

The U.S. Military and Latino Populations: Accommodation and Resistance

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Introduction

The United States military has played prominent roles in the national and daily lives of Latinos/as in the United States marked by two recurring features: the wars fought against intolerance and discrimination at home and in the services and those against whom the nation had declared as its enemies. As well, for Mexican origin populations and Puerto Ricans, their initial relationship emerged as the aftermath of the expansion of the United States through military conquest so that the initial relation between the U.S. Military, the national society, and these populations was qualitatively very different from that of all other populations except for Native Americans who themselves were conquered both by the U.S. Military and the Spanish and Mexican ancestors of Latinos/as. Yet, in spite of these recurring features and initial circumstances, Latinas/os have not only fulfilled their military duty but used this experience as the basis to further their civil rights and to fight the daily conflicts for employment, education, and social justice in often intolerable conditions. Equally important were the many roles and changes that women filled and initiated from espionage to suffering in combat all of which created the social templates and dynamics for fighting sexual discrimination and harassment, the filling of crucial jobs in wartime, and in the caring professions, as well as developing the spiritual and emotional foundations for men overseas.

While commentators have suggested that the initial military participation of Latinas/os can be marked by the use of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban troops by Governor Bernardo de Galvez of Florida and the Spanish Imperial Army against the English Crown during the American Revolutionary War, this argument of inclusion stretches the fundamental relations between Latinas/os and the U.S. Military and the national state.¹ This work departs from this assumption and concentrates solely on the relationship initiated between these populations and the U.S. Military and the national society.

¹ Among the earliest military roles were those organized in the 18th century by Bernardo de Galvez, the Governor of Louisiana who recruited Spanish Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans as troops of the Spanish Crown in assisting early revolutionary efforts during the American War of Independence. As well, Spain provided asylum for American ships in ports in the southern portions of the United States which was Spanish territory at the time. Numerous loans and grants were provided by the Spanish Crown such that the Spanish financed 80% of the American Revolution. See, , , , ,

Early Military Relations with Latino Populations: Conquest

Yet the initial specific interaction did depend on the on-going relations between nations. The Mexican American War of 1846-48² produced the many times contradictory relations between populations of what then was Mexico and the United States. That war itself was part of territorial expansionism following the dictums of manifest destiny and those partial to the further increase of slave holding states.³ Slave holding populations had earlier successfully overthrown the neophyte Mexican nation's political control in Texas in 1836 and some Mexican Texans had in fact fought against Mexico and later against the United States in the American Mexican War.⁴

The Civil War: Brother against Brother and Sisters

But the importance of the Mexican American War cannot be understated for it set the stage for the American Civil War in which Mexican origin populations would fight for the Union and the Confederacy. Over 13,000 Mexican origin and Cubans served under the Confederacy especially from Texas, Louisiana, and Florida.⁵ On the other hand numerous companies of Mexican origin populations organized their Union companies such as Romero's Independent Company, Co A, Militia Infantry, New Mexico; Perea's Independent Company, New Mexico Volunteers USA; Gonzales Company, New Mexico Militia USA; Montoya's Company, Perea's Battalion, New Mexico Militia Infantry; El Valle's Co, Perea's Battalion, New Mexico USA Militia Infantry; Aragon's Company, Company I, 2nd New Mexico USA Infantry; Duran's Company, New Mexico Military Militia USA; Baca's Company, Perea's Battalion, New Mexico USA Military Infantry ; and among many others, Jose Alba Clemente's Company, 1st Co New Mexico USA Military.⁶ Yet Latinas as well are represented in the war itself. Loretta Janeta Velázquez. A Cuban woman, she was said to have fought disguised as a Confederate soldier. *The Woman in Battle* is her account of her adventures as Lt. Harry Buford.⁷ She enlisted in the Confederate Army disguised as a man and fought at First Manassas, Ball's Bluff and Fort Pillow. Discharged when her woman's gender was discovered, she rejoined and fought at Shiloh as a man. Discovered again, she became a successful Confederate spy as a woman.

Spanish American War: Puerto Rican Annexation.

² In the United States, the reference to this war is phrased as the "Mexican American War" while in Mexico it is the "United States Intervention."

³ See Griswold del Castillo (1990:4-6) *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; Ulysses S. Grant (1992, 1885: 37-38) *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant*. Old Saybrook, CT: Konecky & Konecky Press.

⁴ A regiment of Mexican –Texans commanded by Col. Juan Seguin fought on the side of Sam Houston. Seguin later fought in the Mexican army against the invading Americans as an officer in the Mexican army.

⁵ John O/Donne-Rosales (2004) [Hispanic Confederates from the Gulf Coast States](#).
6 F. Stanley, *The Civil War New Mexico USA Volunteers* <http://www.neta.com/%7E1stbooks/nmvol.htm>

⁷ Loreta Janeta Velazquez (1876) *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez, Otherwise Known as Lieutenant Harry T. Buford, Confederate States Army*. Richmond, Va.: Dustin, Gilman & Co. Electronic Copy: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/velazquez/velazquez.html> (1 of 479).

Latinos continued to serve in the U.S. military throughout the 19th century and even fought against Spaniards in the Spanish American War with the assistance of Cuban irregulars who had already defeated the Spaniards earlier. Mexican origin populations from New Mexico, Texas, and California fought with Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders as well as other units at San Juan Hill and other engagements.⁸ Thus F Troop (a platoon sized unit of about 100 men) was led by Captain Maximiliano Luna of Santa Fe, New Mexico all of whom were Spanish speaking citizens from the State of New Mexico.

But this war also created the basis of the relationship between Puerto Ricans and the United States. At the cusp of becoming independent from Spain, Puerto Rico became and remained a territorial annex of the United States whose populations would extensively serve in the U.S. Military from annexation to the present as territorial citizens of the United States as did others of the same period.⁹

World War I: Resistance and Accommodation

World War I once again engaged 200,000 Latinos and especially Mexican Americans. Puerto Ricans served in all Puerto Rican units who as the aftermath of the Spanish American War were formed in six segregated infantry regiments, guarding key installations in Puerto Rico and the Panama Canal Zone.¹⁰ Yet, for Mexican-origin populations, the border did present an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with discrimination, and although little studied, there were numerous young men who although born in the United States chose to move to Mexico rather than serve in the bloody trenches of France.¹¹ Yet many others did serve with distinction like Private First Class Jose C. Salazar, U.S. Army 128th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division who died on November 10, 1918 the last day of the war and is buried at: Plot B Row 04 Grave 38, Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery Romagne, France.¹² Others wrote of their experience like J. Luz Saenz of South Texas who published his diary, *Los Mexico-Americanos en la Gran Guerra y Su Contingente en Pro de la Democracia, La Humanidad y la Justicia*. It illustrates the simultaneous wish to serve faithfully under the military arms of the United States while having to cope with the discriminatory reality of Texan racism and ethnocentrism in that period. In spite of mistreatment and others fleeing across the border to escape military service, David Barkley a Mexican-American of Laredo, Texas chose to serve in the 89th Infantry Division's 356th Infantry Regiment

8 Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919). *The Rough Riders*. 1899. Appendix A. Muster Out Roll Troop F.

<http://www.bartleby.com/51/a1.html> NEW YORK: BARTLEBY.COM, 1999, Originally published by NEW YORK: CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, 1899

9 At the turn of the century, among the few Medal of Honor winners during the Boxer Rebellion (1901), France Silva of Hayward, California was awarded the country's highest military honor. Medal of Honor Recipients , Hispanics in Americas Defense Copyright © 1996-Present .<http://www.neta.com/~1stbooks/medal2.htm>

¹⁰ Col. Gilberto Villahermosa (2002). *America's Hispanics in America's Wars*. September, Copyright 2004. The Association of the Army.

¹¹ Carlos G. Velez Ibanez (1996: 15). *Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest United States*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

¹² Jose C. Salazar, *American Battle Monuments, World War I Honor Roll*, <http://www.abmc.gov/detailw.asp>.

and won the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions near Pouilly, France on November 9, 1918.¹³

The Fight Against Discrimination

As well, military service did move returning veterans to fight for their rights and against discrimination so that while not a veteran's organization, the League of United Latin American Congress was founded in 1929 and influenced by returning veterans like Saenz who served on its board of directors early on.¹⁴ However, the role of Mexican-origin women in developing LULAC cannot be underestimated since its Auxiliary organization was crucial in the total organization's development and more than likely Latinas served as part of the 33,000 women who were enlisted in the armed services during that period while other Latinas filled in crucial labor roles in factories, businesses, and in agriculture.

World War II: *No Mas* (No More)

This pattern of returning veterans influencing and organizing associations in the struggle against racial and ethnic discrimination had its apogee after the intense service in all branches of the military by Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and some Cubans. Yet, there were also internal struggles in the services themselves with Latinos at times being less legible for promotion and unrecognized for the actions on the battlefield.¹⁵ On the other hand many Latinos were honored and received great kudos for valor and leadership and among the 500,000 Latinos who served in World War II, the 158th Infantry Regiment, the "Bushmasters" a quarter of which were Mexican Americans was lauded by General Douglas MacArthur as "one of the greatest fighting combat teams ever deployed for battle."¹⁶

Large segments of the Mexican American population as well as Mexicans not yet citizens joined either elite units of the army like the paratroopers or the marines and were drafted in large numbers into combat units. Some like Antonio Alcaraz and sisters, whose parents had migrated to Tucson, Arizona from Sinaloa, Mexico shortly after the Mexican Revolution, were all sent back to Mexico during the infamous "repatriation" period in the 1930's while he was enrolled at Tucson High School. Shortly afterwards, he "illegally" returned to the U.S. to enlist and served with the 551st Parachute Regiment. Later, only a few weeks after becoming a U.S. citizen, he was wounded in the Battle for Salerno.¹⁷

¹³ Medal of Honor Recipients (1996), Hispanics in Americas Defense.
<http://www.neta.com/~1stbooks/medal2.htm>

¹⁴ LULAC

¹⁵ Brooke West (2003:31), Despite anti-Hispanic Bias Staff Sergeant Led a Dozen Men, Narratives: Stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas in World War II. School of Journalism, University of Texas, Austin, Vol.4. No. 1, Spring.

¹⁶ Carlos Velez Ibanez (1996:203) Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest United States, Tucson, University of Arizona Press; and U.S. Department of Defense. n.d. Hispanics in America's Defense. 71-90. Washington. D.C.

¹⁷ Personal Interview of Antonio Alcaraz, Tucson, Arizona (1973). The "repatriation" movement was a program of expulsion of Mexicans from the United States between 1930 and 1935 in which more a million Mexican were "expatriated" of which 150,000 were U.S. born American citizens:

Others became aces like Francis Perdomos or Richard Candelaria both born in El Paso, Texas but raised in Los Angeles, California. The former became the last USAAF pilot to become an “*Ace in a Day*”, when he shot down five Japanese planes in a single day while serving with the 464th Fighter Squadron in the Far East,¹⁸ while the latter on April 7, 1945 single handedly engaged 17 German combat aircraft including two jets and shot down four German fighters to add to the two he had downed previously.¹⁹ Marine Edward Romero of Tucson survived two wounds through the battles of Saipan, Tinian, and was in the first wave of the invasion of Iwo Jima in which 90% casualties were suffered and later included fierce hand-to-hand combat.²⁰

But many combat units were made up almost exclusively of Mexican origin soldiers like “E” Company of the 141st Infantry Regiment of the 36th Division; the 7th, 30th, and 142nd Infantry Regiments of the 3rd Division; the 22nd Infantry Regiment of the 4th Division, the 23rd Infantry Regiment of the 2nd Division, and the 79th Infantry Regiment of the 7th Division. En toto, eleven Mexican origin soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor and among them, Marcario Garcia of Villa de Castaño, Mexico of the 4th Infantry Division.²¹

Like their many of their World War I fathers, this generation struggled for civil rights and declared “no mas” (no more) against discrimination and founded the American GI Forum. The Forum was made up entirely of returning veterans who upon their return to their homes were denied their earned educational, housing, and medical benefits while some funeral homes refused to inter the bodies of battle slain Mexican American veterans in other than segregated cemeteries.²² They were responsible for many of the gains made against segregated schools, poor housing and restricted covenants, voting rights, employment opportunities, and were among the many that took advantage of the GI Bill to earn university degrees.

Sixty-five thousand Puerto Ricans as well served in the armed forces but many served in segregated units, like the Regular Army's 65th Infantry Regiment or the Puerto Rican National Guard's 295th and 296th Infantry Regiments in Puerto Rico, Panama, the Caribbean, Hawaii, North Africa, Italy, and the Maritime Alps of France and Germany.²³

¹⁸ Santiago A. Flores (2004) “Oscar F. Perdomo - The Last Ace In a Day of WW II.”

<http://www.neta.com/~1stbooks/oscarp.htm>.

¹⁹ Yvonne Lim (2003: Boyhood dream led to career as fighter ace. *Narratives: Stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas in World War II*. School of Journalism, University of Texas, Austin, Vol.4. No. 1, Spring, 2003.

²⁰ Elizabeth Egeland (2003:13) Marine Survived War by “grace of God.” *Narratives: Stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas in World War II*. School of Journalism, University of Texas, Austin, Vol.4. No. 1, Spring, 2003.

²¹ Medal of Honor Winners.

²² Henry A.J. Ramos (1998:2-3) *The American G.I. Forum: In Pursuit of the Dream, 1948-1983*. Houston: Arte Publico Press. “. . .Private Felix Longoria, a Mexican-American soldier whose remains had been returned from overseas nearly four years after he was killed in action in the Philippines [was the case in point].” The owner of the Rice Funeral Home in Three Rivers, Texas, explained to private Longoria's widow that he would arrange for the soldier's burial in the town's segregated "Mexican" cemetery but would not, as requested, allow use of the chapel for the wake because local "whites" would not like it (9).

²³ Gilberto Villahermosa (2002: *America's Hispanics in America's Wars*. *Army Magazine*. September: <http://www.ansa.org/www/armymag.nsf/0/930AC1078D4F313385256C1D007091CD>.

On the other hand, Annapolis graduate Lt. General Pedro del Valle (Retired), United States Marine Corps of Puerto Rico who as a Lt. Colonel, was the architect of all artillery on Guadalcanal without whose tactical and strategic use of arms that very tenuous battle would certainly have been lost. He commanded the 11th Marines (artillery regiment of the 1st Marine Division), the Artillery of the 3rd Amphibious Corps on Guadalcanal and Guam, and commanded the 1st Marine Division during the Okinawa Campaign.²⁴ His awards and decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal and the Legion of Merit with Gold Star, the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, Ethiopia 1935-36; Presidential Unit Citation, Guadalcanal 1942 and Okinawa 1945; Expeditionary Medal with Bronze Star, Haiti 1916; Dominican Campaign Medal, Dominican Republic 1916; Victory Medal, 1918; Second Nicaraguan Campaign Medal, Nicaragua 1930; American Defense Service Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with five Bronze Stars; American Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; Order of the Crown of Italy, Italy 1936; East African Medal, Ethiopia 1936; Colonial Order of the Star of Italy, Ethiopia 1936; Italian Bronze Medal for Military Valor, Ethiopia 1936; Cuban Naval Order of Merit, Second Class, Cuba, 1936; Ecuadorian Decoration of Abdon Calderon Star, First Class, with Diploma, Ecuador 1942.²⁵

But Puerto Ricans faced appalling social and economic conditions upon their return to the Island and thousands migrated from the Island to New York where they faced similar issues to that of Mexicans in the Southwest: poor employment opportunities, limited educational opportunities, racial and linguistic discrimination, housing covenants, and economic disparities in salaries and wages for the same jobs paid other groups as well as exclusion from union representation. They too developed veteran-led independent organizations as well as others under the GI Forum banner and pointed to four Puerto Ricans who received the Congressional Medal of Honor medals as well hundreds of Boriquas who died in the Pacific and Europe part of the basis for their legitimate claims.²⁶

Watershed for Women

World War II was also a watershed for most American women and for Latinas especially so. There are four main areas by which Latinas especially contributed centrally to World War II: first, given the much higher birth rates of Latino families, Latina mothers especially suffered like the Varas, Garcias, and Ortega families each of whose six sons were engaged in combat from the New Guinea to Iwo Jima and from the skies over Germany to the invasion of the beaches of Normandy.²⁷ ²⁸ Second, many Latinas served

²⁴ *Semper Fidelis: An Autobiography*, LtGen Pedro A. del Valle. Hawthorne, California.: The Christian Book Club of America, 1976.

²⁵ *Who's Who in Marine Corps History* (2004) The United States Marine Corps Division of History and Museums. http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/Historical/Whos_Who/delValle_PA.htm.

²⁶ Medal of Honor Winners.

²⁷ Guillermo X Garcia (2001: 15) "War gave soldier confidence to strive for more," *Narratives: Stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas in World War II*. School of Journalism, University of Texas, Austin, Vol.3. No. 1, Fall, 2001.

²⁸ Kristin Stanford (2002: 10) "Sixth Brother in Uniform," *Narratives: Stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas in World War II*. School of Journalism, University of Texas, Austin, Vol.3. No. 1, Spring, 2002.

in the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and Army Air Force as officers and enlisted women as nurses and in quartermaster, communications, instructional and transportation roles like Tucsonans Lieutenant Carmen Romero, U.S. Army and Ensign Beatrice Amado, U.S. Navy both who served crucial roles as nurses in healing hundreds of wounded veterans.²⁹ Third, Latinas took over jobs from which they had been kept out and created new ones when millions of men left for the services and fought ethnic and gender discrimination on the job and the military.

Thus Mexican origin women replaced male railroad workers in firing up locomotive engines for the Southern Pacific Railroad and took the first important steps in breaking down the “color” occupational barriers suffered by Mexican men but as well they successfully had men fired for sexual harassment and may have been among the first women in the United States to do so in the workplace in 1943. So too Mexican origin women represented by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America worked in the copper mines of Arizona and these women organized a series of wildcat strikes protesting poor working conditions and sexual harassment.³⁰ Many would return to form auxiliary women’s organizations with their returning husbands and brothers who would once again face employment discrimination for the very jobs their spouses and sisters filled.

The Soldiers of Agriculture and the Railroads

But a little known fact that is important to note is that while thousands of Mexico-born Marine, Army, Navy, and Air Corps volunteers served for the United States in World War II, 300,000 Mexicans under the Mexico-United States Borrowed Workmanship Program also known as the Bracero Program replaced their brethren and non-Latino workers who had gone off to war in California, Montana, Washington, Colorado, Michigan, Arizona, Wisconsin, and Minnesota between 1942 and 1946. Some considered themselves as “soldiers of agriculture, construction and of the railroads.”³¹

Korea: the Police Action

Unlike World War II, Korea was often at the time a contentious event with little understanding as to the whys and whens of the “police action” that cost many lives. This war was also, however, a mixed proposition for many Latinos/as since those who went into combat in Korea were in the midst of battling the civil battles at home since the first civil rights bills were yet not passed. On the other hand, President Truman’s 1948 integration order did have many implications especially for Puerto Rican soldiers many of whom served in non segregated units. However, in Korea , Puerto Ricans were placed

²⁹ Amanda Traphagan (2003: 34) Young woman found freedom as Navy Nurse,” Narratives: Stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas in World War II. School of Journalism, University of Texas, Austin, Vol.4. No. 1, Spring, 2003. Also, Rachel Howell (2003: 35) High grades landed nurse a job working in operating room,” Narratives: Stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas in World War II. School of Journalism, University of Texas, Austin, Vol.4. No. 1, Spring, 2003.

³⁰ Carlos G. Velez (1996: 119-121) Border Visions: The Cultures of Mexicans of the Southwest United States. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

³¹ Alfonso Lara (2002: 32) “The Other Soldiers,” Narratives: Stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas in World War II, School of Journalism, University of Texas, Austin, Vol.3. No. 1, Spring, 2002.

in segregated units including the well-regarded 65th Army Regiment that had seen service in World War I and World War II. In Korea, the Regiment was subject to much criticism after a hundred of its men refused to fight in one ill-organized and futile battle. They had already suffered heavy casualties due to leadership incompetence of officers and non Spanish speaking non commissioned officers. Eventually, the men of the 65th were exonerated and all court-martials were rescinded. The 65th also served with distinction in helping guard the flanks of the First Marine Division, many of which were of Mexican descent, as it extricated itself from the infamous Chosen Reservoir.³¹

These certainly included 80% of Marine Reserve Easy Company who were Mexicans and Mexican Americans from Tucson, Arizona. Some at seventeen and still in high school were called up in June of 1950 and with very limited training fought valiantly through the Inchon invasion, the battle for the City of Seoul, and to the Yalu River bordering China. Some returned to graduate from Tucson High School, many wounded and all suffering from different levels of battle shock. Some Marine officers in Korea derided units with many Mexican Americans as only “Mexican Marines” but were defended hotly by fists and hearts by other Marine officers like Captain Herbert Oxnam.³²

Here too as in World War II the Medal of Honor would be awarded mostly posthumously to eight Latinos: 6 of Mexican decent, a Puerto Rican, and a Cuban.²⁹ This important generation would also return to the United States to fight for civil rights and gain college degrees and created many of the opportunities for following generations as did Sergeant Eugene Suarez, the only Mexican-American Marine combat photographer to have served in either World War II or Korea.³⁰

But Latina women again would suffer disproportionately because of the larger size of their families and many of their sons would enter combat units like those of Easy Company and not return. Cathy Ramirez lived in hope and dread when her older brother, Joe M. Valenzuela was reported missing in December 1950, a month after his wife Elsa had given birth to their daughter, Elaine. He unfortunately was confirmed to have been killed.³¹

The Korean War however like World War II also served as an important step towards greater civil and educational equity for Latinas and Latinos with many men and women returning also joining the G.I. Forum, developing civil associations like the Mexican American Political Association, the Mexican American League and others, and as

³¹ Carlos G. Velez-Ibanez, (1990) Los Chavalones of E- Company: Extraordinary Men in Extraordinary Events. Addressed to the 40th Reunion of E Company, Tucson, Arizona, July 28, 1990.

³² Personal Communication. Herbert Oxnam, Major, USMCR retired. October 12, 1992, Tucson, Arizona.

³⁰ Eugene Suarez was born in Tucson, Arizona on March 5, 1931 and served in the Marine Corps between 1948 and 1949 and then was called up again to serve in Korea in 1950. He returned shaken and shocked with hundreds of feet of now lost combat motion picture film and still photographs. He went on to become the Chief of Police of the National Indian Police of the Department of the Interior and now is a partner with his son of S&K Tortilla Products of Manassas Park, Virginia.

³¹ Tom Beal (2002) “12 local Marines: From Barrio to Korea to Graves, Arizona Daily Star, May 27.

importantly taking advantage of the GI Bill that offered similar support to that of the World War II version.

Vietnam: the Terrible Tragedy

However, participation in combat was not to cease for Latinos and between 1961 and 2004 many casualties have been suffered, terrible psychic wounds incurred, and families torn apart by the losses incurred. Among the most costly of wars in which Latinos were disproportionately represented in dead and wounded was that of Vietnam.³² An analysis of the distribution of Latino origin soldiers, marines, and sailors in combat units, their total casualty rates suffered of dead and wounded, and the aftereffects on families has not yet been accomplished in this terrible tragedy. However, we do know that between January 1961 and February 1967, slightly less than 20 percent of those killed in Vietnam from the Southwest U.S. were of Mexican origin, and between December of 1967 and March 1969, 19 percent were of Mexican origin—U.S. and Mexico born.³³ Between 1961 and 1969, 19 percent were killed from a Southwestern state when only 13.8 percent was of military age. For the entire period of the war, 1961-1973, 1 in 2 Latinos served in combat units, 1 in 3 was wounded, and 1 in 5 were killed. Latinos became the second largest American minority in Vietnam, with over 19% killed or wounded at a period in which the total Latino population in that age cohort was less than 14%.³⁴

Thus during this period, especially between 1968 and 1973, these casualty rates were felt by many communities whose sons had perished in a very unpopular war. These also became known and questioned among many sectors of the Latino community and wide spread protests not unlike those expressed by millions of other Americans were organized and carried out by Latino university and high school students, professionals, farm workers, blue collar workers, and numerous community organizations and individuals. The Chicano Moratorium of Los Angeles against the war attended by thousands in August 29, 1970 was among the largest but was ended ignominiously by a combination of Los Angeles riot police and Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies.

³² William F Abbott, "The Names on the Wall: A Closer Look" states that "The DoD database contains no information on Hispanic-American casualties. Hispanics can be of any race, but the 1980 census revealed that only 2.6% regard themselves as black. In a massive sampling of the database we were able to establish that between 5.0 and 6.0% had identifiable Hispanic surnames. These were Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and other Latino-Americans with ancestries based in Central and South America. They came largely from California and Texas with lesser numbers from Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Florida and NY and a few from many states across the country The 1970 census which we are using as our V'nam era population base, estimated Hispanic-Americans at 4.5% of the US population. Thus we think it is safe to say Hispanic-Americans were over-represented among V'nam casualties - an estimated 5.5% of the dead against 4.5% of the 1970 population. The Territory of Puerto Rico suffered 345 Vietnam dead." These however, do not include wounded. <http://members.aol.com/WarLibrary/vwc20.htm>.

³³ Velez-Ibanez (204-205).

³⁴ Raoul Lowry Contreras (2003) Facts Have Spanish Surnames, Latino Political Wires. <http://www.voznuestra.com>.

But returning Latino veterans unlike their fathers and grandfathers did not generally join in veteran's associations but like many others hid from the open hostility heaped on them and escaped into neighborhoods to attend school and jobs or in many cases suffered alone for many years from the shock of battle. According to the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study,³⁵ 29% of Latinos who went to Vietnam at some point in their adult lives met the full diagnostic criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, in comparison to a lifetime prevalence rate of 20% and 14% for African Americans and White European Americans, respectively. This Latino percentage is only superseded by Native American Veterans at 30%.³⁶

Yet like their fathers and grandfathers before them, this generation earned 10 Medals of Honor and while whole units were no longer segregated or composed mostly of Latinos, the sheer percentage of Latinos serving in combat units supported the conclusion that Vietnam was fought by too many youths whose basic recommendation for combat was the lack of a college deferment. Yet, as in World War II and Korea, non citizens like Marines Jose Francisco Jimenez from Mexico City and Alfred V. Rascon from Chihuahua, Mexico gave their lives for others and awarded the Medal of Honor. Puerto Ricans won as many Medals of Honor Awards (4) in Vietnam as in World War II.

The Present: 1990-2004

Twenty thousand Latinos served in Operation Desert Storm, Desert Shield (1990-1991), and by 1997 a third of the combat troops in Bosnia were Latinos. But the United States intervention in Iraq once again raised the issue of Latinos engaged mostly in combat units and often in harms way and regardless of citizenship. The first two Marines killed in that war were not citizens of the United States but of Guatemala and Mexico and a third, an immigrant son from Mexico.³⁷

Indeed, in the present, the Marine Corps has the highest percentage of Latinos and Latinas (14%) in comparison to the other services in part due to the allure of an elite combat force and in many cases, the quest for opportunity through the military.

Conclusion

The association of the military and Latino communities has been a long one that began with the expansion of U.S. military power into Mexico and the Caribbean in the middle and late 19th century. This relationship has to be characterized by both accommodation and participation and rejection and resistance depending on the political and social circumstances of the time. The U.S. was seen both as a benefactor by some during the

³⁵ Kulka, R.A., Schlenger W.E., Fairbank, J.A., Hough, R.L. Jordan B.K., Marmar C.R. & Weiss D.S. (1990). *Trauma and the Vietnam War generation: Report of findings from the National Vietnam veteran's readjustment study*. New York: Brunner Mazel.

³⁶ Wounded Spirits, Ailing Hearts: PTSD and the Legacy of War among American Indian and Alaskan Native Veterans (2000). Produced with the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder by the Department for Veterans Affairs VA Employee Education System - Minneapolis, Salt Lake City, and St. Louis Centers.

³⁷ Corporal Jose Angel Garibay and Corporal Jorge A. Gonzalez and Corporal Jesus Alberto Suarez.

Texas Revolt and an enemy during the Mexican American War (1847). During the Civil War, Mexicans who had only been conquered 18 years previously fought for both the Confederacy and the Union and 33 years later also served with distinction in the Spanish American War against other Spanish speaking populations. During this entire process, however, both Mexicans and Puerto Ricans had been compressed into rural and urban enclaves and in the latter case especially, racial segregation had played a major role in differentiating this population from the rest of the U.S. citizenry. For Mexicans, the border created citizenship in the United States but also a permeable membrane that now forced relatives to be “Americans” and the other “Mexicans” but as well most Mexicans now American citizens were denied many of the civil liberties, job opportunities, educational access, housing accommodations, and political voting rights.

Each war has provided the means by which returning veterans were able to resist such conditions and the dead were constant reminders that Latinos did not have to accept the status quo. In this manner from the Civil War, the Spanish American War, World War I, through World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Desert Shield, and now Iraq, Latino populations have served valiantly and with distinction but as well have resisted the conditions still present in parts of the United States.

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