

THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

1965-1975

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determine precisely given the military's policy of not distinguishing them from other "Caucasians" in its official records, impressionistic evidence suggests, as Treviso and minority scholars claim, that Hispanics did indeed make a disproportionate contribution to the war effort. In 2000, two independent researchers, Frederick and Linda Aguirre, went over the 58,202 names inscribed on the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC, and found that 3,741 of these were Spanish surnames, which would be 6.4 percent of the total.⁵¹ Since, according to the census, Hispanics constituted only about 5 percent of the US population in 1960, they concluded that Latinos were indeed overrepresented in the death rates, albeit slightly.

Many Mexicanos distinguished themselves on the field of battle. Thirteen Hispanics were awarded the Medal of Honor. Among these medal winners was Marine Sergeant Alfredo González from Edinburg, Texas, who died in battle in 1968. Twenty-eight years later, he became the first Mexican American to have a destroyer named after him by the US Navy. Most Mexicanos, however, displayed little enthusiasm for the conflict, and with good reason. In general, the war was fought by minorities and working-class whites. It was not long before the white middle class, who had hailed the war as a moral crusade against Communism at the beginning, came to the conclusion that the escalating conflict was morally indefensible—after most deferments were abolished in early 1970 and the burden of financing the war fell increasingly upon their shoulders. The irony was that those youths being asked to lay down their lives to protect the American Way, the poor of the nation, were largely the very individuals who had gained least from it.

Spearheading Mexicano opposition to the war was the Chicano Moratorium Committee, consisting of both students and members of the community in southern California. The Brown Berets were the most conspicuous of the barrio groups. David Sánchez, Brown Beret prime minister, was the Moratorium Committee cochair, together with Rosalío Muñoz, former UCLA student body president and the key figure behind the organization. The Moratorium Committee was responsible for a series of protest marches in East Los Angeles in 1970-1971.⁵²

The most memorable demonstration occurred on August 29, 1970, when thirty thousand people gathered at Laguna Park, now named Rubén Salazar Park, to protest US involvement in Vietnam and the disproportionate loss of Latino lives in the conflict. Chicano representatives came from all over the Southwest. Among those present were Corky Gonzales, Bert Corona, and Rudy Acuña. Intended as a peaceful demonstration, the crowd got out of hand when provoked by the police. In the aftermath, three Mexicanos were killed. These included Rubén Salazar, who died under mysterious circumstances.⁵³ A reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* and news director of KMEX-TV, Salazar was sitting at a bar with some friends when he was struck in the head by a teargas projectile fired by a deputy sheriff. Since he was in the process of preparing an exposé on law enforcement in Los Angeles, the