

# One Dead, 40 Hurt in East L.A. Riot

Times Columnist  
Ruben Salazar  
Killed by Bullet



By CHARLES T. POWERS  
and JEFF PEARSON  
columnists

An East Los Angeles parade and rally that attracted about 20,000 people to demonstrate against the government's opposition to the war in Southeast Asia erupted into a riot Saturday, with the loss of one of the Times' columnists and 40 others.

Ruben Salazar, Times columnist and author of "The Assassination of Dr. King," was killed on Saturday in the riot. Salazar was shot in the back of the head as he walked with a group of demonstrators. He was 40 years old.

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CHICANO  
MORATORIUM  
UNIDOS MARCHAMOS  
8,000 DEAD  
YA BASTA!

# THE CHICANO

# MORATORIUM

# 50 YEARS LATER

AUGUST 2020

CHICANO  
COMMITTEE

ST  
LOS

# WHAT WAS the CHICANO MORATORIUM?



**O**n Aug. 29, 1970, at least 20,000 demonstrators marched through East Los Angeles to protest the disproportionate number of Mexican American service members dying in the Vietnam War.

The National Chicano Moratorium Against the Vietnam War started out peacefully, but that afternoon a minor disturbance touched off skirmishes between demonstrators and law enforcement. By day's end, hundreds were arrested and trailblazing Latino journalist Ruben Salazar was dead.

In the Mexican American community, Salazar would be held up as a martyr, his death likened to the assassinations of the Kennedy brothers and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

In many ways, the ugly events of that day hobbled the Chicano Power movement, leaving demonstrators feeling disillusioned, angry and powerless. And yet. Demonstrators who became leaders in politics, business and the arts recall how that chaotic day 50 years ago reinforced their commitment to advancing civil rights. The Chicano Moratorium, one former marcher said, "was a catalytic moment."

- Los Angeles Times staff



# A LOSS of INNOCENCE

**IT STARTED AS A PEACE MARCH. BUT FOR THE MORATORIUM GENERATION, THE DAY LEFT PROTESTERS DISMAYED, DISAPPOINTED AND ANGRY.**

BY DANIEL HERNANDEZ  
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**T**he night before Aug. 29, 1970, a date that would be remembered for dashed hopes and heartbreak, then-9-year-old Consuelo Flores went to bed early, excited for what was to come: a celebratory *marcha* for peace.

It felt like it was going to be a party in her East L.A. neighborhood. Her family made protest signs. She decided to wear her prized red tennis shoes, “the ones that as a child you say, ‘Oh, these make me run fast, and you can run higher.’”

The National Chicano Moratorium Against the Vietnam War in East Los Angeles would become the biggest gathering of Mexican American demonstrators in U.S. history to that point, with about 20,000 people parading down Whittier Boulevard to what was then called Laguna Park — before violence erupted when sheriff’s deputies stormed the park and skirmishes followed. Patrol cars and buildings were set on fire.

When it was over, three people were dead, including Times journalist Ruben Salazar.

For many in Los Angeles, the march and its chaotic aftermath marked both the peak and the beginning-of-the-end of the Chicano movement.

As the Moratorium’s 50th anniversary approaches, schools, cultural groups, historians, artists and activists are reexamining how the events of Aug. 29, 1970, still



Smoke above Whittier Boulevard from multiple fires points to the chaotic aftermath of the Chicano Moratorium march on Aug. 29, 1970. (Steve Fontanini / Los Angeles Times)

echo politically, socially and culturally, and how in many uncanny ways, the issues at play back then — injustice and police brutality — are reflected on the streets of L.A. now.

It was a “moratorium” because it was a call to suspend, so to speak, the loss of brown lives in the slog of the Vietnam War, half a planet away. Two times as many people with Spanish surnames were dying at its peak in proportion to their population in the Southwest, according to studies by academic Ralph C. Guzman, a future deputy assistant secretary of State. For a

growing and increasingly assertive population of Mexican Americans in California and the U.S. Southwest, those numbers didn’t sit well.

One of Flores’ older brothers, Luis, had returned from serving. He was “changed,” she recalled. The morning of the Moratorium, Flores waited for the march to pass their house at Brannick Avenue, and then joined with some of her siblings.

“I knew as a 9-year-old that this was a big thing, and the whole community was taking part in it,” said Flores, now 59. “I was excited, so I wore my red tennis

shoes.”

At Laguna Park, before the stage, she went barefoot to rest in the grass. Whole families turned out. Folkloric dancers took the stage and the mood was joyous.

At some point after the rally started, deputies responded to a ruckus at a liquor store nearby, where crowds were attempting to buy beverages. Fearing shoplifting, the owners locked people inside until all of them completed purchases, according to accounts. Then the owners called the Sheriff’s Department, which to this day polices unincorporated East Los Angeles.

To the deputies that first arrived, the scene looked like “looting.” Someone threw a bottle. An order came to clear the park a block away. Deputies formed a line. Then they began advancing, batons out.

“I could feel the ground underneath my butt was shaking,” Flores recalled. “And before I could put my shoes back on, my sister was grabbing my arm and yanking me up.”

She managed to slip on her shoes without tying them, just enough to move. They began running, dodging “bottles, sticks, rocks.” Flores remembered smoke — tear gas, shot into the crowds.

“I’m 9 years old, and I’m seeing the cop who’s supposed to protect me, whacking” a young man, she recalled. “My shoes just fall off, and I just keep running, I’m running with my bare feet, so now my feet are burning too, and ... I’m just trying to get home.”

Salazar’s killing, by a tear-gas projectile shot through the curtained doorway of the Silver Dollar Bar & Cafe by Deputy Thomas Wilson, the acting sergeant at the scene, rattled East L.A. and reverberated nationally. Salazar’s voice had begun to challenge mainstream interpretations of the political ferment brewing in major barrios in the big cities of the West, from Denver to San Diego and El Paso and everywhere in between. Through spirited columns, Salazar became the de facto chronicler of the Latino civil rights movement at the time.

“To this day, even talking to you about it, right now I want to cry,” Flores said from her home in South L.A. “It was a traumatic event. It also indelibly marked my life, forever, because it was such an unjust experience that I witnessed.”

Among the marchers was Gloria Molina, 72, who would become the first Latina elected to the California Assembly and the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

“We were really there to have a peaceful march, and we wanted to make a point,” she said. “And instead our community was destroyed, Salazar was killed, and hundreds of people were hurt by the batons. They came in with such force.”

Molina doesn’t regard the Moratorium as a personal turning point; she had already embraced political activism. But she’ll never forget what she saw.

“It was, I guess, a loss of innocence,” Molina said. “I certainly felt what I was doing was right, and I certainly felt that that was violated, and consequently, it was something we felt we had to change.”



The memories for many remain remarkably raw, as though five decades have passed in barely a blink. For Tomas Benitez, a writer and longtime arts administrator, it was the moment a sheriff’s deputy “came up from behind and just whacked me.”

Benitez said he remembered his main emotions, at 18, as simple: “It was the outrage, it was the violation, I joke about it, it was 50 years ago, and I’ve been pissed off ever since, because it was just unfair.”

Harry Gamboa Jr., an artist who co-founded the arts group Asco, summed up the sense of urgency that permeated the Mexican American community about fighting the Vietnam War. “People are trying to persuade you that you are less than human, and at the same time need your human body to go fight a war and make sure you never get an education,” Gamboa said.

Two years before the Moratorium, he was part of the earliest major youth upheaval on L.A.’s Eastside, the high school Blowouts, when hundreds of largely Chicano youth streamed out of classes at high schools in revolt against poor and abusive education conditions.

At the Moratorium, Gamboa ran into Francisca Flores, a legendary activist who helped defend Mexican American youth at the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial. She invited Gamboa to edit an issue of *Regeneración*, an arts journal she founded. That’s where he began collaborating with Willie Herrón III, Gronk and Patssi Valdez — who formed Asco (Spanish for “disgust”). They made experimental “no-movies,” costumed figures on Eastside streets, and “instant murals,” where the artists taped themselves to walls.



**"To this day, even talking to you about it, right now I want to cry." - Consuelo Flores (Josie Norris / Los Angeles Times)**

"It looked like being in the middle of a war, and how best to fight back other than culturally and creatively?" he recalled. "In a not-so-indirect way, Asco emerged from the Moratorium."

For Carmen Ramirez, later a student at Loyola Law School, her memories of the day are tied to escaping Laguna Park and taking refuge at the East Los Angeles Doctors Hospital. Back then, joining community demonstrations was essential to her burgeoning identity as a politically engaged young Mexican American.

"We were looking at the numbers of casualties and how they were distributed among people of color — you know Latinos are always the most gung-ho about going to war — and they were coming back dead, or terribly wounded," Ramirez said. "So what are we doing there?"

Today, Ramirez serves on the Oxnard City Council and is running for a seat on the Ventura County Board of Supervisors. She'll be the first Latina on the board if elected.

"When I graduated from Loyola, I was not expected to pass the bar, but I did on my first attempt," said Ramirez, who for years has been working on environmental activism in Oxnard. The Moratorium, she said, "gave me the view that we just have to fight for justice."



Rosalío Muñoz wore a brimmed hat and a lime-green guayabera as he sifted through physical reminders of the Moratorium in the basement of the Church of the Epiphany in Lincoln Heights. Muñoz today is the church archivist, a role he keeps out of a sense of duty to the movement's legacy. For a visitor, he laid out dozens of photographs and newspaper clippings, some on high-school project-style presentation boards.

Muñoz, now 74, came from a middle-class Mexican American household — postwar, with professional parents — and never harbored doubts about going to college, like a lot of the leaders that emerged in the Blowouts and the Moratorium.

He was known as "Ross" at Franklin High School in Highland Park, where he was elected student body president. For a while he dated a white classmate from tonier Mount Washington. Later, at UCLA, he also won election as student president, the first Mexican American to do so. It would be seen as "helpful" to the overall movement, Muñoz remembers now.

Then Muñoz received his draft orders — ironically, he was to report for induction on Sept. 16, Mexican Independence Day, 1969. He and co-organizer Ramses Noriega saw the coincidence as an opportunity to make a statement. "I didn't see any justice in that war," Muñoz recalled.

Activism against the theater in Vietnam was intensifying nationwide, and though major demonstrations had occurred in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco, "we needed to have our own moratorium, in our own neighborhoods," Muñoz said. "Someone mentioned Guzman's statistics, and that linked those two concerns, the war and the civil rights movements."

At a national meeting of activists in Denver, Muñoz and other leaders chose East Los Angeles, the biggest barrio of them all, for their moratorium. The choice would solidify East L.A.'s place in modern Chicano cultural mythology.

It remains difficult to peg down the legacy of that day neatly, but Muñoz's path in some ways offers a crystallizing case for the generation involved. He stuck to the old-guard style, even after the antiwar movement ended.

Historian Ernesto Chavez said the young demonstrators "were not prepared for the pushback that was going to come

from the authorities, and they sought other vehicles to try to create change."

Muñoz turned to protesting police abuses, and then urban-renewal projects that displaced low-income minority residents of Los Angeles, the "gentrification" of yesteryear. In the 1980s he joined the Communist Party. He now lives in a boarding house in Pico-Union. He doesn't own a car: "I got tired of getting tickets."

Other organizers or those who marched that day would become recognized leaders in politics, the arts and in civil rights. Others joined academia, corporate board rooms and government. Some retreated from activism altogether.

"People moved on," Chavez added. "They finished college, they started families, they had other responsibilities that took them away from organizing"

The Moratorium committee itself disbanded in August 1971, a year after Salazar's death. Leaders blamed co-option and infiltration by outside agents as at least partly responsible.

So now, decades on, is the Chicano movement a dusty relic? What is its proper legacy?

Characteristics that defined the movement are hardly in vogue. Armed militancy, ethnic nationalism and a once-lofty goal of "reconquering" the Southwest for Mexican people do not generally intersect with the concerns of younger, culturally mixed Angelenos who face an increasingly polarized and unequal society.

California's Latino population is ever more diverse, with Central American, Caribbean and South American roots, while some younger Latinos identify with the term Latinx.

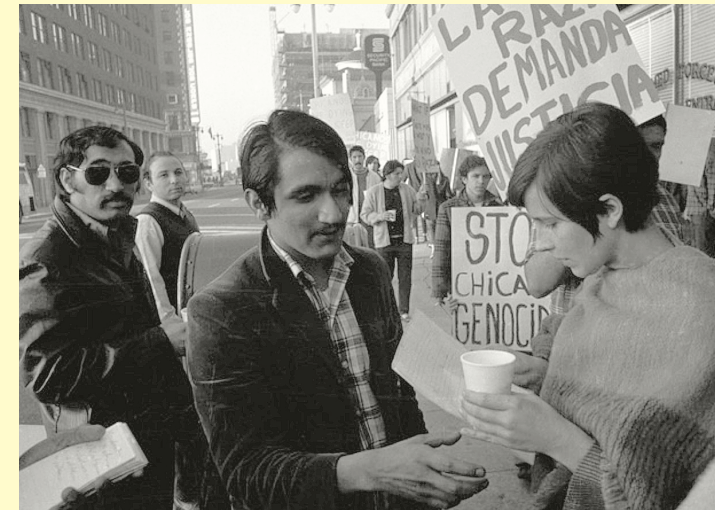
In 2011 the Sheriff's Department issued an inspector general's report that found that deputies used excessive force at the Moratorium and were poorly trained to handle large crowds in 1970. The department says training has since improved. "Unlike the past, today the LASD works with the event organizers to prevent riots

and to ensure that everyone's constitutional rights are protected," Capt. Jose Mendoza said in a statement.

To Mario T. Garcia, a prolific scholar of the Chicano movement, the Moratorium and activists did set the stage for Latino empowerment later. "In the end they didn't achieve *revolución*, but they achieved some very important reforms, and opportunities in education, in media, in the political system and economically," he said.

And for those who ran from baton-wielding sheriff's deputies, Aug. 29, 1970, remains a bitter memory. "I got up, with other people, and we've been fighting back from then on," Muñoz said. "We're still fighting back."

Flores, now inclusion and diversity di-

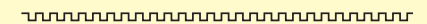


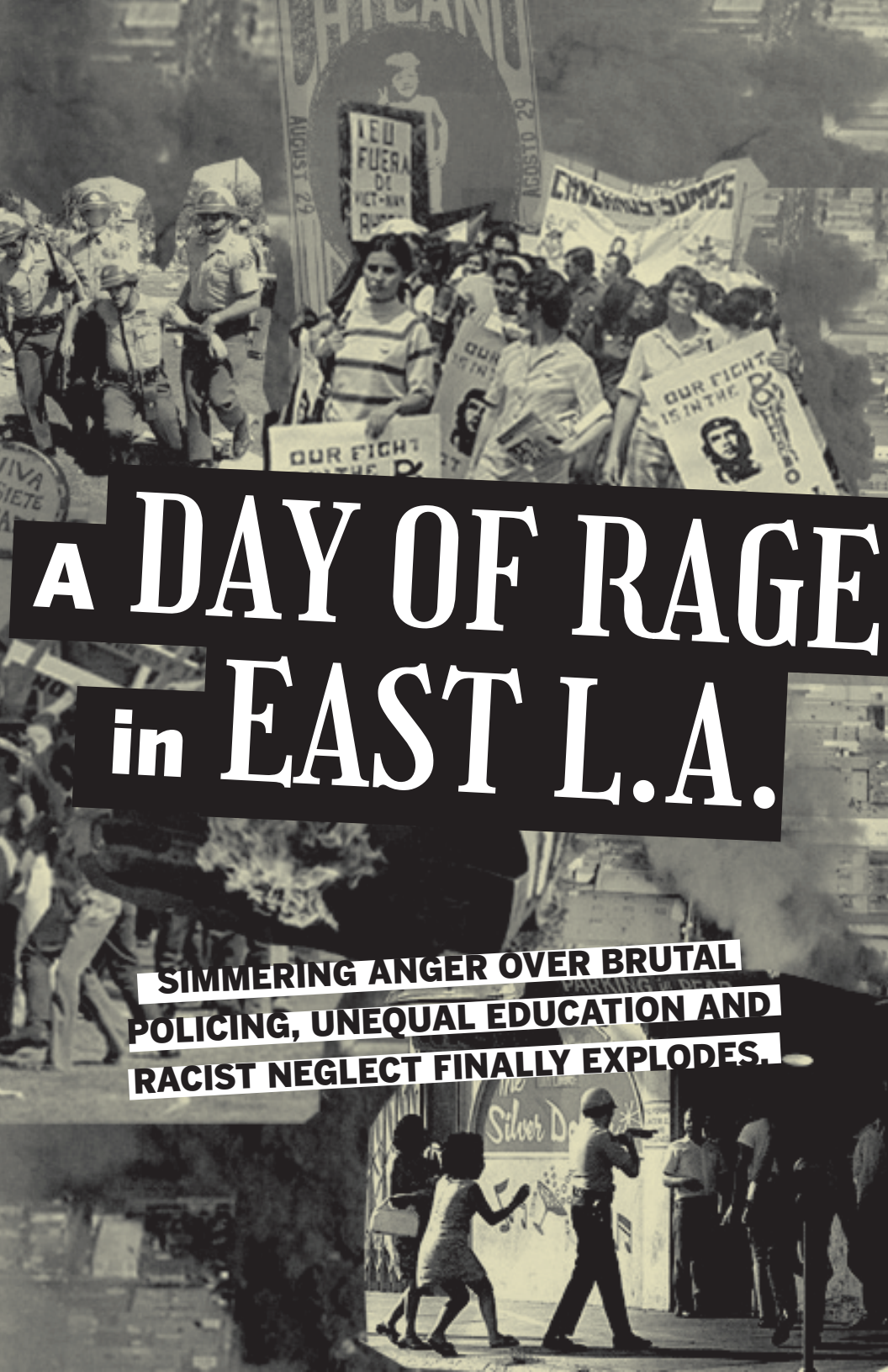
**Muñoz greets Chicano Moratorium activists in November 1969. (Los Angeles Times)**

rector at SAG-AFTRA, remembered that a few days after the march, she spotted her red tennis shoes, discarded and dirty along a sidewalk of Whittier Boulevard.

"I kind of had an epiphany years later, as an adult, that that's probably why I have such a fixation for red shoes, period," she said. "It's because I'm always trying to get them back."

Her voice halted. "I'm always trying to recapture that innocence that was taken from us so brutally. ... And I can't."





# A DAY OF RAGE in EAST L.A.

**SIMMERING ANGER OVER BRUTAL  
POLICING, UNEQUAL EDUCATION AND  
RACIST NEGLECT FINALLY EXPLODES.**

BY LOUIS SAHAGUN

**G**rass-roots activists knew that East Los Angeles' sprawling Mexican American barrio was a community on edge.

For years they had seen bitterness and frustration fester over police brutality, underfunded schools with some of the worst drop-out rates in the nation, biased media coverage, freeway construction that replaced 3,000 homes, and a disproportionate number of Mexican American soldiers returning from Vietnam in body bags.

But even the activists were not prepared for the fury of street warfare that erupted on the hot, smoggy Saturday afternoon of Aug. 29, 1970, when deputies used tear gas and clubs to disperse an anti-Vietnam War demonstration at Laguna Park after responding to a minor disturbance at a nearby liquor store.

The biggest, bloodiest disturbance in Los Angeles since Watts five years earlier lasted several hours. When it was over, Los Angeles Times columnist Ruben Salazar was dead and two others mortally wounded, about 200 people were under arrest, 75 law enforcement officers and untold numbers of demonstrators were injured, 95 county vehicles were destroyed or damaged, 44 buildings were pillaged and eight major fires had been set. Property damage reached \$1 million.

For decades, activists and students of Latino history have marked the anniversary of the unrest, and they will do so again this month, the 50th anniversary of that day of rage.

The commemorations of the movement known as the National Chicano Moratorium Against the Vietnam War have tended to focus on the death of Salazar, then a rare Latino voice in mainstream media. But there's so much more that should be remembered about the day the Eastside demanded to be heard.



The National Chicano Moratorium march began at Belvedere Park near 3rd Street and Fetterly Avenue at about 9 a.m. amid a fiesta atmosphere of vivas! and placards reading "Aztlan: Love it or Leave it!" and "Stop Chicano Genocide."

Once a pejorative term among Mexican Americans, "Chicano" was embraced by

a new generation as an emblem of ethnic pride, cultural awareness and commitment to community.

The march, which drew about 20,000 demonstrators from across the nation, followed a route down Atlantic Boulevard to Whittier Boulevard, then west past bustling restaurants, small markets, appliance stores, carnicerías and panaderías, which filled the air with the aroma of fresh Mexican bread.

The march ended without incident, and participants headed for Laguna Park, where a rally was scheduled that afternoon.

"Picture this in your mind's eye," recalled Frank Villalobos, an architect and president of Barrio Planners, which develops community projects throughout Los Angeles. "It's a sunny day, and thousands of young Latinos clad in the gear of the day — bell-bottom jeans, tie-dye shirts and headbands — are streaming into Laguna Park after a long, hot march and plopping down on the grass."

Conjuntos blared out corridos. Before the advent of bottled water, workers from tienditas, or local stores, handed out cups of water to thirsty demonstrators as they trundled into the park with their families.

Militant Brown Berets guided people toward a stage to wait for speakers, including United Farm Workers leader Cesar Chavez and Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, a former boxer whose fiery advocacy of Chicano power made him a hero to Mexican American youths in the 1960s.

The first signs of trouble occurred a block away when people crowded inside the Green Mill Liquor Store. At about 1:30 p.m. the owner, Morris Maroko, called police and complained that teenagers had stolen soft drinks. He would later tell The Times that the youths had threatened him.

Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputies who rushed in with sirens blaring were pelted, Villalobos said, by a hail of "rocks and Bubble Up and Double Cola soda bottles — remember how big those things were? — thrown by people in an angry crowd."

David Sánchez, founder of the Brown Berets, recalled crossing paths with Salazar amid the commotion.

"Ruben stood out in the crowd because he was wearing a silk shirt, navy blue trousers and shined shoes, so I said, 'Hey man, you're not dressed right for this kind of thing,'" Sánchez said. "Ruben laughed



Two young men hold a banner marking the National Chicano Moratorium in East Los Angeles on Aug. 29, 1970. (Sal Castro / Los Angeles Public Library)

and said, 'I'm not worried.'"

Salazar had a few hours left to live.

The tumult spread toward the park, where about 40 officers were lined up with riot batons across their chests. The crowd surged forward, was pushed back by deputies, then surged forward again.

More deputies arrived to reinforce the skirmish line, which was collapsing in the confusion. Tear gas canisters exploded. Demonstrators ran for cover or stood and fought.

"We had heard through the grapevine that gangs were coming out to fight that day," Sánchez said. "In other words, the issue of police brutality in East L.A. had finally come down to a showdown."

Ismael "Smiley" Perera was among the young Chicanos who had come looking for trouble that day and found it. "We duked

it out with the cops and it was a righteous feeling," he told *The Times* five years later. "It was like I got years of frustration and hate out of me that day."

Violence swept with breathtaking speed along Whittier Boulevard.

At 3 p.m., sheriff's officials issued an urgent call directing as many units as possible from throughout the county to Laguna Park. By 3:30 p.m., deputies established roadblocks to prevent any vehicles from entering the battle zone.

A 3-square-mile area — bounded roughly by the Pomona Freeway on the north and Olympic Boulevard on the south — was the scene of people running for cover and riot-equipped police in gold-colored helmets and gas masks advancing in military formations, trampling spectators and clubbing those who did not

move fast enough. For many in the community, it confirmed their complaints of abusive and indifferent law enforcement.

Among the demonstrators was 15-year-old Lynn Ward of El Monte, who served as a Brown Beret "medic," carrying first-aid supplies in case, as Sánchez put it, "things went wrong."

Sánchez recalled that Ward was in good spirits when he showed up wearing a bush jacket and beret — the headgear seen on countless posters of Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara. He was small, barely over 5 feet 6 and 133 pounds.

"Lynn told me that he really wanted to be out there on Aug. 29," Sánchez said. "But our role that day was not to provide security. Our job was simply to display our presence and protest the war."

It may never be known whether Ward

knew that Brown Beret leaders later raced up and down the boulevard like military officers in urgent retreat, screaming, "Pull out! Pull out!"

A medical examiner's report would say that Ward was "reportedly getting on his motorcycle in midafternoon" — the exact time was unclear — when "someone allegedly threw a Molotov cocktail at him." Other accounts say someone tossed an incendiary device into a trash can.

Whatever the cause, a blast hurled Ward into the air 38 feet and through the plate-glass window of a store, Velasquez Tortilleria.

That tortilleria at 4112 Whittier Blvd. was owned by my grandmother, Juanita Velasquez — a detail I learned while investigating Ward's death for this article.

Ward, who suffered severe burns and a

mangled right leg that was later amputated, was initially treated at a first-aid stand set up across Whittier Boulevard from East Los Angeles Doctors Hospital.

At 88, my mother's memories have faded in time. But she remembers visiting the tortilleria a few days after the unrest ended.

"When I walked into the store," she recalled, "Mom was sweeping up broken glass. She looked at me with sadness in her eyes and said, 'Mira como dejaron aquí.' Look what they've done.

"I'll help you clean it up, mom," my mother said, then set to work.

There was more chaos to come. At about 4 p.m., firefighters and deputies continued to be pummeled with bricks, rocks and bottles as they tried to respond to flashpoints, including a county fire station under siege at the corner of Eastman Avenue and Verona Street. They arrived to find every window broken and files burning in front offices. In the driveway, a squad car was engulfed in flames.

Billows of smoke rose above a 3-mile stretch of Whittier Boulevard that cuts through the heart of East L.A.'s commercial district as police with bullhorns ordered people to leave the area.

That was not an easy order to follow, Villalobos recalled.

"Demonstrators from out of town found themselves trapped in East L.A.'s unfamiliar maze-like geography of narrow neighborhood streets, restricted cemeteries and impassable freeways," he said. "Getting back to cars and buses parked miles away was a terrifying ordeal amid the chaos."

Afraid and desperate, "some people looked for places to hide," he said. "Many others poured back onto Whittier Boulevard, where buildings burned out of control and caravans of police vehicles were slithering like snakes at high speed to break up the crowds."

In some cases, tear gas blew inside buses that had brought demonstrators from out of state. The occupants gasped for air until the drivers could get the vehicles moving.

The violence reached a new level at 4:20 p.m. when 35-year-old Angel Diaz barreled toward a police roadblock at Whittier Boulevard and Esperanza Street in a white 1960 Valiant. Diaz blew through the intersection and then through another roadblock a few blocks away at Calzona Street.

Continuing east on Whittier, the Valiant

swerved toward deputies who leaped out of the way. One deputy whacked the car with his billy club as it sped past. The area was still crowded with demonstrators, but five other deputies fired one round each. "I aimed for the driver's head," Deputy Allen B. Mills told a coroner's inquest.

Diaz turned right at Eastman and headed toward a dozen officers guarding the burning fire station. Deputy Roger Jewell told the inquest, "I raised my hand, the driver ducked beneath the dash. I raised my pistol, steadied it with my left hand and fired three times."

It's unclear which deputy fired the key shot, but one bullet struck Diaz in the back of the neck. He slumped and crashed into a telephone pole, sending sparks flying from the wires.

About 35 minutes after Diaz crashed, deputies responding to a report of two armed men inside the Silver Dollar Bar & Cafe converged on the bar a mile and half to the east on Whittier Boulevard. The report was false, but among those inside was Salazar, 42, taking a break from covering the unrest. His head was shattered by a heavy torpedo-shaped tear gas projectile fired by Deputy Thomas Wilson, the acting sergeant at the scene.

It was the way Salazar died that made him a martyr to many in the Mexican American community. As a Times columnist and news director of television station KMEX he had spoken out against the oppression of Mexican Americans, and some in the community to this day believe he was assassinated and not, as an official inquiry found, the victim of a tragic accident.

Salazar died instantly and his body was not removed from the bar until 7 p.m. The unrest finally quieted down about an hour after that.

By then Diaz was at USC-County Medical Center and still unconscious when authorities booked him on assault with a deadly weapon on a police officer. Diaz, who had a lengthy criminal record dating to 1953, died three days later.

Ward, the 15-year-old Brown Beret, died on Sept. 9, the eve of a televised inquest into the slaying of Salazar.

Two poignant tangible symbols born out of strife on Aug. 29, 1970, and the soul searching that followed, remain to this day.

On Sept. 17, 1970, Laguna Park was renamed in honor of Salazar, whose death was compared by many Latinos to the as-



assinations of the Kennedy brothers and of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Around the same time, the East Los Angeles Sheriff's station adopted a new logo. Beneath the title "Fort Apache," it features an image of a boot with a riot helmet and a Spanish phrase, "Siempre una patada en los pantalones, which means "Always a kick in the pants."

Critics say the emblem casts the station as a Wild West outpost of deputies who crack down on local Latinos. But Sheriff Alex Villanueva, who served at the station for seven years, says it is a source of pride.



The massive demonstration was seen as an extraordinary achievement of the Chicano civil rights movement, a new force on the political scene that, much like Black Lives Matter today, focused attention on fundamental problems in basic institutions in American society — the education system, the administration of justice, the political process and military service.

But much of the sympathy and concern it generated erupted in anger that trans-

**A sheriff's deputy aims his gun into the Silver Dollar Bar & Cafe, where newsman Ruben Salazar died Aug. 29, 1970, after being struck in the head by a tear gas canister. (Raul Ruiz)**

formed East L.A. into an urban battleground.

Five years later, Eduardo Aguirre, an ex-con who headed a local addiction recovery program, mused that "the violence did bring all our problems out into the open. But was it worth nearly destroying our community to do it?"

That remains a tough question to answer.

"Organizing the massive demonstration of Mexican Americans' opposition to the Vietnam War was a huge achievement for the Chicano movement," Mario T. Garcia, a professor at UC Santa Barbara, said. "But it turned into a riot, which had the ironic effect of tagging the movement as violent even though deputies had caused most of the trouble."

"The Chicano movement," he added, "never fully recovered."







# CHASING SALAZAR

ACCIDENT OR ASSASSINATION? A REPORTER'S YEARS-LONG QUEST TO FIND OUT HOW AND WHY RUBEN SALAZAR DIED.

BY ROBERT J. LOPEZ

The fax machine beeped and screeched as it transmitted a two-page document to the FBI. I was a low-level reporter for the Los Angeles Times working out of a storefront news bureau on Exposition Boulevard in South L.A., chasing answers to questions that the newspaper should have asked decades earlier about the death of one of its own.

Without the knowledge of my editors and unsure of what I might be dredging up, I faxed a Freedom of Information Act request to the FBI, searching for clues to a

momentous but neglected chapter in Los Angeles history: the slaying, by a sheriff's deputy, of Los Angeles Times columnist and KMEX-TV news director Ruben Salazar.

That letter, which I sent to the FBI on June 14, 1994, launched me on a journey that has continued to this day. It led me to investigate and challenge the actions of law enforcement agencies in the months leading up to Salazar's slaying, as well as to try to uncover new details surrounding his death amid a tumultuous anti-Vietnam War and civil rights protest in East Los Angeles on a hot, smoggy afternoon — now 50 years ago.

The more I dug into the past, the more

I began to question the historical role of The Times in failing to deeply investigate the killing of a trailblazing journalist who opened the city's eyes to the hopes and frustrations of its long-overlooked Mexican American community.

I also questioned my role as a Chicano journalist who was hired at a time — not unlike now — when the Los Angeles Times was under fire for the failure of its newsroom to mirror the ethnic and racial diversity of the communities it covered.

Salazar was a pioneer whose award-winning journalism opened the door for a generation of Latino reporters like me. I felt a responsibility to focus attention on a grave injustice. But most of all, I was hoping to break news that might shed light on a killing that remains a source of speculation and suspicion to this day.

Was Salazar's slaying nothing more than a tragic accident at the hands of a deputy who was operating under "riot" conditions, as law enforcement authorities contend? Or was Salazar targeted, as some of his closest friends and activists believe, to silence his hard-hitting

reporting of police actions in Los Angeles' Mexican American neighborhoods?

Over the years, the story kept pulling me back as I tried to answer these questions, and eventually I came to my own conclusions about what happened that day on Aug. 29, 1970, when sheriff's deputies swooped down on the Silver Dollar Bar & Cafe.

**EARLY CODE SWITCHER**

In death, Salazar became a mythic symbol for a movement and the people he covered as a journalist. In reality, he was a complicated figure, a skilled code switcher who could easily navigate between white and Latino worlds.

Colleagues at the Santa Rosa Press Democrat, where Salazar was the Petaluma bureau chief in 1956, told me how he exposed secret government meetings and searched for restaurants that served menudo, the familiar Mexican stew of red chile pepper, tripe and hominy. After joining The Times, Salazar lived with his family in Orange County, the land of Richard Nixon and the right-wing John Birch Society.

Salazar became a foreign correspondent, one of the Los Angeles Times' most prestigious assignments. He covered a U.S. military invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965, reported on the war in Vietnam at a time of growing U.S. involvement, and became the newspaper's Mexico City bureau chief.

In January 1969, Salazar returned to Los Angeles to cover a Mexican American community that had transformed dra-



Lopez stands next to a framed original poster of former Los Angeles Times reporter Ruben Salazar that is displayed inside his office. (Mel Melcon / Los Angeles Times)

matically. The civil rights movement had swept across the barrios of the Southwest, where activists had begun calling themselves Chicanos. Emboldened by cultural pride, Chicano protesters were speaking out against generations of racism and discrimination, substandard educational opportunities, law enforcement abuse and the war in Vietnam, where Latinos were dying in large numbers.

A year after returning to Los Angeles, Salazar left The Times to become news director at Spanish-language KMEX-TV. But he agreed to write a weekly column for the newspaper focusing on the Mexican American community.

His columns were a radical departure from the straightforward news articles he had written as a reporter. In his first

column, he offered an unapologetic explanation of why Chicanos resented being told by whites that speaking Spanish was a problem. "Chicanos will tell you that their culture predates that of the Pilgrims and that Spanish was spoken in America before English," Salazar wrote. "So the 'problem' is not theirs but the Anglos' who don't speak Spanish."

Salazar understood the power of television to reach large audiences in a growing Spanish-language community. Each weeknight, his hour-long "Noticiero 34" newscast attracted nearly 300,000 viewers, making it one of the most-watched local news shows. "The reason, undoubtedly, is a newly gained pride in the Spanish language by the nation's second largest minority," he wrote in one of his columns.

#### DEATH AT THE SILVER DOLLAR

At KMEX, Salazar's small news crew aggressively covered growing tensions between Chicano

activists and the Los Angeles Police Department and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. Concerned about the reporting, police visited Salazar at the station and warned that he was damaging the reputation of the LAPD. "Besides, they said, this kind of information could be dangerous in the minds of barrio people," Salazar wrote in a July 24, 1970, column.

On Saturday morning, Aug. 29, 1970, Salazar met KMEX cameraman Octavio Gomez and reporter Guillermo Restrepo near Belvedere Park in East Los Angeles, where crowds were gathering for the National Chicano Moratorium Against the Vietnam War.

As the summer sun burned through a smoggy haze, an estimated 20,000 men, women and children marched nearly three miles to a rally at Laguna Park (later renamed Ruben F. Salazar Park). They chanted "Chicano Power!" and hoisted banners — "Houston," "Denver," "Albuquerque" — proclaiming the far-flung

places from where they had traveled for the historic gathering.

It was the high point of a burgeoning movement and at the time was one of the largest civil rights marches in Los Angeles history. But the rally exploded into violence after sheriff's deputies responded to reports of thefts at a liquor store near Laguna Park. Deputies decided to clear the peaceful gathering, firing tear gas canisters into the multitudes sprawled on the grass as helmet-clad, baton-wielding officers charged forward.

Protesters battled with police and dark clouds of smoke rose into the air as buildings were set on fire along Whittier Boulevard. Salazar and Restrepo worked their way east, stopping at the Silver Dollar Cafe to use the restroom, then decided to grab a quick beer.

Sheriff's deputies responded to a report of two armed men inside the tavern, a report that later turned out to be false. Deputies fired several tear gas projectiles through the curtained doorway, including a 10-inch torpedo-shaped missile designed to rip through plywood in barricade situations. It struck the 42-year-old Salazar in the head, killing him as he sat at the bar next to Restrepo, who crawled out through a back door while choking smoke filled the small space.

#### FINDING THE RIFT

On a hot summer day in El Paso, I sat in a conference room packed with reporters at the 1995 National Assn. of Hispanic Journalists convention. Four panelists were lauding the groundbreaking work of Salazar, who was raised in the Texas border city and had cut his teeth as a cub reporter at the El Paso Herald-Post.

A year had passed since I sent my letter to the FBI. My request for records was being processed and it was unclear how long that would take. I had sent similar requests to the LAPD and Sheriff's Department but was told they didn't have the records I was seeking.

The Los Angeles Times wanted to publish something substantial for the 25th anniversary of Salazar's slaying, which was just two months away, and it was my job to make that happen. But as the panel in El Paso was winding down, I didn't have a story. Until a respected journalist spoke up.

Charlie Ericksen, easily recognizable with his glasses and grizzled beard, stood from his chair and looked at the panelists.

"I'm one of those people who still firmly believe that Ruben was a victim of a political assassination," he flatly said.

A founder of the Washington, D.C.-based Hispanic Link news service, Ericksen, who started his career as a copy boy at the Los Angeles Mirror, had helped launch the careers of many Latino reporters. Without elaborating, he told the gathering that Salazar believed police were after him. I scribbled into my reporter's notebook. I had a lead to chase.

As I later found out, Ericksen and Salazar were close friends. Ericksen and two other friends — a Catholic priest and the director of the L.A. office of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights — had met the newsman at an Olvera Street restaurant three days before he was killed. In separate interviews I held with the three men, they described Salazar as shaken and worried that he was being followed by police. He feared police would do something to discredit his reporting, they recalled.

Their recollections were compelling. Salazar was a veteran journalist who had covered combat overseas. Early in his



Salazar in front of the Old Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City. He was the newspaper's Mexico City bureau chief. (Los Angeles Times)

career, he had pretended to be drunk and was arrested by El Paso police. The ruse enabled him to expose wrongdoing in the city's notorious jail. Clearly, he was not a man who was easily scared.

Restrepo, the former KMEX reporter, said he and Salazar were investigating allegations that Los Angeles police and sheriff's deputies had planted evidence on some suspects and beaten others. The two journalists had been tipped off: Authorities knew about their investigation.

"We were in hot water," Restrepo told me.

I landed another promising lead. A year earlier, the LAPD had responded to my records request, saying the counterterrorism division had no records of Salazar. That was true, but through my reporting I learned that an intelligence file on Salazar had been compiled for former Chief Ed Davis. It was buried in city archives.

I went to the cavernous warehouse where tens of thousands of boxes of historical city records are stored. The LAPD file revealed a bitter rift between Salazar and Davis. The chief had accused Salazar of reporting a "total lie" regarding comments he made in a meeting with Latino journalists. Davis demanded that Salazar apologize — which the journalist refused to do, saying his report was accurate.

The file, which contained transcripts of KMEX news reports and photocopies of Times articles, disclosed a disturbing detail: A "reliable confidential informant" at the newspaper had passed information about Salazar to the LAPD. Salazar, police were told, was a "slanted, left-wing-oriented reporter." I never confirmed the name of that informant but knew through my reporting that Salazar didn't trust some of his colleagues.

I contacted Davis, who criticized Salazar, saying he lacked objectivity and was "not some kind of diplomat or peacemaker." The former chief said in the 1995 interview that he wasn't aware of police shadowing the newsman, but he acknowledged it might have occurred. "If he was surveilled, it might have been done unauthorized by some lower level officer," said Davis, who died in 2006.

On Aug. 26, 1995, the Los Angeles Times published my 3,200-word article on Salazar. It was a solid story that featured details not previously reported by the newspaper. Still, I had found no conclusive evidence that law enforcement authorities were tailing Salazar or knew he was in

the tavern when the deadly projectile was fired. It featured new details but found no conclusive evidence

I hoped that the FBI documents, which I was still waiting for, would provide new clues.

#### OPENING THE FILES

Tourists strolled past colorful piñatas, intricately woven shawls and other handicrafts as I sat with a colleague, then-Times columnist Héctor Tobar, at La Luz del Dia Restaurant on Olvera Street in late June 2010.

It was the same restaurant where a shaken Salazar had met his three friends, telling them he suspected police were after him. We were there to meet a powerful Los Angeles County official who might be able to help us uncover new information about Salazar's slaying.

After 15 years, my search for records had largely resulted in one disappointment after another. Documents from the U.S. Department of Justice were of little help. A request to the CIA prompted a cryptic response: Agency officials could neither confirm nor deny the existence of any records on Salazar, saying such information was classified.

But the biggest setback came from the FBI. More than five years after I had requested records, I finally received more than 200 pages of documents. Some portions were redacted, for what officials said were national security reasons. The records failed to yield any new information on the circumstances of Salazar's slaying.

I had hit the end of the reporting road — until a tip pulled me back.

In early 2010, I learned from a source that the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department had more than half a dozen boxes filled with files related to Salazar and the Chicano Moratorium. The existence of these records had not been disclosed to me when I filed my original request with the department in 1994.

I sent a new California Public Records Act request to the Sheriff's Department seeking to review the files. On March 10, then-Sheriff Lee Baca denied my request.

Hoping to avoid a battle for the records, I met the department's media liaison on March 18 and told him it was in everyone's interest to open the secret files. He indicated that Baca was reconsidering his denial of my request and was "inclined to release" the records.

I had yet to receive a response from



Baca about the files when Tobar and I had lunch at the Olvera Street restaurant with a member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

The five supervisors on the board wielded considerable influence over Baca because they controlled his department's budget. During an off-the-record conversation, Tobar and I played the game of asking questions, yet we made it clear we believed the files should be unsealed and that any assistance from the supervisors would be in the public interest.

In early July, Tobar wrote a column about Salazar and called on the Sheriff's Department to open the files, saying it could help heal the wounds of a 40-year-old case.

Baca denied my request again on Aug. 9. At that point, I knew that the best strategy was to keep this story in the news. Over the next three weeks I produced five articles and a news video. The newspaper published a strong editorial saying it was time to end decades of obfuscation.

The day after my first article was published, the Board of Supervisors ordered the county counsel to prepare a report about whether the files should be made public. Around the same time, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund was working with a documentary filmmaker to press the Sheriff's Department to release the files.

On Aug. 19 I met a source at a down-

**Interior of the Silver Dollar Bar & Cafe in East Los Angeles, where Times columnist Ruben Salazar was found dead on Aug. 29, 1970. (Frank Q. Brown / Los Angeles Times)**

town street corner, where I was handed a large envelope with a copy of the confidential report from the county counsel to the Board of Supervisors. I raced back to the newsroom to write a story. The county's own attorneys had concluded that some of the records should be made public under state law.

Baca had turned over the files to the Office of Independent Review, a civilian watchdog agency created to monitor the department. Over the next six months, the office reviewed the records and took the unprecedented step of investigating a 40-year-old case. The office announced it would prepare a public report of its findings.

A few days before the report was made public, I was given a copy by my source and wrote a front-page story published Feb. 19, 2011. The report said deputies made a series of tactical errors that led to Salazar's killing but found no evidence that he was targeted or had been under surveillance. The report acknowledged that its findings were limited regarding whether Salazar was targeted because that line of investigation was not pursued by homicide detectives assigned to the case.

In early March 2011, the Sheriff's Department finally opened the eight boxes of files for reporters to review. I pored over the voluminous records. They contained interesting revelations, including details of law enforcement surveillance of community groups involved in the Chicano Moratorium.

But the files contained no new information answering the questions that I had first set out to investigate more than 15 years earlier.

#### ROLE OF THE TIMES

I never wanted to be pigeonholed into writing stories focusing solely on Latino issues. But this was a story about a fellow Los Angeles Times journalist who was killed. It transcended simplistic boundaries.

When I first came up with the idea of sending a Freedom of Information Act request to the FBI, I was sure that someone at the newspaper had already done so. No



Ruben Salazar, top center, with his fellow Los Angeles Times reporters. (Los Angeles Times)

one had.

I spent years asking questions and reporting facts that the Los Angeles Times should have asked and uncovered in the weeks and months following Salazar's slaying. By the time I got involved, the trail was cold. People's memories had faded and key records could have been lost or destroyed.

After Salazar's slaying, The Times largely covered breaking events about

the case — including a 16-day coroner's inquest, a fact-finding proceeding that focused more on the unrest and less on the circumstances of Salazar's death. It also produced an investigative piece that called into question the use of the deadly projectile. But for the death of one of its own, the newspaper should have launched a crusade to find additional new evidence and hold people and agencies accountable.

Had the newspaper looked hard enough, it could have discovered key details, including that federal prosecutors had convened a grand jury to investigate Salazar's slaying. The existence of the grand jury was disclosed to me in 1995 by Jerris Leonard, former U.S. assistant attorney general for civil rights. The Catholic priest who met with Salazar at Olvera Street told me he testified before the panel. The federal investigation quietly closed in March 1971 without any charges being filed against the deputy who fired the deadly projectile, according to U.S. Justice Department records I obtained.

Bill Thomas directed local coverage for the Los Angeles Times when Salazar was killed and later became editor of the newspaper. In a 1995 interview, he insisted that his reporters were thorough in their coverage. "I don't know how you could have been any more aggressive than we were," Thomas told me. He died in 2014.

A former high-ranking Times editor offered a different narrative.

Frank del Olmo was well respected and the first Latino named to the masthead of the Los Angeles Times. Hired in 1970, he was mentored by Salazar and became a columnist and associate editor. He died in 2004, after suffering an apparent heart attack in the newsroom.

Del Olmo was on the Salazar panel at the 1995 El Paso journalism conference, where he acknowledged that he and other Los Angeles Times reporters "never really were allowed" to fully investigate the newsman's slaying. He said the killing created an emotionally difficult situation and that Thomas was not comfortable with launching an exhaustive reporting

effort, according to a transcript of the panel discussion.

"The comfort level wasn't there — to allow his reporters to go out and find out what happened, and as a result, we let that ball slip right between our legs," Del Olmo said. "So, we bear some responsibility."

Salazar's death, Del Olmo told the journalists in the room, was "a painful issue" for his newsroom colleagues.

"They just wanted to be done with it as quickly as possible."

#### CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

In recent months, I've seen history repeating itself.

I was hired by the Los Angeles Times in 1992, as part of a grand experiment called "City Times," to report on Latino issues for a team that had been created to cover neighborhoods historically neglected by the newspaper — the "hole in the doughnut," as editors called the area.

At the time, the newspaper was criticized for not doing enough to hire journalists of color. It had largely failed to recognize social and economic forces fueling civil rebellion that exploded in April 1992, after a jury acquitted four LAPD officers who had brutally beaten Rodney G. King, an unarmed Black man. City Times was a zoned news section launched in September 1992 in response to the criticism. It was shuttered in August 1995.

Today, the Los Angeles Times is under fire yet again for failing to hire and promote more reporters of color. The issue spilled into the public realm during the coverage of the Black Lives Matter protests in Los Angeles and across the country following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

As I watched news reports of the protests, I saw police firing projectiles at reporters doing their jobs and thought of Salazar. But I also realized that there are important differences between then and now.

Our ability to fully comprehend what happened to Salazar during a monumental chapter in Los Angeles history is partially limited because there is no audio-visual recording. There were black-and-white photos of deputies wielding weapons at the Silver Dollar, and there were conflicting eyewitness accounts. But there was no real-time video footage.

Imagine the King beating without George Holliday's camcorder footage



Ruben Salazar during his tenure as news director of the Los Angeles Spanish-language TV station, KMEX. (PBS)

of LAPD officers swinging their batons. Imagine Floyd's graphic killing without Darnella Frazier's cellphone footage capturing a pivotal moment in the history of race relations and police violence in the United States.

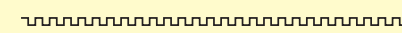
In part because of the technological limitations of the early 1970s, we've been left with pieces of circumstantial evidence that allow us to draw our own conclusions about the tragic slaying of Ruben Salazar.

My conclusion? When sheriff's deputies descended on the Silver Dollar 50 years ago, they didn't think about whether their actions would result in injury or death. They didn't care who was inside that bar.

This incident would not have played out the same way in a white neighborhood. But this was East Los Angeles, a Mexican American barrio. Sheriff's deputies were never held accountable for their actions.

In the end, Salazar died from the very type of law enforcement abuse he was trying to expose.

*Lopez was part of the team of Los Angeles Times reporters that won the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for public service.*



# THE CHICANA REVOLT

CHIGANAS!

Chicanas, find yourself!  
Do you have a part in the Movement?  
Are you satisfied?  
Are your ideas suppressed?

... & CREATE your ideas!  
... CREATE Las Adelitas  
de Aztlán

2:00 p.m.  
Euclid Heights Center  
3045 Whittier Blvd  
L.A.  
Sunday - Feb. 22, 1970

Las Adelitas de Aztlán  
Somos una familia de  
hermanas



**THE WOMEN OF THE BROWN  
BERETS — LAS ADELITAS DE AZTLÁN  
— BREAK FREE AND FORM THEIR  
OWN MOVEMENT.**

BY VANESSA MARTÍNEZ  
AND JULIA BARAJAS

Putting pen to paper, Hilda Jensen began her letter: “Hi, I’m the girl with the bandoleros.”

It was 2003 and she was writing to filmmaker Jesús Salvador Treviño from her home in Alabama. She had learned that the cover of his memoir, “Eye-witness,” had a photo of her as a teenager.

Through the years, she’d stumbled on images from the 1960s and ’70s, photos of her and her friends growing up in East Los Angeles and taking part in political actions, including the massive National Chicano Moratorium march and rally against the Vietnam War on Aug. 29, 1970. The photos were in newspapers, books, on a vinyl album cover and shared across the internet.

Jensen noticed that the men in those images were usually identified with their full names. In contrast, the women and girls who participated in the Chicano movement were most often collectively described as Brown Beret Chicanas. Only a few pictures bore their names.

The thought of women’s contributions to the Chicano movement going unrecognized bothered Jensen. She asked Treviño to be identified, and to include her maiden name: Hilda Reyes. He agreed without hesitation.

Established by teenagers of Mexican descent, the Brown Berets — a group akin to the Black Panther Party in dress and ideology — played a pivotal role in organizing residents of urban areas during the late 1960s and early ’70s. With a platform that centered the experiences of working-class Mexican Americans dubbed “Chicanos,” the Brown Berets rejected assimilation into European American society and stood against the Vietnam War and police brutality. They also demanded high-quality and culturally relevant bilingual education, helping lead massive walkouts at high schools on the Eastside.

At its peak, the Brown Berets had as many as 55 chapters throughout the country, including the Southwest but also in states such as Kansas and Minnesota. By 1970, however, the founding chapter was tearing at the seams. As the group planned demonstrations against the Vietnam War, female members began to question why they were largely excluded

from leadership positions and relegated to behind-the-scenes, menial work.

In a letter addressed to the Brown Berets’ national headquarters, the women of the Los Angeles chapter collectively resigned on Feb. 25, 1970, citing “a great exclusion on behalf of the male segment.”

“We have been treated as nothings, and not as Revolutionary sisters,” they wrote. “We have found that the Brown Beret men have oppressed us more than the pig system.”

“It was really, really hard to leave. It led to a lot of fights. But it also felt very freeing,” says Gloria Arellanes, the first woman to resign from the group.

“I had reached a point where I had tried to make it good and make it work,” she says. “And I didn’t get that, so I had to stand my ground and say: ‘Ya basta. I’m done.’”

## LA CAUSA

While cruising through Whittier Boulevard one night, 18-year-old Arellanes and two friends were invited to the Piranya Coffee House in East Los Angeles. Soon they found themselves among members of the Young Chicanos for Community Action, a group that pushed for educational reform.

After two more visits, Arellanes and her friends joined the group, which was later rebranded the Brown Berets. “I’d never heard this kind of talk,” she says, “kind of militant, and a lot of, ‘We’re not going to take the police getting us anymore.’”

The group presented an alternative to her experience at El Monte High School, which was marked by racial conflicts and unequal discipline consequences between white and brown students.

“There was a lot of discrimination, a lot of racism,” she says, remembering routine brawls with a group of white students known as the “surfers.”

“The police would come into the hallways of the high school and just arrest the Chicanos,” she says. “They never arrested the white kids.”

In the classroom, Arellanes often felt invisible. She remembers waving her hand, hoping to be called on. “I never got acknowledged, so I gave up, and I said: ‘Forget this.’”

Through her work with the Brown Berets, Arellanes developed confidence in her abilities and found that she was able to galvanize volunteers. David Sánchez, the group’s founder, took notice and named

her minister of Finance and Correspondence. She became the only woman on the leadership team.

The position, she says, put her in a gray area. Often, she was the “go-between” for the male Brown Beret leaders and the female membership. But this afforded her the opportunity to establish camaraderie with the other women and girls.

Alongside the other female members, Arellanes designed and edited *La Causa*, the Brown Berets’ community newspaper.

“We did all the artwork. We did all the lettering,” she says. “There are pictures of us around the table just talking and talking and doing our work. We always had a good time when the women got together.”

In 1969, the Brown Berets established the East LA Free Clinic on Whittier Boulevard. Sánchez, who partnered with a health group to find professionals willing to volunteer and serve the community, tasked Arellanes with running the clinic.

Under her direction, the medical center — which was later renamed El Barrio Free Clinic — provided a wide range of medical services, including drug addiction counseling, immunizations, physical exams, STI screenings and even small surgical procedures. Health professionals also provided counseling for unwanted pregnancies.

“And we didn’t say: ‘Have an abortion’ or ‘Do this,’” says Arellanes, underscoring that patients were always informed of all their choices. This resulted in trouble with funding.

“We used to get money from the Catholic Church. And they came one time with a priest and said that they were taking the

money away. I said, ‘Fine with me. I’m not going to give up what we do for people.’”

The clinic was also a site of activism. In 1969, the female members joined a hunger strike in solidarity with 26 prisoners protesting conditions at the Los Angeles County Jail.

#### THE SOLDIER’S DAUGHTER

Jensen got involved with the Brown Berets at 14, when she was in middle school, and has fond memories of working with female members. They fundraised for the clinic, answered phones, sterilized tools and equipment and provided Spanish-English translation.

She first came to know about the group through Arlene Sánchez, her best friend at Hollenbeck Jr. High, and sister of Brown Berets founder David Sánchez.

In seventh grade, the two girls would often meet on the Sánchez family’s porch, listening to records and eavesdropping as David Sánchez and his friends ran meetings inside the house.

One day, Sánchez asked the girls to help distribute fliers. They spent the afternoon walking up and down Brooklyn Avenue, doling out leaflets for an event at the Piranya Coffee House. But when they asked Sánchez if they could go along to the event, he told them, “You girls are too young.”

The girls were undeterred. They talked someone into giving them a ride and, halfway through the event, the uninvited middle schoolers gingerly entered the coffee shop. “David was a little upset,” says Jensen, speaking by phone from Kingman, Ariz., where she moved in 2008. He immediately ushered the girls to a back room. Then he softened. He walked up to Jensen and his disobedient sister and said, “Go get yourselves a drink.”

The middle schoolers melted into a sea of smart, sophisticated faces, all sipping coffee and animatedly discussing politics. With cups of soda in tow, they feigned doing the same. Then bright lights flashed through the windows.

Jensen, now 67, recalls seeing Sánchez sprint out the door to see what was going on. She remembers seeing police officers and squad cars. “And they threw him against the car. They beat him up,” she says.

“But that was a constant thing” at the coffeehouse, says Jensen, who was held at a jail overnight after police raided the coffeehouse that night.



Gloria Arellanes (left, second row) marches in a Robert Kennedy Requiem Memorial Procession the day after he was killed, from Belvedere Park to East Los Angeles College Stadium for a Catholic Mass. Brown Berets were security. (George Rodriguez)

As a result, Jensen’s mother opposed her participation in the group. But there was no changing her daughter’s mind. Eventually Jensen’s mother supported her, going so far as to sew the female Brown Berets’ uniforms.

Wearing that uniform gave Jensen a sense of pride, “a sense of belonging,” she says, “with mexicanos, chicanos, something I didn’t have before.”

After photographers, including the now-acclaimed George Rodriguez, snapped pictures of her with a bandolier across her chest at Lincoln High School, Jensen became an icon. Her image was reproduced on book covers to raise funds for the Brown Berets, and since then she’s been featured on posters, buttons, books and much more.

At the same time Jensen, a symbol of anti-war protests, was also the daughter of a decorated war veteran.

At first, Jensen’s father bristled at her participation in demonstrations against the Vietnam War, reminding her that he had a Purple Heart for his service in the Korean War. They clashed. But then they began to talk in earnest. Through those conversations, Jensen learned that even in the trenches her father was segregated from white soldiers.

“You see, this is why,” Jensen told him, aghast at what he had endured.

“As I got older we mended our differences and we got more close,” she adds. “I

was his caregiver and we understood each other, respected each other’s views.”

#### SHE SAID, HE SAID

As the Brown Berets’ influence expanded, the role of women in the Los Angeles chapter remained circumscribed. Besides Arellanes, no other woman rose through the ranks. And there were no elections for leadership positions. Sánchez named himself prime minister and appointed fellow ministers at will.

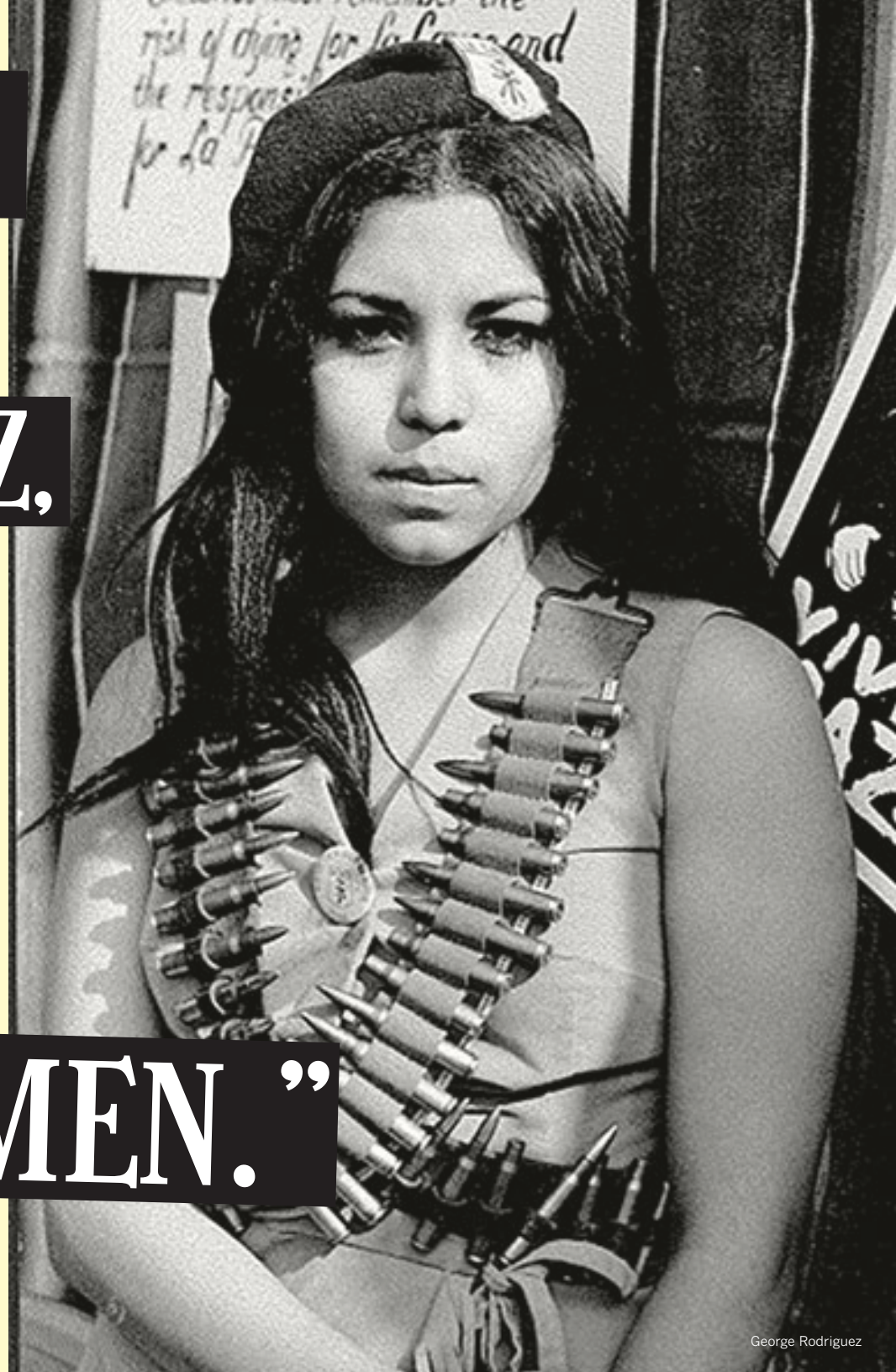
Sánchez today says he had a reason for his governing style. “We saw that so many organizations fell apart because of the voting and because of the chisme [or gossip] and because of the arguments, which destroy most organizations,” he says. “So, we decided that we would have a semi-military organization and just decide on the mission — no arguments, no doubts. It was a lot faster, and it saved us a lot of problems.”

That structure, however, excluded the women and stifled disgruntled members’ concerns. Conflicts arose over the Brown Berets’ free clinic, which also served as its



**“I REMEMBER  
HOW I FELT  
THEN. GEE WHIZ,  
PROUD AS CAN  
BE MARCHING  
WITH WOMEN.  
CHICANA WOMEN.”**

**- HILDA JENSEN, NÉE REYES.**





Former Brown Beret Hilda Jensen. (Hilda Jensen)

headquarters.

According to Arellanes, men in the group often gathered there to drink and fraternize after hours. They never picked up after themselves, she says, leaving it up to the women who ran the clinic to hastily tidy up before patients arrived.

Arellanes took her concerns to Prime Minister Sánchez. "I would tell him: 'The janitors have to clean up the mess, and guess who the janitors are?'" she says. "I was getting tired of that. So I asked David to talk to the men and tell them that they can't hang around the clinic."

Sánchez remembers it differently. In an interview with *The Times*, he says that male Brown Berets only gathered for drinks at the clinic on one occasion.

"I didn't think nothing of it," he adds, describing those members as "good guys" who merely got together to "drink a few beers."

When asked if the men left the clinic ready to use the following morning, Sánchez says, "I think they went back and cleaned up the next day."

Five decades later, Arellanes maintains that what she describes was routine behavior. It mattered, she says, because it not only created unnecessary work for the women, but tarnished the center's reputation — one they'd built from scratch.

"We had established a very family-oriented clinic," she says. To spread the word

about the services they provided, she and other female Brown Berets went door-to-door through East Los Angeles. "The younger men participated with us," she says, "but the older ones did not."

Seeing no improvement with the situation at the clinic, Arellanes told Sánchez, "If you can't clean them up, then I need to leave. And I will take all the women with me, probably, and maybe some of the younger men."

"And that's exactly what I did," she says.

To this day, Sánchez maintains that the complaints outlined in the female Brown Berets' letter were unfounded. He also holds that the resignation was a ploy to cover up a plan to steal the clinic. Arellanes, he says, was coached by "outsiders."

"I don't have a problem with the Berets anymore," Arellanes says regarding Sánchez's allegations. "I know they've claimed that I stole things from the clinic. When we left, all I took were the patient files, because of confidentiality reasons."

The resignation letter speaks to this 50-year-old dispute. "Contrary to what the men are saying," the women wrote, "that we are 'temporarily suspended[,] we have officially resigned.'"

#### UNWELCOME 'LOVE' LETTER

Dionne Espinoza, a professor at Cal State L.A. and expert on gender and sexual politics in Chicano youth culture, maps out the gendered division of labor in the Los Angeles chapter in her research on the Brown Berets. She also signals that sexism was not unique to this group, but rather a challenge women faced in organizations across the country, including the student group formerly known as MEChA and La Raza Unida, a political party.

"Women were denied leadership roles and were asked to perform only the most traditional stereotypical roles — cleaning up, making coffee, executing the orders men gave, and servicing their needs," historian Ramón Gutiérrez, a professor at the University of Chicago, writes in an article on Chicano politics for the *American Quarterly*. "Women who did manage to assume leadership positions were ridiculed as unfeminine, sexually perverse, promiscuous, and all too often, taunted as lesbians."

At San Diego State University, women had leadership roles in the campus Chicano student group. But as associate

professor Adelaida Del Castillo wrote in "Mexican Women in the United States," when it was announced that the former boxer and famed activist Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales would visit the university in 1970, the group deemed it "improper and embarrassing for a national leader to come on campus and see that the organization's leadership was female." Ultimately, it was decided that "only males would be the visible representatives for the occasion."

Even when the men praised the women, their sexism showed. Consider this passage from "A Love Letter to the Girls of Aztlán" by celebrated Chicano attorney Oscar "Zeta" Acosta — a.k.a. "the brown buffalo" and Hunter S. Thompson's Dr. Gonzo — in *Con Safos Magazine*, a leading Chicano literary journal.

*"For months now if not for years we muy macho guys of the movement have longed for your involvement in the drinking of our booze smoking of our dope and most importantly the making of our brown babies who shall bear our names and not yours ..."*

*"For now among other things I hear you now wish to be my equal y mi camarada proposing an end to separation and discrimination which of late you've learned to articulate so well ..."*

*"And so you write poems speeches and little bits of propaganda which you've copied from some white woman's notes at the SYMPOSIUM ON THE CHICANA beginning as it did and ending as it did with an attack on my machismo"*

In response, "Una Chicana de Pittsburg" [A Chicana from Pittsburg, CA] wrote: "Dear Zeta: Your love letter sounds like a proposition, and not a very good one at that."

When discussing the portrayal of female leadership in the Chicano movement — from Arellanes to United Farm Workers co-founder Dolores Huerta — Espinoza says that when examining historical

moments, it's as important to look at who passed out fliers, not just "the person talking in front of the microphone when there's a press meeting."

#### A GROUP OF THEIR OWN

After leaving the Brown Berets, Arellanes — along with Jensen and her sister, Grace; Andrea and Esther Sánchez; Lorraine Escalante; Yolanda Solis; and Arlene Sánchez — founded *Las Adelitas de Aztlán*. The name referred to the soldaderas who fought alongside the men during the Mexican Revolution. They invited members of the community to join them and on Feb. 28, 1970, they made their public debut at the second anti-war



"I ran into a lot of young women who go under the name *Las Adelitas*." - Gloria Arellanes, 74 (Christina House / Los Angeles Times)

moratorium in East Los Angeles.

In preparation for the event, they tried to learn the lyrics to a popular corrido titled "La Adelita." But the song is really long.

"We forgot the words," says Arellanes. "We always laugh about that." With rain falling on them, the Adelitas hummed the tune.

Dressed in black and wrapped in rebozos, a long garment similar to a shawl, the women and teenagers marched while carrying white crosses bearing the names of Chicanos who had died in the Vietnam War.

Arellanes carried a cross with her cousin's name, Jimmy Vásquez. Jensen, not



yet 18, carried the name of Sgt. Richard Campos, whose body was unclaimed after its return from the war.

On Aug. 29, Jensen, Grace and three other Adelitas joined the crowd on the march to Laguna Park for the National Chicano Moratorium, the third in a series of anti-war demonstrations that had taken place in East Los Angeles without incident. But as thousands of people huddled around the stage waiting for the day's programming to begin, Grace noticed smoke.

Wondering if there was a fire, they went to see what was happening. The smoke was from tear gas canisters, which police officers were hurling at demonstrators. People ran in all directions. A police officer began to chase after Jensen and her friends. He was just a couple of feet behind them, she says, remembering feeling a wave of air from the baton on her back.

As they ran, men in the crowd of protesters distracted the officers, allowing them to escape.

Then Jensen's group noticed some women and their children entering a nearby restroom. "We've got to get them out of there," said her sister Grace, "or they're gonna get hurt."

Inside the bathroom, the mothers and children struggled to get water from the faucets. They were trying to wash their faces after being tear gassed, but the trickles of water that came out weren't enough to even get a handful of water, Jensen says.

"So we're in there and these kids, they're crying for dear life because they're scared," she says. The mothers cried with them, "because they don't know what to do."

As Jensen and her companions devised an escape plan, a police officer shot a tear gas canister into the restroom. It landed in the stall farthest from them, but it didn't go off. Startled, the pained children screamed even more.

Male protesters engaged the officer outside the restroom, hurling whatever was at hand at him in an attempt to distract him. Another officer launched another tear gas canister into the restroom.

By then, Grace had ordered the group to run. As they fled, Hilda's shoe fell off and was hastily returned to her.

They ran into David Sánchez along the way, who ordered them to go home. A friend told the girls to go to his family's apartment and stay there until it was safe. They left just before streets were barricaded off.

"If we would have stayed there," Jensen

says, "we would have been — gosh, I don't even think we would have made it."

Arellanes was on the stage when the chaos at the park started.

She saw a wave of people run in one direction, then the other. "And then it went back and then boom! People were screaming and running. I got tear gassed immediately. And I could not see. I could not breathe," she says. "Somebody got a wet T-shirt and put it on my face."

She was taken onto a bus with others. They went back to the Brown Beret office, where people from out of town were also headed. The group had arranged transportation and places for them to stay, bringing people from all over the United States — including Seattle, San Antonio, Denver and Chicago. Violence from the day would leave three dead.

"How did I get home?" Arellanes wonders. "I don't know. I don't remember much after that."

#### LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND

Las Adelitas de Aztlán dissolved that year. "Everybody kind of went their own way," Arellanes says. "I went away for 40 years. I couldn't handle that people were killed."

Arellanes went on to open another clinic, La Clínica Familiar del Barrio, on Atlantic Boulevard, with an entirely new staff, some of whom went on to pursue careers in health and social work.

Jensen also stepped back and decided she would never join another organization.

"When the [original] clinic closed, that was devastating for me," she says. "When you're that young and this is all you have — really, and this is all you know — working for the community and it's closed down like that, that was the saddest thing."

After her first daughter was born in 1972, her decision to stay away from organizing was reinforced.

"After the Chicano Moratorium, I said no way am I going to put myself in jeopardy ever again," Jensen says. "Because that's how scared I was."

Surrounded by plants at her home in El Monte, where a Bernie Sanders 2016 sign still adorns her front porch, Arellanes, now 74, says it wasn't until Rosalío Muñoz, co-founder of the National Chicano Moratorium Committee, contacted her about participating in a commemoration of the moratorium in 2010 that she came back on the scene.

With two children, schooling and new-

found focus on learning about her Tongva roots, Arellanes warned Muñoz that she was now a different person.

Since then, Arellanes has participated on dozens of panels and provided an oral history of her lived experience. She also donated a large collection of documents, photographs, posters and even a brown beret to the Cal State L.A. Special Collections library. The Gloria Arellanes Papers are now a part of the library's "East L.A. Archives," which also includes another Brown Beret-related collection from co-founder Carlos Montes.

"I've been talking with the Berets," she says. "I just very clearly said, 'I don't care if you don't like me, but if we want to get any place, we've got to be united now. We've got to have solidarity and unite. Forget all the personal stuff. Let it go. Gosh, it's been 50 years. Let it go.'"

What she hasn't forgotten is the pain of Aug. 29, 1970. When scholars first began approaching her to talk about her experience in the Chicano Movement, they often showed her videos of the Moratorium. "And I would just sit and cry," she says.

Back in the 1960s and '70s, Arellanes adds, she owned a rifle. She used to go to the mountains for target practice.

After the Moratorium, she threw it out. "To see all that tragedy and that violence and get tear gassed, to see people screaming and running for their lives. It destroys something in you when you see that much pain." Later, when Arellanes raised her two sons, she wouldn't even let them have water guns.

One image remains embedded in her memory: "It was at the park. There was a lot of paper, a lot of debris. There was a wheelchair, tipped on its side. Nobody in it. You know, somebody carried somebody. That always stayed on my mind."

#### A NEW GENERATION

Although Las Adelitas de Aztlán didn't last long, they've left a legacy that others feel connected to even 50 years later.

"I ran into a lot of young women who go under the name Las Adelitas," Arellanes says. "And they were so honored to meet me. And I said: 'Why? We didn't do anything.' You know, it never took off, but for some reason it stayed for women to identify with."

Starting in 2018, Arellanes has opened up at three of the Los Angeles Women's Marches, inviting women in recently formed Brown Beret chapters to join her.



Gloria Arellanes' former beret. (Cal State LA Special Collections & Archives, Gloria Arellanes Papers)

She starts by acknowledging her Tongva ancestors.

Now, 50 years later, the events of the Aug. 29 Chicano Moratorium are ever more present in Jensen's life.

"When I see Black Lives Matter, and I see all the disruption and the cops and the people being hit with tear gas and all that, I cringe," she says. For her, it's like living that day all over again. "You don't forget these things. You stay scarred."

In the summer of 2016, poets and musicians, led by Martha González of the band Quetzal, performed at a concert called "Chicana Moratorium: Su Voz, Su Canto," inspired by the stories of former Adelitas.

Musician Alice Bag, a pioneer in the punk rock movement, honored the women by singing an as-yet unrecorded corrido about Arellanes and the Adelitas.

*"Su boina café ya se la quitó  
[She's taken off her brown beret]  
Pero también sin boina ella nos  
inspiró [But even without the beret,  
she inspired us]  
A Chicanas jovencitas  
[Young Chicanas]  
Y todo tipo de mujer  
[And all types of women]  
A las nuevas Adelitas  
[The new Adelitas]  
Que no se dan por vencer  
[Who don't give up]  
Y luchan por conseguir  
[And fight to achieve]  
Liberación verdadera"  
[True liberation]*

# MORE STORIES

## A 'CATALYTIC MOMENT' FOR ART AND CULTURE

BY CAROLINA A. MIRANDA

In the Chicano Moratorium's wake emerged a wave of muralism, printmaking, photography, performance and music that engaged Chicano themes in ways both literal and abstract — changing the landscape of Los Angeles, and sparking the establishment of long-running Southern California arts institutions.

[latimes.com/chicanomoratoriumart](http://latimes.com/chicanomoratoriumart)

## RUBEN SALAZAR: THE MAKING OF THE MYTH

BY DORANY PINEDA

Days before his slaying, Salazar, an L.A. Times reporter who rose through the ranks to become a columnist for the paper and news director of the Spanish-language TV news station KMEX, revealed to close confidants that he believed he was in danger; he suspected that he was being followed by police.

[latimes.com/rubensalazarculture](http://latimes.com/rubensalazarculture)

## CHICANO MORATORIUM EYEWITNESS

BY KEVIN BAXTER

Before he was honored by the baseball Hall of Fame, before he directed the Spanish-language radio coverage and production of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, Jaime Jarrín always considered himself a humble street reporter first. That's what led him to Whittier Boulevard on the last Saturday morning of August 1970.

[latimes.com/jaimejarrin](http://latimes.com/jaimejarrin)



## READING RUBEN SALAZAR

BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO

Salazar notched nearly every milestone that a reporter seeks in a career — overworked newcomer, trusted beat reporter, valued correspondent, must-read columnist, even television news director — as a Mexican American, at a time when the number of Latinos at the L.A. Times was no more than four. His writings are like a Chicano version of the Gnostic Gospels, one Salazar knew he was drafting all by himself.

[latimes.com/rubensalazarlegacy](http://latimes.com/rubensalazarlegacy)

## A MEXICAN AMERICAN IN VIETNAM

BY BRITNY MEJIA

As helicopters and C-130s flew over a mountaintop bunker in Vietnam, an Army soldier flipped through a copy of Time magazine and asked Tomás Sandoval two questions. Are you from Los Angeles? How about Mexican? Sandoval said yes to both. “Look what your boys are doing to your city,” the soldier said, tossing Sandoval the magazine, turned to an article with the headline: “Chicano Riot.”

[latimes.com/tomassandoval](http://latimes.com/tomassandoval)

## VOICES OF THE MORATORIUM

BY STEVE SALDIVAR

Hear from those who were at the Chicano Moratorium.

[latimes.com/chicanomoratoriumvideo](http://latimes.com/chicanomoratoriumvideo)



Undated photo strips show Gloria Arellanes, at left, and at center, with fellow Brown Beret members including, from clockwise: Lorraine Escalante, Hilda Reyes and Arlene Sánchez. (Special Collections & Archives, John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, Cal State LA, Gloria Arellanes Papers)

Photo illustrations by Martina Ibáñez-Baldor / Los Angeles Times. Photographs from Los Angeles Times; Los Angeles Herald Examiner; George Rodriguez, Ruben Salazar Archive / The University of Arizona; Mel Melcon / L.A. Times; Raul Ruiz; Jose Galvez / L.A. Times; PBS; L.A. Times; Barbara Davidson / L.A. Times; United States Postal Service; Family of Ruben Salazar / PBS; Special Collections & Archives, John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, Cal State LA, Gloria Arellanes Papers; David Fenton / Getty Images; Raul Ruiz



## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This project was designed and built by Andrea Roberson,

Martina Ibáñez-Baldor, Vanessa Martínez and Alex Tatusian.

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development to this project. Engagement editing by Adriana Lacy

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Edited by Hector Becerra, Laurie Ochoa and Steve Padilla.

Reporting by Gustavo Arellano, Julia Barajas, Daniel Hernandez,

Robert J. Lopez, Vanessa Martínez, Carolina A. Miranda, Dorany

Pineda and Louis Sahagun. Video by Albert Brave Tiger Lee, J.R.

Lizarraga and Steve Saldivar. Copy edited by R. Marina Levario

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Betty Chavarria and Judy Pryor. Zine design by Martina Ibáñez-

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