against the war in Vietnam.⁴⁰ The first moratorium was held on December 20, 1969 in Los Angeles a month after the San Francisco rally, and the second on February 28, 1970 in Los Angeles. Other moratoriums immediately followed in other large cities. Over 20 local protests were held in cities like Houston, Albuquerque, Chicago, Denver, Douglas Arizona, and Fresno, San Francisco, San Diego, Oakland, Oxnard, San Fernando, San Pedro and other California cities. Most had over one thousand participants.⁴¹

These Chicano moratoriums culminated in the National Chicano Moratorium on August 29, 1970 in East Los Angeles, with more than 25,000 Chicano marchers and thousands of supportive onlookers. Chicanos came from all over the United States, to protest the military involvement in

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Oropeza, *Raza Si!*, 91.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Vietnam was and continues to be one of the largest single demonstrations by an oppressed nationality.⁴²

Plans for a peaceful rally were soon dashed, however. As protesters marched down their approved parade route, local police received reports that a nearby liquor store had been robbed. They chased the "suspects" into the park where protesters were gathering. Police met with resistance from the confused marchers and declared the gathering of thousands an illegal assembly. Things quickly escalated, as LAPD officers and L.A. County sheriffs in full riot gear tear gassed and clubbed demonstrators. Monitors and activists resisted the attack, but eventually people were herded back. As Carlos Guerra, Chairman of MAYO de Tejas, recalled, "I was sitting left of the speakers stand when people started standing and looking to a commotion in the back. The speakers urged calm when to the right the *perros* started advancing and the people began rapidly retreating. The police trapped the innocent children and adults against the buses causing tremendous panic."⁴³ Storefronts and vehicles went up in smoke, scores

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Johnny A. Gonzales, Jr., "Laguna Park Riot," *El and Del Chicano*, 2 September 1970, sec 1, p. 1.

were injured. There were over 150 arrested that day.⁴⁴ It resulted in three deaths, 74 injuries, and close to \$1 million in damages. One of the persons killed was Ruben Salazar, a well-known columnist for the Los Angeles Times and news director of a Los Angeles Spanish language television station, KMEX.⁴⁵

The Los Angeles Moratorium violence was an anomaly, as no other Moratorium protests experienced real violence or major confrontations with police. The closest call had been a rally in Denton, Texas, where, "A confrontation between police and North Texas State University students Wednesday night was the only blot on an otherwise peaceful Vietnam Moratorium Day in Texas....Police asked people to disperse, nine didn't, and they were arrested. No charges were filed."⁴⁶ Still, the Los Angeles march and subsequent riot had left a bad taste in coordinators' mouths. Salazar's death was a major blow to the Los Angeles community. As famed journalist Hunter S. Thompson put it, "Within 24 hours, the very mention of the name 'Ruben Salazar' was enough to provoke tears and fist-shaking

⁴⁴ Morales, *Ando Sangrando*.

⁴⁵ Carlos D. Conde, "East Los Angeles - Testimony of Disquietude," *Cabinet Committee on Opportunity for the Spanish Speaking-News: Office of Public Affairs Newsletter*, August-September, 1970.

⁴⁶ San Antonio Evening News, 16 October 1969, sec 1, p. 3.

tirades not only along Whittier Boulevard but all over East L.A."⁴⁷ Chicanos and police would clash again in the following weeks. During the annual Mexican Independence day march, "A sheriff's deputy and two other men were wounded by snipers police say, when violence erupted after a parade in the predominantly Mexican-American sector of East Los Angeles. More than 2,000 youths pitching firebombs, rocks and bottle fought about 500 deputies and city policemen for almost five hours around a residential park."⁴⁸ In the wake of Salazar's death and the continuing violence, the committee scaled back their marches, toned down the rhetoric, and eventually disbanded.⁴⁹

Throughout the United States, young men and women rose up against a war they felt was immoral and unjust. When their brothers, husbands, and sons, were sent away to fight for a government that ignored their needs against an enemy they identified with, Chicanos spoke out in a loud unified voice. Whether or not the rest of the United States both within and outside the Mexican-American community would be receptive to their cries was a different matter altogether.

⁴⁷ Hunter Thompson, "Strange Rumbblings in Aztlán," *UCLA LA Gente*, 26 April 1971, sec 1, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Associated Press, "3 Wounded by Snipers in East LA," *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, 17 September, 1970.

⁴⁹ Oropeza, *Raza Si!*, 94.

CHAPTER FOUR

Response to Anti-War Activism

By the time of the Chicano Moratorium march of August 29, 1970, the Chicano Movement was irrevocably an anti-war movement. The perception that Chicanos were solely out for justice and equality was no longer valid. For many people in the United States, Chicanos were all anti-American communists that were aiding the enemies of freedom. To others, Chicano opposition to the war showed a commitment to justice at home and abroad. The United States during this time was a severely divided country. On the one hand, there were places like the University of California at Los Angeles, where demonstrations were held and editorials decried that the war was unjust and racist, but on the other hand, there were other places like Friends University, a small Christian college in Kansas, where a majority of the students were opposed to anti-war demonstrations and nearly forty percent saw the demonstrators as "a national disgrace and should be prohibited by force if necessary."¹

¹ "Results on Viet Nam Poll," *Friends University Daily*, 31 December 1967, p. 1.

The Chicano movement was clearly a dividing force among the populace. The fiery rhetoric and militant stance from the leaders worried a lot of people, especially Anglos. As Nelson W. Wolff, a Texan nominee for Congress wrote to Chicano leader José Angel Gutiérrez,

I admire a man who wants to fight for his people to gain them a better life. But I despise a man who uses this as a pretext to pit one race against another as you are doing by pitting the Mexican-American against the Anglo. I agree with you that more has to be done for the Mexican-American in job opportunities, public education, housing, etc. But let's do it together. I challenge you to quit your loud abusive rhetoric which preaches hate and discord and try to work with the Anglos who want to help the Mexican-American better his life. There is too much of this going on across the nation. Don't threaten us with extinction.²

Once the Chicano movement embraced an anti-war stance, public divisions became even deeper. For the Chicanos, the war was just an extension of the institutional racism of the United States. As Chicano leader Rosalio Muñoz asserted, "Historically, Chicanos have only been offered the dirtiest work of American society. Chicanos pick the crops, man the factories, sew the clothes, wash the dishes, and clean the mess of White America....The Chicano people, through its moratorium, is now saying that the front line

² Nelson W. Wolff to José Angel Gutiérrez, May 11, 1970, José Angel Gutiérrez papers, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

for Chicano youth is not in Vietnam, but it is the struggle for social justice here in the United States."³

Both within the Mexican-American community, and in the majority Anglo population, reaction to the Chicano movement and its newfound anti-war stance was divisive and would eventually lead to the movement's downfall.

Mexican-American Response

For Mexican-Americans, the dividing line between those who supported the Chicano movement and those who opposed it was usually a generational one; younger Mexican-Americans were more likely to champion the cause than older Mexican-Americans were. The most obvious reason for this was that the war was more pressing for younger Mexican-Americans than for the older ones. Chicano rhetoric was apt to point out that the oppressive institutions faced by Mexican-Americans and their role in the war were one in the same. As the editors of *the Chicano Yearbook* exclaimed in an impassioned editorial, "*Carnales*, the same government that seeks to induct you into military service is the same one that allows and promotes discrimination in employment, low wages for farm workers, one-sided and prejudicial

³ Ernesto Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero! (My People First!): Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 65.

educational programs, urban redevelopment, and a thousand other oppressive conditions."⁴

It was not surprising that Chicanos spoke out against the Vietnam War and tied it to their problems at home. As researchers Charles Ornelas and Michael González concluded, "The impact of the war is not limited to the disproportionately higher casualty rates suffered by the Spanish-surnamed in comparison with the national average. Conditions in the barrios are aggravated by the inflationary war economy that strikes hardest at the many families with income below the poverty level."⁵

The rates mentioned above presented another reason that young Mexican-Americans embraced the Chicano anti-war movement. As noted previously, these rates among Mexican-Americans were greatly disproportionate to their population. In Texas, especially in South Texas, the amount of Tejano casualties was astonishing. A Congressional House document, it was noted that "One hundred and eighty four men from Texas have died in Vietnam since January 1, 1967. Of these men, 60 were of Spanish

⁴ George Mariscal, *Aztlan and Vietnam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999), 188.

⁵ Leah Ybarra, *Vietnam Veterans: Chicanos Recall the War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 7.

surname, that is to say 83 percent of the men who gave their lives were of Spanish surname, whereas only 14.8 percent of the population of Texas is of Spanish surname."⁶ More astonishing was a memorial service held in Corpus Christi for Vietnam casualties. Of the 198 deceased servicemen, 187 of those were Tejanos.⁷ For Chicanos, the war was seen as a matter of survival and freedom. The Chicano newspaper, *La Causa*, argued that "the Vietnam War is the ultimate weapon of genocide of non-white peoples by a sick decadent *puto* Western culture."⁸

Young Mexican-Americans embraced the call of the Chicano movement, especially after it adopted an anti-war stance. They began to attend rallies and meetings, integrating themselves into existing organizations such as the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) and the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), while also starting new groups that opposed the war. The Vietnam War helped build the Chicano movement's ranks. Many college-aged Chicanos were beginning to be drafted into compulsory service. One such Chicano, Rosalio Muñoz, a former student

⁶ "Casualties in Vietnam", *Congressional Record-House*, 20 June 1967, 9058.

⁷ "Vietnam Dead Memorial Service," *Corpus Christi Caller*, 11 November 1969, Sec A, p. 1.

⁸ Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero!*, 55.

body president at UCLA, was chosen in a draft lottery for military service. Rather than accept the draft notice, Muñoz gave a heated speech in which he declared that the U.S. government was "creating a funnel which shoots Mexican-American youth into Vietnam to be killed and to kill innocent men, women, and children."⁹ Instead of going to war, he became an important leader in the Chicano movement and was instrumental in leading the planning for the eventual Chicano Moratorium. Other Chicanos took the message of the anti-war movement to heart and did what they felt they could, sometimes with negative consequences. In McAllen, Texas, Berta Escalante was "suspended from school for three days for conduct violation on school property. She was alleged to have distributed leaflets put out by the Mexican American Youth war demonstration in McAllen November 15."¹⁰ Still, the Chicano youth did what they could to spread the word of the Chicano movement.

While the younger generation of Mexican-Americans were eager to embrace an anti-war stance, older Mexican-Americans did not feel the same way. For the older generation of Mexican-Americans, the protest of the war was

⁹ Ybarra, *Vietnam Veterans*, 6.

¹⁰ "School Authorities Sued at La Feria," *Corpus Christi Caller*, 31 December 1969, Sec B, p. 14.

an unfathomable idea. Many Mexican-Americans had fought in previous wars. Many of these had also gained college educations and community prestige through their military service. Now, to have their children protest the United States' involvement in Vietnam was perplexing and disturbing to them.

A young Tejano, Douglas MacArthur Herrera, decided to protest the war by refusing to obey orders to ship out to Vietnam. His father, a LULAC member and veteran of World War II, wrote a letter to his son, begging him to reconsider his actions. In letter, the views of the older generation are summed up perfectly. The father stated that "...we have never had a Herrera yet who has refused to serve his country. Your family will never live it down and your life will be ruined. You should not question your country's motives and its foreign policy, and in the overall picture someone must suffer."¹¹ In effect, the younger Herrera was turning his back on the proud legacy of Tejanos in serving their country without question or hesitance. By doing so, he was bringing shame upon himself. Worse, he would also shame his entire family. The father continued, "Your objections will be widely

¹¹ Mariscal, *Aztlan and Vietnam*, 29.

publicized here in Texas and your family will probably have to move out of Texas to get over the embarrassment and humiliation of what you are doing....don't make us ashamed of you. Go back and serve your country. Don't break our hearts."¹²

Older Mexican-Americans had worked hard and sacrificed much in order to prove that they were loyal American citizens. Now, a younger group was trying to exploit their indigenous Mexican roots not only to build a sense of pride, but also to show solidarity between themselves and the Vietnamese, and thereby defame and damage the United States' military action. This was hard for the older Mexican-Americans to accept. As one lamented, "As an American of Mexican ancestry, I take exception to this 'Chicano' label which is now being brainwashed...into the minds of our younger generation. It is bad enough to have allowed our ethnic element to be branded Mexican-American as our loyalty to America comes first."¹³

Mexican-American community leaders and elected officials were quick to deride and denounce the Chicano Movement. These men were the ones who had most benefited

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Manuel A. Machado, *Listen Chicano!: An Informal History of the Mexican American* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978), 140.

from the military service. Mexican-American politicians saw their power be tested by upstarts like the Raza Unida Party, which was blatantly anti-war and anti-Anglo. Those Mexican-Americans in charge saw Chicanos as a detriment to the cause of advancing Mexican-American rights, and they spoke out against Chicanos. Texas U.S. Representative Henry Gonzalez noted, "We have those who cry 'brown power' because they have heard 'black power' and we have those who yell 'oink' or 'pig' at police, only because they have heard others use the term. We have those who wear berets and beards, not because they attach any meaning to it, but because they have seen it done elsewhere."¹⁴ To him, Chicanos were simply rebelling because other radicals had also rebelled. Gonzalez further criticized Chicanos on the floor of the House of Representatives. On April 3, 1969, Gonzalez pronounced that, "I have watched with alarm as new Mexican-American militant groups have formed, not because they have formed, but because some of them...have fallen into the spell of reverse racism."¹⁵ The Chicanos had begun to paint everything that the United States government did

¹⁴ Mariscal, *Aztlán and Vietnam*, 194.

¹⁵ "Race Hate," *Congressional Record*, 3 April 1969, in John C. Hammerback, Richard J. Jenssen, and José Angel Gutiérrez, *A War of Words: Chicano Protest in the 1960s and 1970s* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 85.

as racist and had turned against all Anglos, even those who were helpful to the Mexican-American cause, Gonzalez insisted. Their despising hatred of the government, military, and other institutions had warped the worldview of the Chicano Movement's leaders, causing them to make "facile judgments of large classes of people, using the same sort of distorted logic, deceitful tongues, and hateful words of racists."¹⁶ He argued that the protesters were portraying all Anglos as bad and all Chicanos as good. Gonzalez concluded that a worldview like that made the Chicanos no better than other hate groups. Fellow Texas Representative, Eligio de la Garza, agreed with Gonzalez's claims. He professed that Chicano leaders "are turning it around to the point where they do not want justice, but they want to bring about injustice upon those who they feel brought it to them in the past....This is just racism in reverse and it is something that we cannot condone."¹⁷

Many Mexican-American civil rights organizations, such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) or

¹⁶ "Cause for Concern," *Congressional Record*, 15 April 1969, in John C. Hammerback, Richard J. Jenssen, and José Angel Gutiérrez, *A War of Words: Chicano Protest in the 1960s and 1970s* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 90.

¹⁷ "Reverse Racism," *Congressional Record*, 28 April 1969, in John C. Hammerback, Richard J. Jenssen, and José Angel Gutiérrez, *A War of Words: Chicano Protest in the 1960s and 1970s* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 105.

the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) were comprised of thousands of World War II veterans. The American GI Forum, founded by a World War II veteran, Dr. Hector P. Garcia, had become the largest veterans' advocacy group in the United States. Garcia was greatly troubled by the divisions in the Mexican-American community. To him, the Chicano Movement was doing a disservice to Mexican-Americans. According to his biographer, "The war in Vietnam had begun to push all other issues off the front pages and out of the attention of Congress and many administration policy makers. Hector saw this quite clearly and bemoaned the fact that civil rights no longer held center stage."¹⁸

Garcia felt that Chicano criticisms of President Johnson's policies posed a threat to the relationship that he had formed with the president for decades.¹⁹ Dr. Garcia and the American GI Forum initially declared outright support for the president and his policies. In a letter to President Johnson, the California State Chairman of the American GI Forum, Mario R. Vazquez, wrote, "Mr. President, Mexican-Americans have died in many wars in our fight to

¹⁸ Ignacio Garcia, *Dr. Hector P Garcia: In Relentless Pursuit of Justice* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2002), 267.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 270.

preserve freedom....We are proud citizens of the United States of America. Now we are serving our people in our struggle to overcome the elements that surround us. The members of the American GI Forum hope that those who protest join in the fight for peace so that those now fighting in Vietnam come home to [live] a peaceful life."²⁰

The final group to be studied is Vietnam veterans. Veterans of the war went through a drastic change throughout the duration of the war and afterward. At first, soldiers in the war were generally eager to fight for their country. By the end of the war, however, many of the soldiers fighting were draftees serving against their will. Consequently, many veterans became increasingly anti-war over the years.

For their part, Chicano protesters never criticized the soldiers; instead Chicanos praised their comrades fighting in Vietnam. As the Chicano publication *La Batalla Esta Aqui* expressed it,

Historically, Chicanos have played major heroic roles, particularly during World War II and the Korean War, where there were a great number of Chicano war veterans who were heroes. But for every Chicano hero that made it home alive, there were a great many more Chicanos who died in battle. Today, with the Vietnam War, Chicanos are still fighting and dying to become war heroes. It is time that we begin to realize that our sons and brothers, husbands,

²⁰ Mario R. Vazquez to Lyndon Baines Johnson, Dr. Hector P. Garcia Papers, Mary & Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

and boyfriends, cousins and nephews are the ones being used to fight a war from which La Raza gains nothing. We only lose."²¹

As Chicano leaders both boasted about and complained at rallies, the United States was sending Chicanos to Vietnam to take advantage of the "guts of the *Mexicano*, because we have proven that we have more guts than any other group that ever went to war."²² Even as they opposed the war, demonstrators continued to take pride in the military record of Mexican-American men.

As noted, the Mexican-Americans sent to Vietnam earlier in the war were enlisted men and volunteers; they tended to be more fervently pro-American. When asked about the protesters, these soldiers tended to view them with disdain. One such soldier, Master Sergeant Julian Guzman voiced strong feelings against anyone protesting the bombing of North Vietnamese civilians by the United States. "They should see the civilian Vietnamese killed by the Viet Cong and some of the atrocities they commit in South Vietnam," he said.²³

²¹ Ybarra, *Vietnam Veteranos*, 6.

²² Mariscal, *Mi Raza Primero!*, 126.

²³ Jerry McKinney, "Soldier Home for Visit Backs Stand on Vietnam with Action," *Corpus Christi Caller*, 18 January 1967, Sec A, p. 1.

Another Mexican American soldier had similar feelings. In his oral memoir he recalled that, "At the time, I thought they were Communist instigators that should have been obliterated too....Thousands of soldiers, all handicapped from the war, and we started to listen to the politics of the war and more of why they were protesting and I think that's when my attitude started changing....I think a lot of Chicanos shared my same feelings and it was like I had to validate myself that I was, in fact American, that I was a citizen."²⁴

Clearly, the young men who went to Vietnam in the 1970s were different from the ones that went in the middle 1960s. As the war dragged on longer than expected, there was a need for newer, fresher troops. In the years 1969 through 1972, the Selective Service used a lottery to determine the order in which young men would be called up for duty. Because of this, many of the troops who went to Vietnam in the later years were not as willing and showed resentment. As one Chicano veteran recalled, "If you look at this thing over time, the politics of the situation became more known....It was a hell of an educational process and a politicizing process we went through....I don't think there's any question but that people who went

²⁴ Ybarra, *Vietnam Veterans*, 25.

later on were a hell of a lot more politically sophisticated than the initial guys that went, but they all paid the price."²⁵

While the war dragged on, these soldiers began to see the war in a different light. A former Army sergeant later recollected, "I became very cynical, but it was like trying to figure out what is it that we're doing. I never questioned that communism was obviously wrong, but what was right about us?"²⁶ Eventually, the veterans still in the army were deemed a detriment to morale and were kept separate from soldiers in training. Another soldier exclaimed, "They didn't want Vietnam vets training the new vets, because they knew they had a bad attitude, so you'd see two very different groups of people."²⁷

Chicano soldiers in Vietnam faced a multitude of hardships and, like their older counterparts, had to work hard to prove their courage and worth. Unlike the World War II veterans, these veterans believed they had sacrificed greatly and were tricked by a government that did not care about them. A veteran of two tours later complained, "We had to do a little bit more to prove that

²⁵ Ibid., 51.

²⁶ Ibid., 66.

²⁷ Ibid., 73.

we were Americans, so that we could be accepted...I think, in my opinion, hey, a lot of us Chicanos, we've been stupid. We were striving to do what we did and we did those things."²⁸ Although they agreed with the anti-war protesters, many draftees and volunteers still went to Vietnam. The veteran explained, "There was a lot of Chicana women that were sitting back, saying, 'No seas pendejo, no te vayas' [Don't be stupid, don't go]. How many of those women are saying rosaries today?"²⁹

Anglo Response

In order to gauge the reaction to the Chicano anti-war protest movement, it is important to understand that Chicanos were part of the general anti-war movement. Even the infamous Chicano Moratorium had its roots in an Anglo movement. For their part, many Chicanos tried to keep their protests separate from Anglos. Chicano activists were convinced that the national anti-war effort did not relate directly to Chicanos. At the same time, mainstream Anglo peace activists unwittingly exacerbated Mexican-American vulnerability to the draft by directing and limiting their anti-war message to people like themselves.

²⁸ Ibid., 92.

²⁹ Ibid.

As one Chicano leader wrote, "We realized, around the time of the November 15 moratorium that the main thing the white peace groups were doing was keeping whites out of the service....The consequences were obvious: more Chicanos are in."³⁰ Still, the Chicanos were soon considered a part of the anti-war resistance as a whole, a position that did not garner them much sympathy from Anglos, generally.

Though the war had become increasingly unpopular, the protesters turned out to be even more unpopular. One report found that "Although polls suggested that years of fighting had turned Americans against the war, an even greater number opposed the anti-war movement. Editors and reporters...had helped fuel the widespread belief that Vietnam demonstrators were spoiled, anti-American extremists."³¹ It was no surprise that the protesters were unpopular with the public; their rhetoric was militant and inflammatory. For example, in a rally held in San Antonio, one speaker labeled the United States "the world's leading bully" and Vietnam was branded "the most shameful episode

³⁰ Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Sí!, Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 127.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

in the whole of American history."³² Because of this rhetoric, Vietnam protesters—whether Chicano, Anglo, or African-American were seen as un-American, cowards, and/or communists. During the same rally, as a speaker "was making his presentation, teenagers Kathy Crites, and her sister Susan, walked among the crowd holding up signs which said 'Support the USA not the U.S.S.R' and 'It's hard to tell the yellow from the red.'"³³

Others dismissed the Chicanos' complaints entirely. A letter to the editor in San Antonio tried to debunk the theory that Mexican-Americans were suffering the most. It stated,

The oft-repeated charge by some of our simpering citizens (not all, by any means, Mexican) that Mexican-Americans bear the bigger brunt of the casualty count in Vietnam do not look at the figures as American but as Mexicans....[Mexican-Americans]number at least 50 per cent of the local population so it is reasonable to assume that they either volunteer or are inducted into the military in greater number than the remaining 50 per cent of the population which is made up of Anglo-Jewish-Greek-Italian-Chinese-Arab-Uzbek-and-other hyphenated Americans....It all evens out but the pit of it all is that the editorial whimpering and simpering played up by Chicano War-Moratorium types...implies that Chicanos generally are chicken types who cling courageously to Mexican concept and culture but look for a cop-out when called to measure up.

None of which is true, of course, because the truth is that we do measure up and no amount of moaning, groaning,

³² Sylvia Thomas, "Speaker at Trinity Calls U.S. World's Leading Bully," *San Antonio Express*, October 16, 1969, Sec A p. 1.

³³ Ibid.

sobbing, sniffing, snuffling, wailing, or chest-beating is going to hide it.³⁴

Still, some other Anglos were critical of what was not being said. Protest activities were mainly comprised of vigils, rallies, marches, speeches, teach-ins and debates. Most of the activities were held on college campuses, which was appropriate because it was the young people of the country showed the most concern about America's continued presence in Vietnam. Still, critics argued, some the unfortunate part of the anti-war demonstrations was that the wrong people were hearing the speeches. As one reporter put it, "Instead of kids and young adults, the audience should have been businessmen, parents, establishment leaders and a big slice of that middle class silent majority everybody keeps talking about. They would have heard some thought-provoking arguments and they would have gone home with the message: Most young people want no part of what they consider a senseless and immoral war."³⁵ The rallies should have been aimed at pro-war people. The "hawks" should have been present to hear and evaluate the speeches. The reporter concluded, "These are the

³⁴ "Our Readers Write: Percentage of Casualties," *San Antonio Evening News*, 11 September 1970, Section B, p. 10.

³⁵ "Wrong People Heard Speeches During War Moratorium Day," *San Antonio Express*, October 16, 1969, sec 1, p. 3.

simplistic people who call moratorium day a Communist plot and viewed the participants as Red dupes at best. They would have felt more than a trifle silly sitting in the noonday sun listening to their intellectual betters—the kids—talks and debate....[They] bring no credit to themselves by trying to put the Red tarbrush to a bunch of college kids and to a few concerned adults."³⁶

As for elected officials, their reaction was usually negative. Still, there were some who championed the cause of the Chicano anti-war protesters. Texas United States Senator Ralph Yarborough was a great supporter of the anti-war movement. In a speech, Yarborough praised the moratoriums, saying, "This (the moratorium) was one of the highest manifestations of what a free society means." Yarborough pointed out that the Vietnam conflict was not like World War II, which was a declared war. "This is a presidential war, not a congressional war," Yarborough observed, "and in a presidential war you cannot suspend the democratic liberties of the people."³⁷ This support was not long-lasting, however, as Yarborough was defeated in the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Senator Praises Moratorium," *San Antonio Evening News*, October 20, 1969, Sec A, p. 1.

1970 election by the more conservative, pro-war Democrat Lloyd Bentsen.

President Johnson, a supporter of Mexican-American rights, was alarmed by the rising popularity of the Chicano Movement. He felt that his political hold on the Mexican-Community was slipping. In a speech given in El Paso, Texas, on October 17, 1967, LBJ reminded Mexican-Americans about the accomplishments of his administration, but concluded that, "It is not enough...for too many years, your government paid too little heed to the status and hopes of the Mexican-American community....A lesser people might have given up a long time ago, but your people didn't give up. They believed."³⁸ Johnson vowed to do more, beginning with appointing more Mexican-Americans to positions in his administration—including Dr. Hector P. Garcia. The tactic did not work, however. By this time, the war had turned too many Chicanos against Johnson. Viewing the tactics as pandering, Chicanos told the government, "Don't ask rich Mexicans to talk for the poor."³⁹ In the end, the unpopular Johnson did not seek re-election in 1968. The Democrats lost the White House, and

³⁸ Julie Pycior, *LBJ and Mexican Americans: The Paradox of Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 210.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

Mexican-Americans lost a vital ally in their civil rights struggle.

After Republican Richard Nixon took the office, public and government support for Chicanos dwindled even more. In an interview, Vice President Spiro Agnew escalated criticism of the moratorium by calling the leaders "an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals." He warned that the "hard-core dissidents and professional anarchists" are planning "wilder, more violent" protests Nov. 15, the next planned moratorium."⁴⁰ Although the rallies would be peaceful, Agnew's comments typified how most Anglos felt about the anti-war protestors. For Chicanos, this would prove to be their downfall. With political and public opinion against them, there was no way the Chicano Movement would be treated fairly.

This was most evident after the August 29th Chicano Moratorium march in Los Angeles that ended with the death of Ruben Salazar, a respected journalist who was killed by a sheriff's deputy. Afterward, a grand jury—comprised of only Anglos—found that the Los Angeles police were clear of all wrong doing. Salazar's death was ruled an accident.

⁴⁰ "Agnew's 'Overswing' Defies Administration's War Moves," *San Antonio Evening News*, October 21, 1969, sec A, p. 1.

Mexican-Americans were outraged at the findings. They believed that Salazar's death had not been adequately explained. They did not believe the death was accidental.⁴¹ But there was nothing they could do, because public opinion was against them. Many people believed that the Chicano Moratorium march was planned by anarchists who did not respect the country and the American system of righting grievances and obtaining justice. As one opinion columnist wrote,

Many of the dissidents came here from other cities and states to join agitators in Los Angeles to set off a major riot, which was planned in advance. That the holocaust did not erupt into greater proportions is due to the bravery and tactics of sheriff's deputies and the good citizenship of the people of East Los Angeles....Those arrested should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Precautions must be doubled to prevent a recurrence of such criminal irresponsibility.⁴²

Because of their aggressive, militant stance, the Chicanos now found their search for justice strangulated by their actions. Chicano rhetoric and tactics had not only turned majority opinion against them, but it had also created divisions within the Mexican-American community. The Chicanos would now have to face the consequences for their actions.

⁴¹ Jose Andres Chacon, "Ruben Salazar - Journalist," *San Antonio Express News*, 27 February 1972. Sec A, p. 1

⁴² Karl Hubenthal "At the Bottom of It All: Riot Aftermath," *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, 2 September 1970, sec A, p. 3.

CHAPTER FIVE

Consequences of Vietnam War Protest

Aftermath of the Chicano Moratorium

On August 29, 1970, the nation's largest Chicano anti-war rally took place in Los Angeles, California. On that afternoon, more than 20,000 Chicano demonstrators marched down the busy Los Angeles streets. Sometime in the afternoon, police, responding to a report of looting, met the marching crowds head-on. The ensuing confrontation soon escalated into violence. Rally spokesman Javier Gonzales alleged that the trouble started because officers moved in without warning, causing some of the demonstrators to panic and fight back. "They didn't give us any warning before they set off the tear gas," he later complained.¹ Deputies said that although only handfuls of demonstrators had caused trouble, they had to clear everyone out of the park to disperse the troublemakers.

The violent clash between police and marchers which erupted that day caused the deaths of four Mexican-Americans, most notably Ruben Salazar, a news reporter and

¹ "Mexican-Americans Rally Ends in Riot," *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 30 August, 1970, Sec. A, p. 1

columnist for the *Los Angeles Times* and news director for the Spanish language television station KMEX in Los Angeles. President Nixon, on learning of his death wrote, "Through all of the years I knew him and his work, Ruben Salazar exemplified the finest tradition of his craft. He was forthright, honorable and compassionate. His leadership earned the highest respect and he will be sorely missed."² The August 29th rally was supposed to be a new high for the Chicano Movement, thousands of Chicanos from around the country uniting as one. Instead it became the beginning of the end for the movement.

Chicano Moratorium Committee

After Salazar's demise, a coroner's inquest was convened to determine whether or not his death was accidental. Chicanos from around the country screamed for justice. During these weeks, while the jury deliberated, there was uneasiness around Los Angeles. There were riots and shootings during the 16th of September, Mexican Independence Day, celebration of 1970.³

² Jose Andres Chacon, "Ruben Salazar: Journalist," *San Antonio Express News*, 27 February 1972, Sec A, p. 1.

³ "3 Wounded by Snipers in East LA," *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 17 September, 1970, Sec A, p.3.

Finally, in October of that year, the results of the inquest declared the shooting a homicide, the ruling was considered a blow to the Sheriff's Department whose officials had insisted that Salazar's death was a tragic—but unavoidable—accident.⁴ The sheriff's deputy involved, Tom Wilson, was never prosecuted, however. Los Angeles District Attorney Evelle Younger decided not to press charges against Officer Wilson. Furthermore, the United States Commission on Civil Rights also declined to intervene on the Chicanos' behalf.⁵ After years of antagonizing and berating the police and the government, Chicanos now asked the same institutions for fair treatment.

After the Chicano Moratorium march, the executive committee vowed to continue the demonstrations. Each of these demonstrations, however, continued to erupt into violence. As the outrage over the death of Salazar grew, younger, more militant Chicanos began to attend the Moratorium Committee meetings. According to leader Ramsés Noriega, there came an influx of young people who "saw

⁴ Vern Smith, "Jury Rules Salazar Killing No Accident," *Long Beach Page-Telegram*, 6 October 1970, Sec A, p.1.

⁵ Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Sí!, Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 180.

everything like a big party; they didn't understand the social and political thing that was going on."⁶ As the meetings went on, more Brown Berets, a group of Chicanos that emulated the politics and tactics of the Black Panthers, began to take over the meetings. Committee chair Rosalio Muñoz objected to the increasing number of "young individual Chicano Anarchist types" who were generally "a volatile group of young people without jobs."⁷ The Brown Berets and the newer recruits fought with the older committee members; they used the office phones for long-distance calls; and then routinely used drugs during the meetings.

By early of 1971, a young Tejano Brown Beret, Estucio "Frank" Martinez, who later claimed to be an ATF informant, had ousted Rosalio Muñoz to become the new chairperson of the Moratorium Committee. This new, Brown Beret-led committee scheduled two more marches for the beginning of 1971. Both of these would end in violence, with the second march seeing a young Chicano killed by police gunfire.⁸ With this, the remaining original committee decided it was time to end the moratoriums. While the Brown Berets continued

⁶ Ibid., 181.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 182-184.

to hold their own, separate marches⁹, the remaining Chicano Moratorium committee members decided against further activities. Ramsés Noriega called a meeting of the remaining committee, declaring, "The Moratorium is over. The reason why is that there is too many killings, too many attacks, everybody's confused, there's too many problems....It's over with go home....I am not going to be responsible for one death, because from now on, the killings are going to escalate."¹⁰

After the end of the Moratorium marches, the Chicano movement became splintered focusing on regional problems rather than national ones. Spurred on by Salazar's death and the ensuing violence, California Chicano groups began to focus on combating police brutality in city *barrios*.¹¹ Chicanos in Colorado and New Mexico turned their attention to continuing problems with land rights. In Texas, education and voter rights became the most prominent. Throughout the Chicano community the issue of the Vietnam War was pushed into the background.

⁹ Ian Haney-López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 198.

¹⁰ Ernesto Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero! (My People First!): Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 79.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The American GI Forum

For several years, Chicano leaders tried to convince some of the more respected organizations, such as the American GI Forum and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), to join them in condemning the Vietnam War. The executive board of the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) had proposed a resolution to condemn the war as early as 1966.¹² The resolution was ultimately defeated because of the efforts of board members who were also in the American GI Forum. For most of the war, the American GI Forum was the Chicano Movement's greatest opponent within the Mexican-American community.

The American GI Forum and its members were unwavering supporters of President Lyndon Johnson because it was through Johnson that they had achieved their early successes in civil rights. LBJ also counted among his friends Dr. Hector P. Garcia, the founder of the American GI Forum. Through Dr. Garcia, the American GI Forum had a direct line to the White House. When a problem with the draft board in South Texas occurred, Dr. Garcia wrote a letter directly to Johnson:

¹² George Mariscal, *Aztlán and Vietnam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999), 195.

Mr. President, the Mexican Americans in Uvalde County have asked to request of you that Draft Board 122...be dissolved and new one appointed. [They] have no Mexican American Draft Board Members. Vietnam casualties in Uvalde County total 6, Mexican Americans 6; Maverick County total Casualties 10, Mexican Americans 9. I feel that the Draft Board illegally constituted by excluding Mexican Americans in violation of recommendation of National Selective Service Act in setting up draft boards made up of neighbors and friends in the community.

Colonel Schwartz refuses to take action. Mexican Americans are seriously upset about this discrimination. Something must be done immediately otherwise conflict will break out into open and cause irreparable damage to our state.¹³

As hard-line Democrats, members of the American GI Forum would repeatedly reaffirm their allegiance to Johnson and their support of his policies concerning Vietnam. The American GI Forum argued that an anti-war stance was detrimental to the troops. For the American GI Forum, criticizing President Johnson's foreign policy and the war in Southeast Asia was the same as criticizing the men and women of the armed forces. José Angel Gutiérrez, one of the major Chicano leaders in Texas, later complained, "Any kind of notion that you were out of line with White House policy, foreign policy, meant you were un-American. Of course we were out of step with the war and we were out of step with the president and we were out-of-step with the

¹³ Hector P. Garcia to Lyndon Baines Johnson, Monday February 5, 1968, Dr. Hector P. Garcia Papers, Mary & Jeff Bell Library Special Collections and Archives, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

foreign policy in Vietnam. So that made us suspect in the eyes of the American G.I. forum. And we clashed."¹⁴

With an increasing number of Vietnam veterans joining the American GI Forum, however, divisions began to grow within the American GI Forum itself. It was only a matter of time before anti-war veterans gained power and broke ranks with the rest of the organization. In June of 1970, the California chapter of the American GI Forum passed a resolution opposing the war. At the national meeting the following year, the anti-war resolution came up for a vote. With the numbers of Mexican-American soldiers dying in Vietnam increasing and becoming more disproportionate to other races, opposition voices gained a majority. The resolution passed and the American GI Forum came out against the Vietnam War.¹⁵ Although the Chicano Movement seemingly had a new ally in their struggles, the American GI Forum would not take part in any marches or protests. In fact, after the Chicano Moratorium riot, American GI

¹⁴ José Angel Gutiérrez, interviewed in "Justice for My People: The Dr. Hector P. Garcia Story." Available from <http://www.justiceformypeople.org>. Internet; accessed September 13, 2008.

¹⁵ Mariscal, *Aztlán and Vietnam*, 195.

Forum leaders advised against community members taking part in marches or demonstrations.¹⁶

Instead, the American GI Forum looked to the plight of the returning Vietnam veterans and began to redouble their efforts in helping them. The veterans returning from Vietnam were more likely to file reports about any injustice they felt they were receiving. As historians Rosina M. Becerra and Milton Greenblatt discovered, "Vietnam veterans had a significantly stronger sense of being discriminated against than their older peers.... The Vietnam veteran was certainly much more vocal in his indignation about discriminatory practices probably because his consciousness had been raised as a result of the Chicano movement of which he was and is a part."¹⁷ The American GI Forum had never dealt with such a large volume of claims. Becerra and Greenblatt continued, "The older veteran was more likely to accept discriminatory treatment because by doing so, he had learned to survive as a minority person in a majority culture.... The Vietnam veteran tended to feel that he deserved better."¹⁸

¹⁶ "'Police Can't Guarantee Safety' Don't March, GI Forum Says," *San Jose News*, 3 September 1970, sec 1, p. 3.

¹⁷ Leah Ybarra, *Vietnam Veterans: Chicanos Recall the War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The American GI Forum soon had its hands full with veteran claims ranging from unpaid GI Bill benefits to veterans in need of psychological help. Clearly, the American GI Forum was most concerned about veterans who were becoming victims of a system that had turned its back on them. A February 1973 article in the *San Antonio Express News* lamented, "Tens of thousands of them are jobless and growing more bitter toward their homeland every day. They are back in families where there is never enough to eat or wear-and where a doctor is someone you see in a dire emergency, if you can find one then."¹⁹

The American GI Forum spent the rest of the decade working on behalf of returning veterans, creating the Veterans Outreach Program (VOP) to help veterans who were having trouble readjusting to society. The VOP offered free counseling and employment assistance.²⁰

In addition to providing direct help for the vets, the American GI Forum encouraged Mexican-American businesses and civic groups not only to donate to the VOP, but also to hire returning veterans. American GI Forum Texas Commander Paul Herrera later stated with pride, "We of the American

¹⁹ Carl T. Rowan, "Harsh Realities," *San Antonio Express News*, 20 February 1973, Sec. A, p. 1.

²⁰ Carl Allsup, *The American G.I. Forum: Origins and Evolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 116.

GI Forum can be proud that our National Veterans Outreach Program was the first veterans' organization to reach out to our Vietnam Veterans."²¹

La Raza Unida

As the national Chicano anti-war movement came to a halt during the early 1970s, the last hope for advancing its cause depended upon the Raza Unida Party (RUP). RUP was a political offshoot of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), a college-based Chicano advocacy group and one of the leading groups in the Chicano anti-war movement. The goal of the Raza Unida Party was to act as a viable third party in American politics by running Chicano candidates-first at a local level and then increasingly at the state-wide level.

Initially, RUP was successful in their mission, capturing state legislative seats throughout the Southwest, and completely taking over a town in Texas-Crystal City. It seemed that the RUP was poised for greatness. In time, however, it became clear that the same tactics that had hindered the Chicano movement in its anti-war crusade would ultimately doom RUP. Much like Chicano anti-war

²¹ Ron Maloney, "Local Groups Pay Tribute to Those Lost," *Seguin Gazette-Enterprise*, 26 May 2009, Sec. A, p. 1.

protesters, RUP members had a with-us-or-against-us mentality. Raza Unida leaders routinely criticized Mexican-American civic leaders for failing to back the party. When American GI Forum leader Dr. Hector P. Garcia endorsed liberal Democrat Frances "Sissy" Farenthold in the 1972 Texas gubernatorial elections instead of RUP candidate Ramsey Muñiz José Angel Gutiérrez said that he "felt ashamed that a man who calls himself a leader of Mexican-Americans would neglect one of his own...to help an Anglo woman." Furthermore, he claimed that Dr. Garcia was "just a flunky of the Democratic Party, a mere puppet....Any Mexican-American who is not with our cause...better watch out because Raza Unida will step all over them."²² Apparently the Chicano Movement had not learned from past mistakes. Instead the RUP continued to attack Anglos and fellow Mexican-Americans, thereby alienating a great number of people.

After the 1972 elections, Raza Unida was exposed as a political failure. As one newspaper remarked, "Raza Unida has proved its point; it has shown that the Mexican-American vote can be vital to Texas elections. But it has not shown it can even approach statewide victories, nor is

²² Elias Clarke, "Interview with José Angel Gutiérrez," *Barrio*, April 1972, 10.

there any prospect it will ever be able to do that. Its leaders and adherents had better realize this simple political fact and act accordingly."²³

While RUP failed to become a force in state or national politics, there was still hope for relevancy at the local level. As the *San Antonio Express* observed, "Raza Unida's true strength is not statewide but in local elections such as Crystal City where the party controls the city council and has gained some county offices. This is as it should be, for Mexican-Americans are in a majority and should determine their local affairs."²⁴ Crystal City stood to be, for RUP, as a shining example of how Chicano leadership could flourish, but instead it became another disaster.

Through their anti-Anglo rhetoric and actions, Raza Unida had alienated and driven off a good deal of the Anglo employers in Crystal City. Not only that, but Mexican-Americans were also being affected by the failed actions of RUP leadership. By 1973 the town government was nearly bankrupt. A *Wall Street Journal* article documenting the Chicano takeover of the city reported:

²³ "New Factor," *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 13 November 1972, sec A, p. 3.

²⁴ "Raza Unida's True Power Is in Local Elections" *San Antonio Express*, 10 November 1972, Sec. A, p. 18.

Mexican-American as well as Anglo - have left town. Despite an infusion of some \$20 million in federal funds through the city, county, schools and Urban Renewal Authority, sales-tax collections in the city are up only 56% compared with an increase of 214% in Carizzo Springs, a predominately Mexican-American town 10 miles away where La Raza has little influence....the county unemployment rate has dropped from 17% "before Raza" to 13.7% in April, a 21.8% improvement. By contrast, the unemployment rate in neighboring Dimmit County, which has a similar ethnic makeup, declined over the same period to 9.3% from 13.7%, a 32.1% improvement.²⁵

The city ran into more trouble after protests of utility charges-essentially non-payment of services-on the part of La Raza Unida and Crystal City's natural gas supply was shut off by its singular supplier, LoVaca Gathering Company. Crystal City residents were left without propane for cooking and were forced to resort to mostly wood burning stoves.²⁶

Left without political allies and facing increasing pressure from external problems, RUP leaders began to fight amongst themselves. Several began to accuse each other of using their positions for personal gain. José Angel Gutiérrez, brash founder and leader of the Raza Unida Party-and now a county judge-began to target people he considered enemies. In a *San Antonio News* article from

²⁵ Richard A. Shaffer, "Patronage for the Faithful," *Wall Street Journal*, 5 September 1975, sec 1, p. 10.

²⁶ "Lo-Vaca Shuts Off Gas," *San Antonio News*, 11 October 1975, Sec A, p. 1.

October 11, 1975, it was reported that "21 people were arrested on bodily harm complaint filed by county judge José Angel Gutiérrez, and released on \$1,000 bonds. All those arrested were members of the *El Barrio Club*, which secretly filed \$3 million lawsuit against José Angel Gutiérrez. Two members of the Barrio Club were caught in Zavala County courthouse with Rattlesnakes in a bag. José Angel Gutiérrez believes the snakes were intended for him."²⁷ This infighting wrecked the future of the Raza Unida Party. By the end of the decade, RUP was no more.

The remnants of the party followed the traditional trajectory of most third party movements in United States history. The youth from MAYO who joined the Raza Unida Party in droves were subsequently recruited by both major parties, particularly the Democrats. The issues that RUP fought for (bilingual education, employment opportunities, community control of local institutions, permanent voter registration, Chicano Studies programs, educational access to professional careers and reform of election laws to permit greater participation by Chicanos in the local, state, national, and international affairs) were incorporated into the platforms of both major parties and

²⁷ Jerry Deal, "Officials arrested in Crystal," *San Antonio News*, 11 October 1975, Sec A, p. 1.

their candidates.²⁸ Over time, the remnants of the Chicano Movement would become the cornerstones of both political parties in South Texas. The Chicano Movement may have ended, but its legacy still lives on today.

²⁸ John C. Hammerback, Richard J. Jenssen, and José Angel Gutiérrez, *A War of Words: Chicano Protest in the 1960s and 1970s* (Westport, Conn. : Greenwood Press, 1985), 153.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

By the end of the 1970s, the Chicano Movement was a shell of its former self. What had once started as a national movement for Mexican-American advancement had broken up into regional factions that concentrated their energies on local issues. Political missteps and infighting had robbed the movement of whatever remaining national power it had. One of the main causes for this strangulation was the Chicano Movement's opposition to the Vietnam War.

Even before opposing military action in Vietnam became part of its platform, the Chicano Movement and its various groups were no strangers to controversy. The heated rhetoric and actions of Chicano leaders often put them at odds with older Mexican-Americans, especially civic leaders. Moreover, Chicanos' disdain for authority and their penchant for militant tactics alienated Anglos who might have otherwise been sympathetic to the struggling Mexican-Americans. Up to the beginning of the war, Chicanos could argue that they were only seeking justice and fair treatment for Mexican-Americans. When the young

men and women of the Chicano Movement took a stand against the war, however, their claims were harder to justify.

A great majority of Anglos and older Mexican-Americans saw the Chicano Movement's stand against the war and against the government as anti-American. Chicanos were no longer viewed as just radicals; they were now also considered treasonous, or worse, communists. Within the Mexican-American community, protests against the war brought Chicanos into direct conflict with more established Mexican-American advocacy groups, most notably the American GI Forum. Many older Mexican-Americans had fought valiantly in World War II and the Korean War. These veterans saw the Chicano protesters as disrespectful towards the proud tradition of Mexican-Americans in the armed forces.

By protesting the war so vehemently, Chicanos alienated a large part of their own community. This would be a great blow to their cause. Chicanos could not truly advance their people if they did not have the people's support. Worse, the Chicano Movement butting heads with the established Mexican-American advocacy groups slowed down any real civil rights effort. Without the full support of the Mexican-American community, Chicanos could

not succeed in furthering their cause, and ultimately failed.

When it came to their dealings with the Anglo majority, Chicanos' resistance to the Vietnam War also caused problems that would lead to the movement's demise. Even before their policies turned against the Vietnam War, Chicanos were not seen in a very positive light by Anglos. Their anti-Anglo rhetoric turned off many in the mainstream, but it was their anti-war stance that truly turned Anglo opinion against Chicanos. Once the Chicano Movement became effectively an anti-war movement, mainstream society began to lump the Chicano protesters with the general anti-war movement. This proved to be extremely detrimental, because, at the time, the only thing less popular than the Vietnam War was the anti-war movement. Chicanos were no longer a separate entity trying to better the situation of their race. Instead they were a part of the marginalized anti-war movement. Support for the Chicano Movement would never recover.

With popular support waning, Chicanos became increasingly confrontational and militant toward authority. Such increased antagonism ultimately led to violent clashes with law enforcement, most infamously in Los Angeles on August 29, 1970. On this day, four Chicanos, including a

well-respected journalist, were killed in clashes with police.

The backlash against the increasing violence that accompanied Chicano anti-war marches was too much for the leaders to overcome. By 1971 the national Chicano Movement was over. Chicano groups turned their attention to local and state matters. Mexican-American groups turned their attention away from protesting the war and back to their own communities, with some groups focusing on education, others land reform, and yet others in helping to reintegrate Chicano veterans of the Vietnam War into society.

By the time the Vietnam War officially ended, so had the Chicano Movement. What began so promisingly in the 1960s had ended in disappointment by the 1970s. It would be another 30 years, when immigration became a hotly-debated issue, that another cause would unite so many in the Mexican-American community. It was the protest against the Vietnam War that led to this end. By turning both the Anglo majority and their own community against their policies, Chicanos Chicano leader Irene Tovar summed it up best when she said, "We paid for what we believed."¹

¹Oropeza, *Raza Si!*, 182.

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