

Spring 2013

The Vietnam War and its Detrimental Effects on Chicanos

Juan Carlos Trejo
Kennesaw State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/etd>



Part of the [Chicana/o Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Trejo, Juan Carlos, "The Vietnam War and its Detrimental Effects on Chicanos" (2013). *Dissertations, Theses and Capstone Projects*. Paper 550.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

GUERRILLEROS: THE VIETNAM WAR AND ITS DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS ON
CHICANOS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

DR. ALAN LEBARON, DR. RANDALL PATTON, AND DR. REBECCA HILL

OF THE AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

BY

JUAN CARLOS TREJO

KENNESAW, GEORGIA

MAY 2013

College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Kennesaw State University
Kennesaw, Georgia
Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the thesis/project of

Juan Carlos Trejo

has been approved by the committee for the capstone requirement for the
Master of Arts in American Studies
in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Thesis/Project committee:

<u>Randall Patton</u>	<u>4-29-2013</u>
Member	Date
<u>Dr. Y. Ben</u>	<u>4-29-2013</u>
Member	Date

My name is Juan Carlos Trejo and I am a Mexican-American student of American Studies at Kennesaw State University. I chose Mexican-American veterans of the Vietnam War to study for the Master of Arts Thesis in the American Studies program. I chose this topic because from my perspective the Chicano in the United States has been under-represented in the history books of the United States and has been the subject of discrimination. As a Chicano I have experienced racial bigotry in my upbringing and I must attest that it is important to discuss why the Vietnam War was a failure for many Mexican-Americans who saw the war as an opportunity to move upwardly in the American socio-economic pyramid.

The racism that I have experienced during my lifetime informs my perspective on the socio-economic system in the United States. This personal perspective on racial, ethnic, and class injustice, while it does not replace research and critical analysis of evidence, augments and helps shape my research agenda. In my experience there are not that many good jobs available for Chicanos and there exists discrimination in obtaining decent housing and a good higher education. Some will argue that there does not exist any discrimination in employment, educational attainment, or in purchasing a home in a safer neighborhood, but I can ascertain by my own life experiences that discrimination exists in covert forms for Chicanos and other minority groups. One example that I can give is the discrimination that exists against Hispanics including Mexican-Americans in educational attainment. Georgia State University's graduate school is composed of 59 percent White students, 19 percent Black students, 5 percent Asian students, and 5 percent Hispanic students.¹ The demographics of the number of students does not reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the state of Georgia much less that of the United States. Hispanics are under-represented by 4.1 percent as compared to Georgia's population

¹ Georgia State University, "Demographic Overview of Students," *Fall 2009*, http://www.gsu.edu/images/institutional_effectiveness/Fall2009DemographicOverview.pdf (Accessed March 25, 2013).

demographics, while Blacks are under-represented by 11 percent; however Whites are over-represented by 4 percent, and Asians are over-represented by 2 percent.² I argue that the under-representation of Chicanos, Hispanics, and Blacks at universities across the United States is evidence of an indirect form of discrimination, and that this discrimination has evolved into its present form because laws against unmasked discrimination have forced it to do so.

The examples of what I call indirect discrimination against Chicanos are abundant; however, the purpose of this essay is to discuss the possibility that the Vietnam War could have been a stepping stone in the socio-economic ladder for Mexican-Americans; and why many Chicanos did indeed see the war as an opportunity for social mobility. In addition, I will discuss how in reality the war did not bring advancement to the Chicano veteran. The idea that the Vietnam War could have been a way for Chicanos to become upwardly mobile is connected to the idea that World War II created some positive outcomes for African-Americans as well as other minorities including White minorities who were not part of the major Anglo-American majority. It is for this reason that I decided to research if the war in Vietnam was of any benefit to the Mexican-Americans that participated in it.

The statistics on the number of Chicanos serving in the Vietnam War were a motivating factor in conducting this research as Chicanos comprised about six percent of the country's population during the war and accounted for about twenty percent of the casualties in Vietnam.³ I felt that this was a situation where Mexican-Americans were being over-represented, and I wanted to find out why. It seemed odd that in employment, housing, and educational attainment Chicanos have sometimes been under-represented or discriminated against and that in wars their

² US Department of Commerce, "State and County Quickfacts," US Census Bureau, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/13000.html> (Accessed March 25, 2013).

³ Herman Baca, "The Chicano Moratorium August 29, 1970, Still Remembered After 35 Years," *La Prensa San Diego*, <http://laprensa-sandiego.org/archieve/august26-05/chicano.htm> (Accessed March 25, 2013).

numbers tend to be higher than their population demographics. As a Chicano I also wanted to find out why the numbers of enlistment and death for Chicanos and Hispanics were high during the Vietnam War.

The first group of Mexican-Americans to be referred to as Chicanos were the Mexican citizens of the states of Texas, New Mexico, California, and all of the other lands that Mexico lost in the Mexican-American War of 1847-1848. Before these lands were lost by Mexico these Mexican-Americans were Mexican, and before Mexico gained its independence from Spain they were Spanish citizens of New Spain. After the Mexican-American War many Mexicans refused to leave their ancestral lands and became American citizens under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. Since that time Chicanos have referred to themselves as Mexican-Americans or Chicanos, and these terms now include the sons and daughters of Mexican immigrants who have been born in the United States. Chicanos sometimes refer to themselves as Latinos or Hispanics, but these are terms that describe how Chicanos fit into the much larger community of peoples from Spanish-speaking nations or nations where a Latin culture was adopted. In other words all Chicanos are Hispanic and Latino but not all Hispanics and Latinos are Chicanos. Latino refers to any person who descends from a Latin nation, and thus includes Portuguese-speaking peoples from Brazil and Italian-speaking Argentines.

The term Chicano has been a popular term in use since the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and has its origins in the Nahuatl word for Mexico. Today many Mexican-Americans embrace the term as a word that creates unity between all Mexican-Americans; however, other Mexican-Americans prefer to use terms that describe what state they are from like Tejano, Californio, and Nuevomexicano. Sandra Cisneros helped develop the idea of Chicano and Chicana as terms to identify Mexican-Americans in her book *Woman Hollering Creek and Other*

Stories.⁴ In this essay the terms Chicano and Mexican-American will be used frequently to signify the brotherhood or *carnalismo* that exists within this ethnic group.

Mexican-Americans have had a difficult time gaining acceptance from the rest of American society. The differences in language, culture, and customs have set Chicanos apart from other European-Americans who have assimilated into the dominant English speaking culture. The differences between Anglo-Americans and Hispanic-Americans can be traced hundreds of years in the past to the period when England and Spain were at odds with each other because of various beliefs. For example the Dutch and English propagandists produced a heavy amount of literature in the 1500s and 1600s that portrayed Spaniards as particularly cruel, intolerant, and ignorant which came to be known as the Black Legend. As part of the Elizabethan campaign an Englishman named John Foxe contributed stories in which Protestants were portrayed as martyrs and Spaniards were portrayed as murderers of the innocent. Although many scholars have realized that other imperial powers acted with as much cruelty as Spain had, in the United States this idea of the Black Legend was partially responsible for the hostile view held towards Hispanics especially Chicanos.⁵

Time and time again Chicanos have attempted to become a part of the English speaking American society by joining the military thus falling into the philosophy that states that if one is willing to die for a nation then one is a de facto member of that nation. The Chicano fights an identity battle within himself that he brings out to the physical world in the effort of demonstrating to himself and to American society that he is worthy. Within himself is the battle of being an Indigenous person and at the same time being a descendant of Spain and other parts

⁴ Sandra Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (New York, NY: Vintage/Random House, 1992).

⁵ William S. Maltby, *The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 117-118.

of Europe, because he is not a simple person he is a complex individual. The Indigenous heritage of Mexican-Americans is also a mixture of tribes from all over the southwestern United States and Mexico. Chicanos have a rich cultural amount of capital in that they descend from Aztecs, Tarascans, Totonacs, Comanches, Apaches, Navajos, Pimas, and many more tribes.⁶ According to a study performed by Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Medicina Genómica most Mexicans and Mexican-Americans are about 40 to 60 percent European and about 40 to 60 percent Native American.⁷ This binary of identity becomes even more complex when the dichotomy of being of Mexican descent and American-born is factored into the discussion of Chicano identity and culture.

The notion of desiring accommodation into the English dominant American societal complex for Chicanos was well exemplified during the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was for many Chicanos seen as an opportunity to fight for America the land of their birth, and an opportunity to be warriors for democracy and capitalism the ideals that the United States was promoting. For many young Chicanos with no real prospects of obtaining a quality college education or a job, the war and joining the military seemed to ostensibly be a route to earn money for a more promising future. However the war proved to be controversial, un-popular, and traumatic for most of the Mexican-American soldiers and sailors that participated in it. Several factors in the understanding of their identities were changed, and their behavioral and cultural characteristics as well as their ethnic understanding of themselves were also altered by the war. This essay seeks to discuss how the Vietnam War was perceived by many Chicanos as

⁶ Michael D. Coe and Rex Koontz, *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs* (New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 17-18.

⁷ Arturo Barba, "Genoma Destapa Diferencias de Mexicanos," *CNN Expansión*, June 6, 2009, <http://www.cnnexpansion.com/actualidad/2009/06/04/genoma-destapa-diferencias-de-mexicanos> (accessed January 31, 2013).

an opportunity for social upward mobility, but in reality was a failed opportunity for many Mexican-Americans. This essay desires to speculate by the interviews and research that was conducted that many Chicano Vietnam War veterans did not move up in the socio-economic structure of the United States, and were instead harmed by the Vietnam War in terms of their physical health, job discrimination, and damages to their moral and mental abilities.

America's involvement in the war can be traced as far back to President Harry S. Truman's administration. Truman supported France in Vietnam's war for colonial independence from France and lower-level functionaries of his administration met with Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother.⁸ Diem would eventually become the president of Vietnam in 1955 with the support of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The year before Diem's ascent to the presidency Vietnam had won its war of independence against France and was subsequently divided into two separate countries: Communist North Vietnam and an ostensibly democratic republic of South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnamese government were not satisfied with the terms of the treaty and desired to unify all of Vietnam as one country even if it meant unification by force. President Eisenhower feared that if nations began to fall under communist rule their fall would produce a domino effect. Since countries were under communist rule in Europe and Asia he believed it was only a matter of time before communist rebels and activists would be successful in the Americas. Eisenhower sent economic aid and weapons to South Vietnam. His successor John F. Kennedy would eventually add 16,500 military advisors to the American effort to fight a

⁸ Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-1957* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 27.

communist takeover in Vietnam.⁹ It seemed that the United States was completely submerged into the struggle for who would control Vietnam.

Mexican-Americans became targets of the military in terms of the draft. Unintentionally or not Chicanos had very limited arguments and chances of not being conscripted into the military or of fleeing the country to avoid the war. Due to the poorer state of public education in areas where Hispanics resided, most Chicanos did not enroll into colleges and universities and therefore had more limited chances of obtaining a draft deferment. Hispanic young men were heavily recruited or drafted after they graduated from high school and were drafted even if they dropped out. At predominantly Hispanic schools military recruiters and ROTC programs were the answer for escaping the barrio for many Chicanos, and the military was seen by many as a way to climb the socio-economic ladder in the United States.¹⁰ That escape however came at an expensive price and for many the price was death, but for many who survived the war physical and mental problems as well as changes in their identities became a common phenomenon. Luis Gonzalez a former soldier in the Army who served in the Vietnam War commented that, “I volunteered to join the military because I had very few opportunities to attend college and most likely I was going to be drafted anyway.”¹¹ Gonzalez like many other Mexican-Americans had very few options after high school and his decision was to join the military which could have improved his possibilities of entering the middle-class and not working a menial job.

⁹ Michael Nelson, ed., *The Evolving Presidency: Addresses, Cases, Essays, Letters, Reports, Resolutions, Transcripts, and Other Landmark Documents, 1787-1998* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1999), 170.

¹⁰ Mario T. García and Sal Castro, *Blowout! Sal Castro & the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 122-123.

¹¹ Luis Gonzalez, interview by Juan C. Trejo, December 15, 2012, transcript, Kennesaw, GA.

The lives of many Mexican-Americans who enlisted or were drafted into the military and served in the Vietnam War changed in many ways. One way that their lives were affected by the war was through the relationships that these veterans had with their family members. In the Mexican-American culture the social concept of family is heavily endorsed and emphasized. As many Chicanos adhere to Roman Catholicism and other forms of Christianity, the family unit has become the central social relationship in that culture. The tenets of Catholicism and Christianity outline what a person should live his life by, and being monogamous and being a good father or mother is a central notion in that doctrine.

Juan Ramirez in his book *A Patriot After All: the Story of a Chicano Vietnam Vet* demonstrates how important his family was to him before he joined the military. He states that his grandmother who was of Indigenous descent was the most important person in his life. After all the troubles that he would eventually go through from having served in the Vietnam War, her faith and her teachings to him would be what helped him overcome the issues that were created within him because of the war.¹² In his biography Ramirez discusses that the violence, war crimes, and brutality that he experienced in the war distorted and became an obstacle in having a good relationship with his family.

The barbarous nature of the war left great psychological wounds in many Chicano veterans. It can be inferred that the violence against other human beings made it difficult for veterans to surpass seeing their own family in a non-hostile manner. Marcello, an Army veteran who chose not to give his last name and who served as a First Lieutenant as a Forward Observer, stated that the brutality he witnessed injured his ability to feel. Marcello averred that many soldiers grew numb to the violence he remembers stacking dead enemy corpses one on top of the

¹² Juan Ramirez, *A Patriot After All: the Story of a Chicano Vietnam Vet* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 6-7.

other as if they were nothing. The worst for Marcello was that many of the Viet Cong that were killed were women, and he recalls that, “soldiers would stack dead women on top of dead men as if they were fornicating as a joke.”¹³ Like many other Chicanos who returned from the war Marcello eventually divorced his wife, because she felt that he was no longer the person that he used to be. He confessed that he knew he was not the same person he was when he married her, and that his issues with anxiety and depression were definitely caused by the war.¹⁴ The violence and trauma Chicanos experienced during the war greatly contributed to their trouble re-adapting to the social concept of family. In addition, war crimes like the My Lai Massacre had negative effects on Vietnam veterans who could not overcome the tragedies.

The lack of communication during the war between some Chicanos and their families was also a voluminous issue that affected relationships with family members. The 1960s were not a time in which fast communication was in place, and the telephone systems that did exist were not within reach of soldiers that were patrolling the jungles of Vietnam. In a way for many soldiers home became a place that was out of reach and beyond the horizon, and writing letters became a form of momentary escape from the perils of war. However because of the anti-war movement in the United States many soldiers would write letters home and receive no letters back. On several occasions many soldiers would strive to make it out of Vietnam alive to be reunited with their girlfriends only to find out that she was no longer interested in dating a Vietnam War veteran.¹⁵

¹³ Lea Ybarra, *Vietnam Veterans: Chicanos Recall the War* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004), 167. No last name given by the interviewee.

¹⁴ Ybarra, 170. No last name given by the interviewee.

¹⁵ Gil Dominguez, *They Answered the Call: Latinos in the Vietnam War* (Baltimore, MD: Publish America, 2004), 89.

The notion of relationships with family members presents a complicated and varied reality for many Chicano veterans. In some ways strong familial ties were what helped many Mexican-Americans transcend the violent occurrences of the war. Luis Muñiz Lopez an Army veteran of Vietnam declared that if it was not for his wife and children back in America he would not have made it out of the war alive. Lopez stated, “I would write letters to my wife at every chance that I would have,” and that his wife would record her voice and the voices of their children on tapes that she would mail to him.¹⁶ He never divorced her and he averred that he loved her until the day she died. However, every circumstance may be different depending on the person as Lopez stated that he had a very strong connection to his family before he left for war.¹⁷ His mentality and his identity with his family were strong enough to overcome the traumas of the war. For many Chicanos however the degree of violence and degradation that they experienced in Vietnam did have drastic effects on how they perceived and related to family members.

For many Chicanos joining the military was part of the beliefs that were indoctrinated into them by their families who pass on cultural traits and friendship networks. For some Mexican-Americans the history of warrior-hood has survived to the twentieth century and beyond. A Chicano lives with his mestizo history of having roots to Aztec, Tarascan, or Apache warriors as well as his connection to the Spanish conquistador. The idea of proving oneself through participation in combat is a notion that has been passed down through generations. As Lorena Oropeza stated in her book *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era*, in leading up to the Vietnam War Mexican-Americans could boast that they had earned more Medals of Honor than any other ethnic group during World War

¹⁶ Lopez, Luis Muñiz. 2009. Interview by William L. Browne. August 7. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

¹⁷ Lopez, Luis Muñiz.

II and the Korean War.¹⁸ The idea of joining the military and ostensibly fighting for the safety of one's country, beliefs, and family resonate well in the minds of Chicanos. However the Vietnam War turned out to be different as many were misled about the reality of the conflict, and what the United States government was really supporting.

Regarding the discourse of how many Chicano veterans' lives and how they were impacted due to the conflict in Vietnam patriotism in the Chicano sphere becomes important to discuss. In other words how proud were these Chicanos about being American and what motivated them to join the military? This debate counters ideas brought about by more conservative thinkers like Samuel Huntington, who in his article *The Hispanic Challenge*, accuses Chicanos and other Hispanics of being the single most immediate danger to America's traditional identity. Huntington declares that Black and White Americans are native to the United States giving an understanding that Chicanos and other Hispanics are not natives to America.¹⁹ However it is false to believe that many Mexican-Americans are not part of the English-speaking American culture and it can be discerned that many felt it was their patriotic duty to enlist into the military during the Vietnam War. Luis Gonzalez contends that as a native Tejano, a Hispanic born and raised in Texas, he felt that it was his duty to volunteer to serve in the military. Gonzalez is one of many Chicanos whose ancestors were born and have lived for many generations in the United States.²⁰ Gonzalez's self-desire to enlist into the military and not wait to be drafted proves that many Mexican-Americans saw the Vietnam War as an opportunity to do something better with their futures even though for many this did not come true.

¹⁸ Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 54.

¹⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge," *Foreign Policy* no. 141 (March-April 2004): 32.

²⁰ Gonzalez, Luis.

Patriotism was an important factor in the culture of many Chicanos that led many to enlist into the military during the war. Ralph Garcia a former Marine stated that he decided to enlist into the Marine Corps because he saw that they were the toughest, and that if he wanted to be as tough as they were he had to prove himself by joining. He also recalled that when he was twelve years old he saw a Chicano Marine walking through his barrio in the blue dress uniform returning from the Korean War. Garcia saw how patriotic and warrior-like he looked, and he felt that in order to be somebody of importance he had to join the Marines.²¹ Garcia embodies the patriotism of wanting to belong to something and to feel a part of something larger than himself. The patriotism that Garcia and that several other Chicano veterans felt was complex, and it had overtones of the desire to move up in the world in terms of class, position, and respect. In other words many Chicanos saw the military as a chance to become socially mobile and leave the working class that had engulfed their history in the United States and their lives.

Many Chicanos reasoned that if they served in the military like other Chicanos who had served in World War II and in the Korean War they could be respected as first-class citizens and no longer be the second-class segregated citizens that they were treated as. Many Chicanos had seen how the military had become a tool of social mobility for African-Americans, Italian-Americans, and other immigrants and may have believed that this could work for them in the Vietnam War Conflict. Research demonstrates that the Vietnam War did not economically benefit Chicano veterans. Saul Shwartz's article "The Relative Earnings of Vietnam and Korean-Era Veterans" shows that for many Vietnam War veterans the later economic output when compared with non-veteran citizens was comparably low. In 1979 Vietnam veterans were making less money than the average non-veteran, and Vietnam veterans of other races including

²¹ Garcia, Ralph. 2002. Interview by Philip Shaull. December 17. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Mexican-Americans were earning less money than White Vietnam veterans and even less money than non-veterans.²²

Manuel Marin was a Mexican who entered the United States illegally and who after being granted his permanent residency or “green card” felt that it was his duty as a Mexican-American to serve in the military.²³ Marin joined the Navy and stated that he had to give something back to the country where he had lived in for most of his life. He affirmed that he wanted to go to college like his Anglo-American friends but that he was poor, and that his chances of going to college were scarce.²⁴ However Marin and many other Chicano veterans like him affirm the strong sense of patriotism that existed in the Mexican-American community during the earlier stages of the war. Many Mexican-Americans saw that Vietnam would be their chance to prove to other racial and ethnic groups of their country that they were also proud of being American and that they were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of dying in combat. They believed that if they went through with the draft and served in Vietnam that they could be as American as a White person, and treated as first-class citizens. For many Mexican-American soldiers who served in Vietnam the war was not only about the possibility of economic gain, but it was also about gaining social clout.

The war in Vietnam however caused a rift in that averred patriotism by its exploitation of the Chicano soldier and its use of soldiers as cannon fodder in a confusing and aimless conflict. President Lyndon Johnson declared that the war in Vietnam was a war in which communism had to be contained, but many soldiers declared that after several weeks in combat they did not

²² Saul Shwartz, “The Relative Earnings of Vietnam and Korean-Era Veterans,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 39, no. 4 (July 1986): 568.

²³ Charley Trujillo, *Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam* (San Jose, CA: Chusma House Publications, 1990), 41.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

understand the purpose of the United States in Vietnam. Confusion about the purpose and the rationale of the war became widespread in the military fronts and patrols in the jungles of Vietnam, and it created a state of entropy among many soldiers.

Mike Serrano came to embody the confusion that many Mexican-Americans experienced during the war. Serrano stated that his naïveté and romanticisms of the war as a great crusade against the evils of communism came to a halt. He did not care about saving the Vietnamese people anymore; he only cared about making it through his tour of duty alive. Serrano grew to call himself an animal because he only wanted to survive not caring about anything else.²⁵ Due to the fact that the United States had nebulous reasons for being involved in Vietnam many Chicano soldiers lost morale along with their humanity. Juan Ramirez remembers the exact time when he lost his morale and confusion about his involvement in the war. Ramirez was serving in Quang Nam Province in January of 1969 when he came to the realization that he was not accomplishing his goal. Ramirez believed that to fight communism was a noble goal but grew confused because nothing that he was experiencing felt like he or the military were fighting communism. All he saw was the destruction of the lives and property of the Vietnamese people and the support of a dictatorship.²⁶

The sense of patriotism that many Chicanos had before their participation in the war in Vietnam was altered by their experiences in the conflict. The destruction that many witnessed and at times inflicted on the Vietnamese villagers created a sense of confusion regarding why America was involved in the civil war between North and South Vietnam. For many Chicanos who survived the war the violence, destruction, and confusion of the war led to animosity or

²⁵ Dominguez, 127.

²⁶ Ramirez, 50-51.

indifference towards government especially conservative leaders who favored wars or were prone to favor a military interventionist agenda. Robert, a former Marine Corps Sergeant, embodied the tension felt toward the government by stating if he knew then what he knows now he would have never gone to the war, because it was a situation where “American kids were dying every day and there was no clear objective.”²⁷ Many Chicanos returned from the war with the same feelings, and they were not necessarily feelings of anti-patriotism. Rather the feelings that several Mexican-Americans felt upon their return to America were sentiments that government cannot be blindly trusted.

The hostility and fear that many Chicanos felt towards government upon their return from the war was not new to Mexican-Americans, but it was surprising that the United States acted in a controversial manner. For many Chicanos that were aware of their Mexican roots a corrupt and dictatorial government was to be hated. In Mexico Porfirio Díaz and the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI) were the root causes of Mexicans exchanging their homeland for a life in the United States.²⁸ However for many Chicanos who were not the descendants of the first one-hundred thousand Mexicans that were gained through the Treaty of Guadalupe, the idea that the imaginary savior nation was wrong surprised them. In other words many Chicanos had an image of the United States as a great nation that supported freedom and democracy, but this image was shattered for several Chicanos when the Vietnam War occurred. Many Mexican-American Vietnam War veterans were still patriotic but had grown suspicious and critical of the American government. Thus, their perceptions of government were altered into being more cautious of conservative ideas about war than being blindly patriotic. Salvador Hernandez

²⁷ Ybarra, 178. No last name given by the interviewee.

²⁸ Burton Kirkwood, *The History of Mexico* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 175-177.

Gutierrez a former machine gunner in the Army during the Vietnam War admits that in Vietnam he learned many things and saw many tragedies. Some of the events that he experienced he stated, “were good and some were bad, but I was proud of serving my country and the Purple Heart I received for my wounds were a symbol of valor.”²⁹

Religion should also be considered a factor in the Chicano attitude toward the Vietnam War. Historically, Roman Catholicism in the Chicano and Mexican culture has become a symbol of hope, faith, and mestizaje for the majority. In December of 1531 the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to an Indigenous peasant named Juan Diego near the mountains of Mexico City. The Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to him with brown skin like the skin of the Indigenous and spoke to Juan Diego in Nahuatl the language of many Indigenous people of Mexico. She ordered him to build him a church at the site of Tepeyac, and gave him Castillian roses which do not grow in December to prove that she had truly appeared.³⁰ The Virgin of Guadalupe came to symbolize mestizaje in the manner that she was a symbol to the Spanish and the Indigenous that she was worthy and needed to be respected. The color of her skin was an indicator to the Spanish that she stood on the behalf of the Indigenous people of Mexico, and that she demanded there to be peace among the Spanish and the Indigenous. As time progressed Roman Catholicism was spread throughout all of New Spain through the establishment of missions. The Spanish and the Indigenous mixed heavily with each other and produced mestizos or people of European and Native American descent. Many Chicanos who desired to stay close to their culture tried not to

²⁹ Gutierrez, Salvador Hernandez. 2008. Interview by Steve Pearce. October 31. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

³⁰ John Mini, *The Aztec Virgin: The Secret Mystical Tradition of Our Lady of Guadalupe* (Sausalito, CA: Trans-Hyperborean Institute of Science, 2000), 40-49.

let go of Roman Catholicism and to the Virgin of Guadalupe, because they provide a basis for morality and beliefs.

Communism on the other hand has a variety of notions within its doctrine that outline compassion for other human-beings and call for a just society, but it calls for a suppression of religion. The problem with Christianity is that in the tenets of true Christianity pacificism is expected of a true Christian. Pacificism does not win a proletarian revolution. According to many communists only brute force can conquer capitalism, and that is one reason why communism stands against religion.³¹ Karl Marx viewed religion as a tool that was created by the wealthy in order to create a sense of false hope for the working classes in order to keep them docile. Lenin was particularly hostile towards religion and identified atheism as an inseparable part of scientific socialism. He stated that religion must be combatted, and that religion was a reactionary method by the bourgeoisie to enslave the masses.³²

To some Chicanos communism stood against their beliefs, faith, and culture even though many of its tenets may have favored working class Mexican-Americans. Many Chicanos saw the fight against North Vietnam and the communists as a noble act, and wanted to see democracy established in South Vietnam, but the type of government that was established was not what many wanted. In the early years of America's involvement in the war Vietnamese Catholics from North Vietnam fled by the hundreds of thousands to South Vietnam in the effort to escape religious persecution by Ho Chi Minh and the communists. Ngo Dinh Diem the ruler of South Vietnam along with the United States saw this as an opportunity to rally support for democracy

³¹ Leslie Mason, "The Conflict Between Communism and Religion," *The Communist Review* (2007), http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/periodicals/communist_review/1924/02/mason.htm (accessed January 3, 2013).

³² Vladimir Ilich Lenin, *Essay on Religion by Lenin*, (Forgotten Books, 2012), 10.

and the freedom of religious expression in South Vietnam. Strong efforts were made by the Roman Catholic Church to let the world know what was occurring in Vietnam by sending popular religious clergymen and women to Vietnam. The priest Patrick O'Connor chronicled the sufferings of the refugees and Pope Pius XII showed strong support for South Vietnam.³³

Even though many Chicanos heavily sympathized with Vietnamese Catholics and stood against communism several lost the belief that they were fighting communism in Vietnam. Juan Ramirez asserts that he felt that he was not acting as a true Catholic when he was relocating villagers during Johnson's Strategic Hamlet Program. Ramirez describes feeling nothing like he thought he would feel during war. Ramirez stated, "the test of manhood was not there, and it was nothing like the army conquests of John Wayne my childhood hero."³⁴ Killing people became a contradiction for many Chicano soldiers who struggled with this confusion. It was difficult for many Mexican-American soldiers who came from a working-class background to fight working-class people who it seemed were fighting against tyranny and oppression. Diem was a tyrant who cared only about himself and the elite, and quickly several Chicanos realized that they were helping someone who did not deserve their help.

The act of being a warrior had been a cultural characteristic for many Mexican-Americans for centuries but killing people was a contradiction to their religious identity and beliefs which can be considered a great dichotomy in Chicano culture. Mike Serrano recalled that he felt guilty and confused about being a soldier and taking part in killing enemy combatants. At one point in his tour of Vietnam he went to speak to a Catholic priest, and confronted him. Serrano asked the priest how the priest could give the soldiers blessings from

³³ Jacobs, 136-137.

³⁴ Ramirez, 42-43.

God right before they went out into the jungle to kill people. Serrano confessed that the answer the priest referenced to from the Old Testament was not satisfactory to him, and that it did not change the guilt he felt from the violence he experienced.³⁵ From these accounts it can be inferred that war and brutality never bring about true peace or justice.

For several Chicano soldiers the war brought conflict to their Catholic Christian religious identity. Antonio P. Bustamante discussed his feelings of duality between right and wrong in an oral history. Bustamante declared that he had no regrets and yet at the same time some regrets regarding his participation in the war in Vietnam. He did not regret fighting communism, like many Chicanos he felt animosity and hostility toward communism's stance towards religion but maybe he did not feel hostility towards socialism. However he did feel a strong sense of regret for participating in a war that cost the lives of more than 58,000 military servicemen and women. Bustamante reminisced with regret at the destruction of Vietnamese lives, children, property, and land by the military. He claimed that as a Catholic these things that occurred in Vietnam have been difficult to cope with after the fighting.³⁶

The war in Vietnam had a profound impact on the religious characteristic of identity in many Chicanos by questioning how even in the fight against communism a religious institution could stand for war. The inhumanity that many Mexican-American veterans witnessed and experienced created a sense of conflict for many of them. The war allowed these Chicanos to question certain notions of the Catholic Church and while it may not have created atheists out of these Mexican-American veterans it did create awareness that the Church may not always be correct. Many Chicanos after their participation in the war seemed to veer more towards the

³⁵ Dominguez, 129.

³⁶ Bustamante, Antonio P. 2010. Interview by Debbie Lopez. March 7. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

writings of the Catholic monk Thomas Merton. Merton stood on the side of pacificism. He heavily criticized Karl Marx for his desire to spread atheism and to combat religion.³⁷ However Merton also criticized the use of violence to accomplish peace, justice, or democracy, and was a strong opponent to American foreign policy in Vietnam. To make war in Vietnam was not an act of God even if it was in the effort to fight communism.³⁸ For many Chicano veterans the war in Vietnam was not truly fighting communism it was instead defending American corporate interests and protecting an oppressive dictatorship; one that was initially headed by Ngo Dinh Diem and then replaced by another headed by Nguyen Van Thieu.

Fighting communism in support of capitalist interests created a sense of conflict in numerous Mexican-American soldiers, because many Chicanos had feelings of sympathy for peasant farmers reminiscent of their upbringings. In other words ideas of a peasant fighting for a piece of the land he toiled on for most of his life was not contrary to the feelings that some Chicanos held against wealthy landlords who reaped the profits of their labor. In a sense David R. Roediger's theories of the privilege of being white and of the upper classes creates a nexus with this discussion of the sympathy of some Chicano soldiers with Vietnamese peasants.³⁹ Roediger states that the masses are fooled by the concept of race in order to create a division between the working classes and this division is clearly exemplified in the Vietnam War. This exemplification is demonstrated not just in the fact that American soldiers of the working classes were fighting peasants many of whom wanted a socialist political system of some sort but also in

³⁷ Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968), 21-23.

³⁸ Thomas Merton, "Note for Ave Maria," *Passion for Peace: The Social Essays*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997) 323.

³⁹ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York, NY: Verso, 2007).

the fact that there existed disparities in the platoons, squadrons, and regiments in the military between the white soldiers and the minority soldiers.

In the Vietnam War there existed a large force that drove numerous Chicanos as well as other soldiers to experience changes in their identities and in their perspectives regarding the validity of the war. Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Thieu became the two most powerful men in the Republic of South Vietnam. They came to ostensibly espouse democracy and a parliamentary system; however, the reality was far from the idealism of democratic institutions, and in practice the people of South Vietnam perceived of Diem and Thieu's policies as authoritarian.

When Diem became president of South Vietnam he deterred the land redistributions that the Viet Cong had muscled through coercion. The Viet Cong had managed to intimidate landowners in South Vietnam to vacate their land and then the Viet Cong redistributed the land to peasant farmers. However landowners composed a large segment of Diem's political followers and many landowners were also Catholic, so Diem reversed the land seizures and returned the landowners their property. Diem's regime did not conduct these policies in a peaceful manner and was known to be quite barbaric in accomplishing his objectives.⁴⁰ Diem did not seek to share much of his powers either and became the antithesis of democracy as he sought to centralize power.⁴¹ Democracy was not a virtue that Diem shared with America; however, American officials like Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, Kennedy, and Johnson saw Diem as the man that could at least keep communism from taking over South Vietnam.

⁴⁰ Michael H. Hunt, ed., *A Vietnam War Reader: A Documentary from American and Vietnamese Perspectives* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 44-45.

⁴¹ Jacobs, 183.

Multitudes of Mexican-American soldiers were not oblivious to the atrocities that occurred in South Vietnam, and saw the nation as essentially backwards. Ray, a former sergeant in the Army described that he saw South Vietnam as a place that endorsed immoral behavior. Ray stated that Saigon “was a place where prostitution flourished and drinking and drug-use were prevalent.”⁴² Raul, a former Army soldier also discussed his opinion of Saigon and the South Vietnamese government. Raul claimed that he never questioned that communism was wrong, because of its animosity towards religion and its desire to simply concentrate power from capitalist moguls to communist moguls. However he questioned what was right about the Thieu regime, because he saw that it neglected the people of South Vietnam. Raul described Saigon as the city of a million prostitutes and beggars, and questioned if that was what America was fighting to establish.⁴³ Perhaps what many Chicanos saw in South Vietnamese cities like Saigon led them to believe that America was losing the war and not achieving a real objective. Joe Lopez a former veteran of the Vietnam War concluded that, “South Vietnam had many prostitutes and the government did nothing to help out the poor people of South Vietnam. It was the South Vietnamese dictators who themselves lost the support of the people not Ho Chi Minh.”⁴⁴

Numerous Chicano soldiers experienced several defeats in morale in the war in Vietnam that affected their identity and changed how they felt towards the war especially as feeling that the war was a form of socio-economic mobility. The largest collection of attacks by the communist forces that affected morale was the Tet Offensive spearheaded by the Viet Cong or

⁴² Ybarra, 124. No last name given by the interviewee.

⁴³ Ybarra, 66. No last name given by the interviewee.

⁴⁴ Joe Lopez, interview by Juan C. Trejo, January 7, 2013, transcript, Kennesaw, GA.

National Liberation Front. The plans for the *Tet Mau Than* or New Year of the Monkey offensive were completed in 1967 by North Vietnamese diplomats in Hanoi. The offensive was geared towards breaking the South Vietnamese armed forces and convincing Americans that the war was unwinnable by targeting urban areas in South Vietnam.⁴⁵

The Tet Offensive began on January 31, 1968 with the communist forces numbering above 80,000. The Viet Cong and other guerillas attacked almost all provincial capitals and most major cities from the Demilitarized Zone to the Gulf of Thailand. However the most important battles took place in Saigon, Quang Tri, Tam Ky, Hue City, Khe Sanh, and Chu Lai.⁴⁶ The battles were fierce and claimed the lives of many soldiers and civilians. The Viet Cong massacred many South Vietnamese non-combatants which added to the shock that the Tet Offensive produced in American soldiers and South Vietnamese soldiers. The numbers are not certain but estimates state that after the three phases of the Tet Offensive around 40,000 to 80,000 communist troops were killed while 14,000 civilians also lost their lives.⁴⁷

In discussing military strategy the Tet Offensive was a complete failure for the communist forces. While they proved that they could launch an offensive of such a great size on the American and South Vietnamese militaries they took heavy casualties and lost many soldiers. However the Tet Offensive managed to crush the morale of soldiers and numerous Chicano soldiers felt the pinch. Henry Hernandez who served in the Marines recalled that the fight for Hue City was gruesome and endless. The resistance that American forces encountered in taking control of Hue City was fierce. Hernandez stated that his Marines took heavy casualties and that

⁴⁵ James H. Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 10-11.

⁴⁶ Willbanks, 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

the fight lasted twenty-one days in order to defeat the Viet Cong guerillas.⁴⁸ The shock tactic that the guerillas in the Tet Offensive employed also brought a heightened sense of awareness by soldiers. In other words troops in general felt less fearful of danger in the rear areas but after the Tet Offensive it was typical of soldiers to carry grenades and other weapons with them constantly in areas that were once considered safe.⁴⁹ Even though the American forces inflicted a much higher casualty rate on the communist forces during the Tet Offensive the Viet Cong and other guerillas had managed to distort the mentality of the Americans.

Several Mexican-American soldiers and civilians began to grow impatient with the effort to deter communism from spreading into South Vietnam and began to view the war as unwinnable. Many Chicanos at home became deeply involved in the anti-war movement as they saw the war becoming too large. Many of them, including war veterans, joined activist movements that called for an end to the war and a moratorium on the amount of Chicanos that were being sent to Vietnam. These organizations included the Mexican-American Political Association, the Mexican-American Youth Organization, the Catolicos por la Raza, and many more activist organizations that sought an end to Chicano participation in the war.⁵⁰ By 1968 the Johnson administration had about 600,000 troops stationed in Vietnam.⁵¹ Many of these troops were Chicanos because of the program that the Johnson administration had instituted seeking to draft young men from urban areas into the military in order to “improve” their futures. As a result of the Tet Offensive and Johnson’s troop escalation in South Vietnam many Chicanos at

⁴⁸ Dominguez, 32-33.

⁴⁹ Garcia.

⁵⁰ Oropeza, 73, 95, 147.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Melvin R. Laird, Secretary of Defense Histories* (Washington, DC, 2012).

home expressed their staunch disapproval with the war and even took part in several moratoriums with the goal of ending the draft of Chicanos into the military.⁵² While not all Chicanos agreed with staging protests to end the war in Vietnam, the morale of many Chicanos that fought in the war did decline and their perception that the war could have been a stepping stone into middle-class American life was fading.

The American support for the dictatorships and corrupt regimes of Diem and Thieu made several Chicano soldiers feel that they were playing an oppressive role in the war instead of successfully deterring communism from spreading into South Vietnam. The goal of seeing a South Vietnamese government that truly tried to help its people, and was dedicated to democratic elections was not seen by numerous Chicano troops. Therefore the morale and spirit of fighting the war decreased and changed the attitudes of multitudes of Chicanos towards governments going to war. The identities of many Mexican-Americans regarding war as a means of accomplishing change were affected by witnessing these dictatorships. The Tet Offensive simply managed to demonstrate to many Chicano soldiers that the people of South Vietnam were not content with the status quo regime, and that American politicians were not doing what needed to be done to bring about true democracy in South Vietnam. Perhaps for many Vietnamese Ho Chi Minh's ideas were a better answer than Diem and Thieu's ideas of authoritarianism and the continued exploitation of peasants and the working classes.

The escalation of soldiers into Vietnam and the Tet Offensive were two notions that lowered morale for several Mexican-American soldiers. However the issue of racism and racial tensions was also a factor in the diminishing support for the war among many Chicano soldiers, and racism affected the identity of many Chicanos after the war. Discrimination was not a new concept to Mexican-Americans during the war, but it was surprising as many Hispanics did not

⁵² Oropeza, 135.

expect to feel discrimination in the military, instead many believed that the military would make them be more American and give them the opportunities of upward mobility that they desired. It was hard to grasp the fact that Chicanos were in the military to fight for America, and that their sacrifice did not make them American enough. The racism that Chicanos experienced from other soldiers not just white soldiers but black soldiers as well is a component of Roediger's theory of whiteness and the concept of race and ethnicity creating divisions among the lower economic classes instead of unity.

Many Hispanics were subjected to racism before the war in Vietnam, and even segregation was not uncommon for them to experience. In the state of Texas the separation of Hispanics from other European-Americans became a social custom. When the Texas Revolution had succeeded in separating Texas from Mexico Hispanics were viewed as untrustworthy. Towns in Texas were usually separated into three parts which consisted of an Anglo section, a Hispanic section, and a Black section. Many Chicanos could not interact with Anglo-Americans in churches, restaurants, theatres, and many other public places. Schools were also segregated but because Hispanics were partially White and considered White by authorities Hispanic schools did not receive the funding of the separate but equal clause.⁵³ Chicanos had to endure segregation in the state of Texas until the Supreme Court ruled in *Hernández v. State of Texas* in 1954 that Jim Crow laws could not be applied to Hispanics, because Hispanics contained European blood.

The state of California did not offer any more equality than the state of Texas did. There existed strong prejudice against Chicanos in California, and school segregation was quite common. Laws were enacted in the late 1800s that prohibited Native-American, Black, and

⁵³ Texas State Historical Association, "Segregation," <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pks01> (accessed January 9, 2013).

Asian children from attending school with Anglo-American children. Several Hispanic students were also discriminated against in California, and school segregation for Chicanos did not end until a federal appellate court upheld in *Mendez v. Westminster* in 1947 that Hispanics could not be discriminated against in public schools and that segregation of Hispanics was unconstitutional.⁵⁴ However the history of segregation regarding Chicanos did not deter Hispanics from enlisting voluntarily into the military during the Vietnam War, but as mentioned earlier this may have been due to the fact that many Mexican-Americans did not have many economic opportunities after high school. Enlistment into the military during the Vietnam War was the only option for many Mexican-Americans after high school, because it offered equality in the hiring process unlike many jobs in the world outside of the military. It could have appeared reasonable to Chicanos that military service was their key to success and upward mobility.

Chicanos come from a mixed heritage of European and Indigenous ancestry that is now living in the United States. The issues that they have had with racism and discrimination made them feel like they were second-class citizens unable to gain full citizenship or full acceptance into American society. Enlistments into the military and military service were ways that many Mexican-Americans could be accepted by non-Hispanic Americans at least in theory, and as a form of paying employment.⁵⁵

Many Chicano soldiers felt discrimination in the military and that changed their hopes and perceptions of how they viewed American society. Juan Ramirez discusses his encounters with racism and talks about his squad leader named Jensen. Jensen was racist and hated

⁵⁴ National Archives, "School Desegregation and Civil Rights Stories: Orange County, California," <http://www.archives.gov/philadelphia/education/desegregation/orange-county.html> (accessed January 8, 2013).

⁵⁵ Oropeza, 43-44.

minorities. At the time that Ramirez met him Jensen did not have much time left in his tour of duty, and because of his short time Jensen would send minorities into the most dangerous missions and areas.⁵⁶ Towards Jensen's last few weeks in Vietnam he would send Ramirez and his squad to patrol areas while he would stay at the command post. Ramirez stated that he "exploded with rage and told my commanding officer that Jensen was no longer fit for duty, and that Jensen did not care about us or our safety."⁵⁷ What Ramirez experienced with his racist squad leader in Vietnam was simply a representation of the discrimination that existed in America at the time, and that had travelled with his platoon to the war in Vietnam. Except that in this case racism became a problem in order to survive as many Chicanos were constantly being put in positions of danger because they were considered less important and more expendable.

The notion of racism was something that plagued multitudes of Chicano soldiers in many things that they did during the Vietnam War. The notion of being promoted to higher ranks in the military was more difficult for several Chicano soldiers than it was for Anglo soldiers. Juan Jose Pena who would later become a doctor in Mexican-American Studies recalls his experiences with racism in the military as condescending. Pena remembers an occasion when his senior non-commissioned officer told him that he had great skills and discipline but that he would never become a commissioned officer.⁵⁸ Pena believed that the NCO was alluding to the fact that minorities made up a large segment of enlisted and drafted soldiers but made up a very small segment of college-educated officers.

⁵⁶ Ramirez, 52.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁸ Dominguez, 165.

Racism towards Chicanos during the Vietnam War era was also institutionalized by the federal government in a certain way. In other words Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, and the military had instituted a program called Project 100,000 which sought to lower the standards of the Armed Forces Qualification Test and to provide remedial help for those who were unable to pass the tests.⁵⁹ What Project 100,000 really did was that it sought to recruit more Hispanics, Blacks, and Native-Americans who because of inferior educational systems could not pass the qualification tests and were therefore unfit for military service. Draft deferments for college educated students proved that minorities were bigger targets for military service as many Chicanos note that it was almost impossible for them to obtain a draft deferment because of poor education. Louis Rodriguez a former soldier recalls that he was drafted into the Army and that he had no choice regarding which branch of the military he could serve in or where he could be stationed.⁶⁰ Rodriguez is just one of many Chicanos who were drafted into the military and for many reasons regarding socio-economic conditions, patriotism, or ideas to combat communism chose to stay and not try to dodge the draft. Racism however played a part in the amount of Chicanos who were drafted into the military during the Vietnam War at the federal level. The draft made many Chicanos feel like they were second-class citizens in that they were not afforded the option of joining the military but were for the most part required to. This form of institutionalized discrimination further added to the alienation that many Chicanos felt towards government. In other words the draft and Project 100,000 changed the political identity of several Chicanos, and made them feel fear towards government.

⁵⁹ The Vietnam Center and Archive, "Vietnam Archive Robert S. McNamara Resources," <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/resources/mcnamara/> (accessed January 1, 2013).

⁶⁰ Rodriguez, Louis. 2005. Interview by Debra Murphy. July 28. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

When many Chicano soldiers returned from the war in Vietnam discrimination towards them continued at various degrees. Juan Ramirez recalls being pulled over by a police officer who mocked his military service and accused Ramirez of being a bathroom cleaner in the military.⁶¹ Many Chicanos also experienced difficulties in obtaining employment because of their ethnicity and prior military service. Joaquin M. Jauregui a former soldier in the Army claimed that he got fired from a job at a telephone company because he was not an American citizen even though he had served in the Vietnam War. Jauregui admitted that that incident drove him to consume alcohol in heavier amounts.⁶² Racism was a factor that affected the self-esteem of many Chicano soldiers, and that many Chicanos had to deal with. The incidents of discrimination that occurred in the Vietnam War were representative of the problems that American society had at the time with prejudice against Hispanics.

All of the factors that affected the lives of numerous Chicanos in the Vietnam War were exacerbated by the use of drugs and alcohol. Racism was a problem that Hispanics have had to deal with for all of their lives but the war was unique in that drugs and alcohol were used as a means of recreation by some soldiers during and after the conflict. The hippie movement in America and new ideas regarding peace and free love were entangled within heavy drug use. That culture of using drugs and alcohol to free the mind was brought to the Vietnam War by American soldiers. When soldiers returned to the United States many of them encountered a society in which the use of illegal substances was on the rise. As a result many Chicano veterans turned into drug-addicts and alcohol abusers.

⁶¹ Ramirez, 91.

⁶² Jauregui, Joaquin M. 2009. Interview by Efrain Avila. March 11. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

The use of drugs and alcohol for many Chicano soldiers began in the jungles of Vietnam. Southeast Asia has been a producer of heroin and opium for centuries, and as Juan Ramirez described it heroin and marijuana could be found in abundance in Vietnam at very cheap prices.⁶³ Using drugs and alcohol became a form of escape for many soldiers who were in Vietnam and who did not want to be there. Several Chicanos who were constantly facing death in the front lines of South Vietnam numbed the mental pain by taking drugs and alcohol. Officers would turn a blind eye to the use of alcohol by the “juicers” and to the use of drugs by the “slammers.”

For many Chicanos the use of drugs and alcohol may have had to do with the fact that many of them came from impoverished backgrounds and poor neighborhoods where drugs were already a problem and were present. The fact that drugs were more readily available in the neighborhoods of minorities put many Mexican-Americans more at risk of drug-use and alcoholism as opposed to their fellow white non-Hispanic soldiers. Since draft deferments were typically unavailable to minorities and Project 100,000 made sure to enlist young people from poorer urban neighborhoods it cannot be surprising that drug culture was exported to Vietnam. The anti-war movement and the hippie movement also made sure to incorporate middle class young adults into drug culture. Soldiers began using marijuana as early as 1963 when the war was still in its early stages, and in 1967 a federal investigation revealed that marijuana was used at least sixteen times at the Marine Corps brig in Da Nang. Heroin was used by an estimated 15 to 20 percent of soldiers in the Mekong Delta, and could cost as low as \$1 dollar per dose.⁶⁴ Not all Chicano soldiers were drug users but there was a significant amount of soldiers from all

⁶³ Ramirez, 112-113.

⁶⁴ Peter Brush, “Higher and Higher: American Drug Use in Vietnam,” *Vietnam*, December 2002, <http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/central/Brush/American-drug-use-vietnam.htm> (accessed January 3, 2013).

backgrounds that became heavier drug users and alcohol consumers because of the Vietnam War.

When many Mexican-American soldiers returned home from Vietnam the addiction to drugs and alcohol continued as many Chicanos felt discriminated against in housing, employment, and in everyday social life. In 1973 a White House coordinated survey discovered that out of the thousands of heroin users that returned from the war in Vietnam one-third were still addicted.⁶⁵ The combination of depression from the atrocities that many Chicano veterans had experienced in the war as well as the helplessness that many felt upon their return home fueled the increasing turn to self-medication. This self-medication came in the form of using substances that were readily available without the need to seek medical help or a prescription. The trauma that they suffered in the jungles of Vietnam was brought home and was exacerbated by problems that included racism, unemployment, and the neglect of society towards the Vietnam veteran. Not only did many Chicanos not receive a hero's welcome when they returned to the United States, for many the war proved not to bring many positive factors in their lives. The war, drugs, alcohol, discrimination, mental, and physical issues did not add up to any upward mobility in their socio-economic state.

The feelings of guilt and remorse regarding the problems associated with the war in Vietnam were one of the causes for increased alcohol and drug abuse by many Chicano veterans as well as other minorities and white soldiers. David a former Corporal in the Army described his feelings of remorse by stating that he felt that there were things that he could not change. People that he had to kill in the war brought back bad memories and nightmares. For a long time David drank alcohol in dangerous amounts in order to avoid the nightmares in which the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Vietnam War would all come back. He confessed that he was able to escape these dreams because he was constantly inebriated.⁶⁶ The desire to escape the memories of the war became a common goal for many Hispanic soldiers who felt anxiety about the destruction the war had caused. Abran F. Montoya claimed that after the war his consumption of alcohol increased in order to cope with the changes from being in a war zone to being in a more calm area. He would constantly have flashbacks and nightmares and he admitted that his problem with alcohol affected his marriage. However he declared that “it was the love and compassion of my wife that helped me become stronger as a man and quit drinking.”⁶⁷

The use of drugs and alcohol by many soldiers upon their return from Vietnam changed their behavior as many no longer acted in the manner that they used to before the war. Louis Rodriguez declared that he became a hard-core alcoholic, and that when he was intoxicated he would argue with his wife; however, she also pushed him to seek help even though it proved to be a tough journey to recovery for him.⁶⁸ Juan Ramirez in his book describes the issues he had with drugs and alcohol upon his return from the war as detrimental to his family. Ramirez however would take years to recover from his problems with drugs and alcohol and ended up divorced from his first wife due to his problems coping with a non-combative environment.⁶⁹ The alcohol and drug abuse problems that many Chicano soldiers experienced in the Vietnam War and upon their return to America managed to destroy families and change who these

⁶⁶ Ybarra, 144-145. No last name given by the interviewee.

⁶⁷ Montoya, Abran F., Jr. 2002. Interview by Dena R. Montoya Osborn. December 7. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁶⁸ Rodriguez.

⁶⁹ Ramirez, 160-161.

Chicanos were. For many who were lucky sobriety came as a blessing but for a few others homelessness and death took a toll on their lives.

American society helped to create a negative atmosphere for several Chicano veterans upon their return home. Antonio P. Bustamante described his return to America as hostile, because protesters and hippies treated them with disdain. Bustamante declared, “upon landing at the airport protesters demonstrated animosity towards me and other veterans by insulting us and spitting at us.”⁷⁰ He noted that even his family and friends were not as compassionate with him as they should have been.⁷¹ It was hypocritical of Americans to treat veterans in this manner, because veterans especially Hispanics had little choice in going off to fight the war in Vietnam. In addition, the neglect that many Chicanos encountered by the federal government upon their return from the war had created resentment among veterans. For many years after the war many veterans were ignored by the government and there were not enough services that targeted the problems that veterans and many Chicano veterans especially were going through. In other words the few programs geared towards assisting Vietnam War veterans were less available to minority veterans because of the instances of racism that some experienced when they attempted to seek help.

Racism influenced how numerous Chicano Vietnam veterans felt about their identity of being Americans and Mexicans synchronously. The Chicano veteran had to cope with the idea that he had served in an unpopular war and that he was poorly welcomed home, and that middle-class American life and privilege was far from reach. Even though he had left his country for patriotism or simply because he had no other option he was not received as a better American for participating in the conflict. Upon the return to America many Chicanos were still treated as

⁷⁰ Bustamante.

⁷¹ Ibid.

second-class citizens not just by their government but also by other Americans. Unlike the major strides that participation in World War II had for African-Americans such as Executive Order 9811 that essentially desegregated the military and helped African-Americans gain the ranks of officers and non-commissioned officers in the military, Mexican-Americans were still treated as second-class citizens.⁷² The large-scale Civil Rights Movement that accompanied African-American participation in the Vietnam War did not occur for Chicanos, and instead Chicanos had their own Civil Rights Movement on a much smaller-scale when compared with the Civil Rights Movement that African-Americans staged. The Chicano Movement was strong but it did not see major federal legislation come to fruition because of its efforts and it can be argued that many Mexican-Americans have benefitted more from the legislation that came from the Civil Rights Movement as led by African-Americans; for example, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The brutality that many Chicano veterans experienced in Vietnam created severe changes in many of them that influenced their characters, personalities, and emotions. The medical term for this disorder that was brought back to America by veterans was titled Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and its symptoms included upsetting memories, nightmares, flashbacks, feelings of hopelessness, and survivors' guilt among many more. PTSD affected many veterans and their families and was a disorder in which the government did not rapidly create programs to provide medical treatment for. Many Chicano veterans had a lot of problems associated with PTSD due to discrimination in VA hospitals and the strong feelings of denial regarding

⁷² Voice of America, "African-American Soldiers in World War II Helped Pave Way for Integration of US Military," <http://www.voanews.com/content/a-13-2005-05-10-voa47-67929177/396374.html> (accessed April 6, 2013).

symptoms of the disorder.⁷³ The US Department of Veterans' Affairs reported that there are more than 830,000 Vietnam War veterans living with service-related PTSD, and that the percent of PTSD incidents is higher for Vietnam veterans than veterans of the Gulf War or veterans of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The report states that the incidence of PTSD is higher among veterans who were in infantry regiments.⁷⁴ This means that Chicano Vietnam veterans have higher incidents of PTSD because many of them served in infantry units as opposed to support units.

In the dialogue regarding PTSD many Hispanic soldiers felt that the federal government as well as American society had neglected their problems, and in some instances ridiculed their service in Vietnam. Bobby J. Montano a former Hispanic soldier reported that he struggled with his problems of PTSD for a long time, and that he felt that the government did not try to tackle the issues of PTSD as much as they could have. Montano instead of seeking help from a federal program to battle his PTSD symptoms eventually joined a support group which was started up by other Vietnam veterans. He stated that relationships with other people were difficult for him because of his problems associated with PTSD.⁷⁵ Relationships with family and close friends were deeply affected by PTSD in several Chicano soldiers who had returned from Vietnam. Juan Ramirez describes his problems with the disorder as shattering to his relationship with his wife. Ramirez recalled one incident in which he had a flashback of the war and had ran to the edge of a

⁷³ Sonya Rhee and Charley Trujillo, *Discussion Guide: Soldados Chicanos in Viet Nam* (Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Service, 2003), 4-5.

⁷⁴ Our Health Policy Matters, "Veterans and Mental Illness," <http://pgionfriddo.blogspot.com/2011/06/veterans-and-mental-illness.html> (Accessed April 1, 2013).

⁷⁵ Montano, Bobby J. 2011. Interview by Rachel Trujillo. October 26. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

cliff. His wife chased him down and he realized that he had problems due to the war and that he needed to seek help.⁷⁶

The problem with PTSD for many Chicanos was that their culture of machismo was too strong to recognize that they were mentally helpless. Older generations of Chicano veterans who had fought in Korea and in both World Wars had suppressed symptoms of PTSD and covered them with machismo and alcohol use. However the war in Vietnam was different for many Chicanos because they did not receive the treatment that older veterans received. In other words when many Chicanos returned home they returned to a society that looked down upon Vietnam veterans while veterans from World War I and World War II still experienced racism but returned to a society where their service was somewhat appreciated. Joaquin M. Jauregui demonstrates his resentment towards a society that was not the victims of the draft or who had the means to avoid the draft by recalling that when someone discovered that he was a veteran of Vietnam they automatically assumed things about him. Jauregui averred, "I could never wear my uniform in the United States without someone acting in a hostile manner towards me."⁷⁷

The mental problems that were associated with PTSD affected numerous Chicano veterans in a negative manner, and contributed to their problems in finding and holding employment. PTSD hurt these Chicanos who could have been productive members of society, who instead abused drugs and alcohol as a means of self-medication. Without the strong support of government agencies to provide outreach programs for veterans of color Chicanos with PTSD resorted to find solutions of their own sometimes productive but many times destructive. As a result homelessness in the United States rose especially in the veteran category. The National

⁷⁶ Ramirez, 160-161.

⁷⁷ Jauregui.

Coalition for Homeless Veterans concluded that 23 percent of all homeless people in America are veterans, and that of these 47 percent are Vietnam veterans.⁷⁸ It is safe to state that for many Mexican-American Vietnam War veterans the war was not an opportunity to rise to middle-class American life, but instead was the cause for many socio-economic problems.

PTSD was a major result for veterans of the Vietnam War and so was the physical ailments that resulted from the military's use of a defoliant known as Agent Orange. The military would use the chemical that contained dioxin in order to destroy vegetation in the dense jungles of Vietnam. The purpose was to remove any cover which would be of use to the communist forces; however, dioxin has been proven to be highly toxic to humans. Numerous cancers and even heart disease have been attributed to Agent Orange, and these include cancer of the prostate, lymph nodes, spleen, liver, bone marrow, and many more.⁷⁹ It can be argued that the production of Agent Orange by the Monsanto Corporation and the Dow Chemical company was a way in which functionaries of the federal government profited from the war in Vietnam by handing down government contracts. The cost was high in the veteran community and proved to have severe physical ramifications for multitudes of Chicano veterans.

Abran F. Montoya describes his problems with Agent Orange as detrimental to his health and to the relationship he has had with his family. Montoya's testimony confirms that the government was slow in their response to the issues associated with Agent Orange, and that at many points they neglected the repercussions. Montoya states that his diabetes, kidney problems, and blood problems have all been linked to his exposure to Agent Orange.⁸⁰ Ray a former

⁷⁸ Rhee and Trujillo, 7.

⁷⁹ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Veterans' Diseases Associated With Agent Orange* (Washington, DC, 2012).

⁸⁰ Montoya.

Sergeant in the Army also had severe problems linked to both PTSD and Agent Orange. He recalled that the military would release thousands of pounds of dioxin from helicopters and airplanes in order to defoliate the jungle. However he remembers that the soldiers were told that it was harmless to humans, and that sometimes they were misled regarding its use. Sometimes they were misinformed that Agent Orange was really mosquito repellent. Ray's experience with the side effects of Agent Orange was terrifying to him and his family. He had trouble talking to his wife and family about his experiences in Vietnam and about the physical side effects that were happening to him. He remembers that his body would constantly break-out in rashes that were unexplainable by doctors and that at the same time he would have nightmares about the war as a symptom of PTSD.⁸¹

The difficulties that many Chicano veterans of the Vietnam War experienced with PTSD and Agent Orange produced changes and severe problems in their physical health. Repercussions came for several Chicanos as many of these veterans were neglected by the federal government and treated as expendable in the military. Their mental and physical identities of who they once were for many Chicanos were dramatically altered after their participation in the war. The tension and hostility that many Hispanics feel towards government, especially towards more conservative administrations, can be interpreted as a reaction to the neglect that the military and government agencies demonstrated towards these issues. The problems that were created between some Chicano veterans and their families were in fact changes in cultural norms in Mexican-American culture. Communication between a veteran and his family deteriorated in the face of the struggle against the symptoms of PTSD and Agent Orange. The pride that many

⁸¹ Ybarra, 126-127. No last name given by the interviewee.

Chicanos thought they would feel due to their participation in the war for many of them did not exist, and more money and better paying jobs for many did not exist either.

The Vietnam War for many Chicanos had several changes in how they felt about being Mexican-American. Many Chicano soldiers experienced changes in the way that they related to family members and friends. The cultural tie that Hispanics share in being emotionally close to family was distorted by their participation in the war, and this led several Chicanos to be more withdrawn from family and friends. The cultural tradition that Mexicans and Mexican-Americans had established as a means to survive amid poverty and struggles with oppressive governments was rattled by the emotional problems that the Vietnam War caused. This was quite possibly due to the violence against civilians that some Chicano soldiers encountered and may have been a part of. This was also due to the brutal tactics that the communist forces used against American soldiers and civilians that caused many soldiers to return from Vietnam traumatized.

The perception of religion and patriotism was another characteristic in the cultural orientation of Chicanos that was affected by the Vietnam conflict. Many Mexican-Americans stood firmly against the anti-religious tenets of communism, but some understood Christianity's stance against killing people as well, and some even grew sympathetic to socialist ideas of equality and land redistribution. This probably caused some internal conflict to occur, but it remains unclear how Chicano soldiers came to view their place in the Church.

The Vietnam War did not take away Chicanos' patriotism; instead it instilled a fear towards government in some Chicano veterans, and a withdrawal from following government actions without second thoughts. In other words many Chicanos were still very proud to be Mexican-Americans but became skeptical of government or leaned more towards leftist ideas. Joe Lopez stated that he was very proud of being a Mexican-American especially after the

Vietnam War, because he witnessed how hard Chicanos fought on the front lines. However he admitted, “America should only go to war when it is attacked, and we should not go around the world spending money that can be spent at home.”⁸² These ideas of investing and spending money at home most likely mean that funds should be used to develop and assist the lower-classes of Americans that do not have the best access to essential needs such as food, shelter, transportation, education, and skilled employment. The idea of investing more in social programs in the United States and therefore aiding the upward mobility of Mexican-Americans as well as other working class groups shares a connection with David G. Gutiérrez’s theories of the third space and Lester Frank Ward’s theory of the welfare state. Gutiérrez attributed the lower education rates of many Chicanos and Hispanics to the failure of the American education system in adequately providing programs to assist the rapidly-expanding Hispanic and Latino community.⁸³ Gutiérrez added that if only the federal government spent more money on educational programs in the United States instead of relegating many Chicano students to low-level curricula, Chicanos could reach their full intellectual potential.⁸⁴

The support the federal government gave to the dictatorships of Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Thieu was a reason why this skepticism towards government grew among several Chicano Vietnam veterans. The perception of government in the identity of many Chicanos was altered because of the validity of the war in Vietnam. Many Mexican-Americans have long had doubts about the actions of government due to the land incursions of the Manifest Destiny policies of the federal government. Due to patriotism, a warrior culture, and the Chicano stance

⁸² Lopez, Joe.

⁸³ David G. Gutiérrez, “Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the “Third Space”: The Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico,” *The Journal of American History* 86, no.2 (Sept. 1999): 508.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

against communism many Mexican-Americans decided to serve in the war. However as the war's duration prolonged many soldiers observed that democracy was not being instituted in South Vietnam, and that oppressive dictatorships were being backed instead. The endorsing of corrupt governments in Vietnam helped to break the belief in positive government actions, and led some Chicano veterans to become withdrawn from government. Many Chicano Vietnam veterans became discontent with protesters in America who blamed the soldiers for the actions of the war. The anger stems from the fact that many Chicanos did not have the resources to flee from the draft and had no choice but to serve in the military. Ralph Garcia stated that they claimed to be angry at government foreign policy but that in the end it would be lower echelon soldiers who would take the heat for what happened in Vietnam.⁸⁵

The atrocities that many Chicano soldiers were exposed to in the Vietnam War resulted in changes in some veterans' physical and mental health abilities. PTSD became a problem that affected how many Chicanos held relationships with family members, friends, and people of the outside world. Several Chicano veterans had difficulties communicating with their loved ones and for many the result was self-medication in the form of alcohol and drug abuse. For some Chicanos divorce became common and for those who experienced severe symptoms of PTSD homelessness became common. The physically damaging effects of Agent Orange became another struggle that Vietnam veterans experienced. Dioxin produced a malevolent change in the physical attributes of many Mexican-American veterans that increased the social problems that they had.

Chicanos cannot be categorized into one homogenous group as each individual experience varied; however, from this research it can be concluded that the Vietnam War produced many problems and issues for many Mexican-American Vietnam War veterans. The

⁸⁵ Garcia.

Chicano people that served in the war became disconnected with patriotism, and perhaps their entire perspective on social and political relations was altered into a new way of thinking. Voting trends are a prime example that after the Vietnam War many Chicanos including veterans' identities underwent a metamorphosis. For example in the 1976 Presidential Election which occurred one year after the last American helicopter left Vietnam the Democratic candidate James E. Carter won 75 percent of the Hispanic vote. Carter also won almost every county in the heavily Chicano populated Rio Grande Valley in Texas, many Chicano majority counties in New Mexico, and the heavily Chicano populated county of Los Angeles, California.⁸⁶ In that same election Peter Camejo a Hispanic from California ran as a third-party candidate under the Socialist Workers' Party and won about 100,000 votes mostly in the southwest.⁸⁷

The pattern of many Chicanos including several Chicano veterans of tending to vote for more moderate and liberal candidates has not declined since the 1976 Presidential Election. In fact, Democrats can almost always count on winning a majority of the Hispanic and especially the Mexican-American vote. At least 71 percent of all Hispanics consider themselves to hold a moderate or liberal political ideology, and the percentage for Mexican-Americans is believed to be higher than the average for all Hispanics.⁸⁸ For example in the 2008 election in the state of Texas, Chicanos voted for the Democratic candidate by 63 percent and in California by a margin of 74 percent.⁸⁹ That is not to say that all Chicanos are liberals of ideology but a plurality of them

⁸⁶ David Leip, "1976 Presidential Election Results," *David Leip's Atlas of US Presidential Elections*, <http://uselectionatlas.org/> (Accessed February 18, 2013).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Roberto Suro, Richard Fry, and Jeffrey Passel, "Hispanics and the 2004 Election: Population, Electorate, and Voters," *Pew Research Hispanic Center*, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2005/06/27/iv-how-latinos-voted-in-2004/> (Accessed February 18, 2013).

⁸⁹ Mark Hugo Lopez, "The Hispanic Vote in the 2008 Election," *Pew Research Hispanic Center*, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2008/11/05/iv-results-for-california/> (Accessed February 18, 2013).

are and it is a demographic which includes Chicanos who served in the Vietnam War. When veteran Luis Gonzalez commented on his political views he stated, “I don’t belong to any party but I feel like I am more a liberal and independent voter. There is too much exploitation of the poor, especially minorities by the rich.”⁹⁰

This view of politics and social interactions is due to the chaos that many Chicano veterans experienced in the Vietnam War. The chemicals and the weapons that were used to kill many people especially non-combatant civilians were seen as the rich getting richer by using the poor to kill the poor. Many Mexican-American veterans were not naive to what were the true underlying themes and causes of the Vietnam War. Big corporations like Monsanto as stated earlier in this essay were profiteering from government-military contracts at the expense of the lives of soldiers, which for many who served in the war seemed an expendable asset. That is why veterans like Luis Gonzalez and Juan Ramirez became weary of government especially of conservative politicians or liberal politicians with a conservative agenda. Thus the identity of many Chicanos in terms of political and social philosophies went from being one of blind patriotism and more centrist-conservative ideals to one in which many Chicanos became more aware of the true political arena in the United States in which in order to survive many Chicanos had to move to a more centrist-liberal position. For example Ramirez states in the last pages of his testimonial book on his participation in the Vietnam War, “What I have to say, and I’ll say it until the day I die, is that we were wrong, and it is wrong to kill other people in the name of religion and ideologies. And no movie or parade, memorial or book, is going to make me feel good about the Vietnam War just so that my country can send others like me to kill on my

⁹⁰ Gonzalez, Luis.

behalf. I don't want you to die for me and my freedom, young man or young woman..."⁹¹ In effect Ramirez like several other Chicano Vietnam veterans stands against war and the conservative agenda to spread "freedom" to other nations who do not want the form of government that the United States has. A soldier named Frank in Lea Ybarra's book stated that he served in an unfair war in which he saw many things that were unpleasant done to people who were innocent. When Frank was asked if he would ever allow his children to serve in a war he said, "My son and my daughter they know all about Vietnam. From an early age, I've made them aware. I showed them pictures on the map and what went on over there and both my son and my daughter, they're 100 percent against war."⁹²

In a sense the Vietnam War created more liberal-minded citizens because of its atrocities. Besides the fact that war crimes occurred in the Vietnam War and that many Chicano soldiers experienced these crimes and some may have even taken part in them there are other reasons why several Chicano veterans changed their political and social attitudes.

In order to conclude this research project and essay it must be reiterated that many Chicanos could not afford to attend college and did not have the resources or the connections to evade the draft creating an atmosphere in which many Chicanos had no choice but to serve in the war. For some Mexican-Americans the war presented itself as an opportunity for a better future, and that is why many Chicanos were not drafted but voluntarily enlisted into the military. In effect it is a result of these situations that many veterans who returned and who were able to overcome PTSD, drug and alcohol abuse became more inclined to favor government programs that created other alternatives for minority youth to better their futures rather than by joining the

⁹¹ Ramirez, 176.

⁹² Ybarra, 202. No last name given by the interviewee.

military and serving in war. The programs that several Chicanos have supported include educational programs that increase funding for lower-income students, work-study programs, job training and job placement programs, and entitlement programs. It can be inferred that some support these programs because of the aforementioned plurality of moderate and liberal Mexican-Americans and their voting records.

The war in Vietnam was a war that produced changes in the lives in many of the more than 170,000 Mexican Americans who participated in it.⁹³ The characteristics that comprise Mexican-American culture were altered by a government that sought to fix the world while it ignored its own social problems at home. The fight against communism and the details of the domino theory were not well thought out, and democracy in South Vietnam was never truly instituted. As a result many lives were lost in a war in which minorities were drafted and sent to the front lines to fight in disproportionate numbers. The negligence of the discrimination problems in the United States resulted in another front for several Chicano veterans to deal with. The ascendance into a higher socio-economic status for many Mexican-American Vietnam veterans was not achieved; instead many of them lost more of themselves than they gained. They have continuously had to struggle with a society that denigrates Vietnam veterans and discriminates against Chicanos, and they have had to fight for common civil rights against a government that institutionalized racism. The sacrifices that many Chicanos made during the Vietnam War should not be forgotten or dismissed as irrelevant, but it should be regarded as a war that did not provide many socio-economic opportunities or benefits for many Chicanos.

⁹³ Richard Santillan, "Mexican-Americans in Vietnam," *Hispanic America USA*, <http://www.neta.com/~1stbooks/santil.htm> (Accessed February 20, 2013).

Bibliography

- Baca, Herman. "The Chicano Moratorium August 29, 1970, Still Remembered After 35 Years." *La Prensa San Diego*. <http://laprensa-sandiego.org/archieve/august26-05/chicano.htm> (Accessed March 25, 2013).
- Barba, Arturo. "Genoma Destapa Diferencias de Mexicanos." *CNN Expansión*, June 6, 2009. <http://www.cnnexpansion.com/actualidad/2009/06/04/genoma-destapa-diferencias-de-mexicanos> (accessed January 31, 2013).
- Brush, Peter. "Higher and Higher: American Drug Use in Vietnam." *Vietnam*, December 2002, <http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/central/Brush/American-drug-use-vietnam.htm> (accessed January 3, 2013).
- Bustamante, Antonio P. 2010. Interview by Debbie Lopez. March 7. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. New York, NY: Vintage/Random House, 1992.
- Coe, Michael D. and Rex Koontz. *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*. New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, 2002.
- Dominguez, Gil. *They Answered the Call: Latinos in the Vietnam War*. Baltimore, MD: Publish America, 2004.
- García, Mario T., and Sal Castro, *Blowout! Sal Castro & the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011.
- Garcia, Ralph. 2002. Interview by Philip Shaull. December 17. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- Georgia State University. "Demographic Overview of Students." Fall 2009. http://www.gsu.edu/images/institutional_effectiveness/Fall2009DemographicOverview.pdf (Accessed March 25, 2013).
- Gonzalez, Luis. Interview by Juan C. Trejo. December 15, 2012. Transcript. Kennesaw, GA.
- Gutiérrez, David G. "Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the "Third Space": The Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico," *The Journal of American History* 86, no.2 (Sept. 1999): 481-517.
- Gutierrez, Salvador Hernandez. 2008. Interview by Steve Pearce. October 31. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

- Hunt, Michael H., ed. *A Vietnam War Reader: A Documentary from American and Vietnamese Perspectives*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Huntington, Samuel P. "The Hispanic Challenge." *Foreign Policy* no. 141 (March-April 2004): 30-45.
- Jacobs, Seth. *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-1957*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Jauregui, Joaquin M. 2009. Interview by Efrain Avila. March 11. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- Kirkwood, Burton. *The History of Mexico*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilich. *Essay on Religion by Lenin*. Forgotten Books, 2012.
- Leip, David. "1976 Presidential Election Results." *David Leip's Atlas of US Presidential Elections*. <http://uselectionatlas.org/> (Accessed February 18, 2013).
- Lopez, Joe. Interview by Juan C. Trejo. January 7, 2013. Transcript. Kennesaw, GA.
- Lopez, Luis Muñiz. 2009. Interview by William L. Browne. August 7. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- Lopez, Mark Hugo. "The Hispanic Vote in the 2008 Election." *Pew Research Hispanic Center*. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2008/11/05/iv-results-for-california/> (Accessed February 18, 2013).
- Maltby, William S. *The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Mason, Leslie. "The Conflict Between Communism and Religion." *The Communist Review* (2007), http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/periodicals/communist_review/1924/02/mason.htm (accessed January 3, 2013).
- Merton, Thomas. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968.
- . "Note for Ave Maria," *Passion for Peace: The Social Essays*, ed. William H. Shannon. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997.
- Mini, John. *The Aztec Virgin: The Secret Mystical Tradition of Our Lady of Guadalupe*. Sausalito, CA: Trans-Hyperborean Institute of Science, 2000.

- Montano, Bobby J. 2011. Interview by Rachel Trujillo. October 26. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- Montoya, Abran F., Jr. 2002. Interview by Dena R. Montoya Osborn. December 7. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- National Archives. "School Desegregation and Civil Rights Stories: Orange County, California." <http://www.archives.gov/philadelphia/education/desegregation/orange-county.html> (accessed January 8, 2013).
- Nelson, Michael ed. *The Evolving Presidency: Addresses, Cases, Essays, Letters, Reports, Resolutions, Transcripts, and Other Landmark Documents, 1787-1998*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1999.
- Oropeza, Lorena. *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005.
- Our Health Policy Matters. "Veterans and Mental Illness." <http://pgionfriddo.blogspot.com/2011/06/veterans-and-mental-illness.html> (Accessed April 1, 2013).
- Ramirez, Juan. *A Patriot After All: the Story of a Chicano Vietnam Vet*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1999.
- Rhee, Sonya and Charley Trujillo. *Discussion Guide: Soldados Chicanos in Viet Nam*. Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Service, 2003.
- Roediger, David. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York, NY: Verso, 2007.
- Rodriguez, Louis. 2005. Interview by Debra Murphy. July 28. Transcript, Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- Santillan, Richard. "Mexican-Americans in Vietnam." *Hispanic America USA*. <http://www.neta.com/~1stbooks/santil.htm> (Accessed February 20, 2013).
- Shwartz, Saul. "The Relative Earnings of Vietnam and Korean-Era Veterans." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 39, no. 4 (July 1986): 564-572.

- Suro, Roberto Richard Fry, and Jeffrey Passel. "Hispanics and the 2004 Election: Population, Electorate, and Voters." *Pew Research Hispanic Center*.
<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2005/06/27/iv-how-latinos-voted-in-2004/> (Accessed February 18, 2013).
- Texas State Historical Association. "Segregation."
<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pks01> (accessed January 9, 2013).
- The Vietnam Center and Archive. "Vietnam Archive Robert S. McNamara Resources."
<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/resources/mcnamara/> (accessed January 1, 2013).
- Trujillo, Charley. *Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam*. San Jose, CA: Chusma House Publications, 1990.
- US Department of Commerce. "State and County Quickfacts," US Census Bureau.
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/13000.html> (Accessed March 25, 2013).
- U.S. Department of Defense. *Melvin R. Laird, Secretary of Defense Histories*. Washington, DC, 2012.
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. *Veterans' Diseases Associated With Agent Orange*. Washington, DC, 2012.
- Voice of America. "African-American Soldiers in World War II Helped Pave Way for Integration of US Military." <http://www.voanews.com/content/a-13-2005-05-10-voa47-67929177/396374.html> (Accessed April 6, 2013).
- Willbanks, James H. *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Ybarra, Lea. *Vietnam Veterans: Chicanos Recall the War*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004.

