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Vietnam Veterans: Chicanos Recall the War (review)

Crescencio López

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(Review)

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estudio de las *Novelas ejemplares* seguido de un índice de términos que ponen el broche final a un volumen indispensable para el estudioso de la obra cervantina.

Julia Domínguez
Iowa State University

Vietnam Veterans: Chicanos Recall the War
University of Texas Press, 2004

By Lea Ybarra

In their own words, twenty-four Vietnam Veterans including their families, tell a deeply personal and often painful account of how their military experience in Vietnam shaped their lives. These interviews form the basis of the written material composed in the 246 page book, *Vietnam Veterans: Chicanos Recall the War* by Lea Ybarra. Her scholarly work adds to the growing repertoire of publications on Chicanos who served in America's armed forces, more specifically during the Vietnamese Conflict in the years 1961 to 1975.

The oral contributions of the *Veteranos* are compelling given the enormous emotional, personal, physical and spiritual sacrifice they endured so young. Each narration by the *Veteranos* captures the essence of the time and space of that era including their shifting attitudes and opinions before, during, and after the war. Moreover, the awareness of race and class issues including Chicano Cultural Identity become evident in America's discriminatory attitude toward Chicanos and the communities in which they lived.

In an effort to judiciously present the unique war-time experiences of the *Veteranos*, the author organizes the book into three parts that are further sub-divided into ten chapters. Major themes which arose out of each separate interview have been grouped together and they range from youthful idealism, patriotism, cultural identity, to the lasting psychological and medical impact on themselves and on their families.

In part one, *The Vietnam War and the Mexican American Community*, Ybarra contextualizes the war for the reader with a brief historical account of why the United States fought in South East Asia, and its resulting economic, environmental, personal, and political aftermath. Several notable studies are cited focusing on Chicanos and the war along with their respective analysis and significant research findings.

In part two, *Veterans Recall the War*, personal accounts of the war are told in vivid and often graphic and gruesome detail. This is the part of the book where the *Veteranos* relate their amazing ordeal of survival not only in South East Asia but in America as well. The Chicano Vietnam Veterans interviewed were just out of high school when they went to Vietnam, many of whom felt a strong and patriotic duty of becoming military soldiers because someone in their family or community was a soldier. Likely to influence their attitude toward the war was when they were deployed to Vietnam, for example soldiers deployed before the Tet Offensive in January 1968 believed strongly that the U.S. involvement in Vietnam was to fight communism. Those involved in Vietnam after the Tet Offensive in March 1968 held the belief that the U.S. was in SE Asia for corporate gain rather than freedom and liberty. Their political awareness grew from the rising antiwar movements sweeping communities across the nation. Three *Veteranos* interviewed believed the armed conflict in SE Asia was morally wrong and thus applied and received Conscientious Objector status, despite the enormous resistance given by the draft boards. Those who did go to SE Asia and fought experienced overwhelming psychological and medical issues when they returned home from their respective tours of duty. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Agent Orange syndrome were two illnesses unknown before the Vietnam War era. However, many years following the war when thousands of Veterans presented similar symptoms with unknown etiologies the Veterans Administration Hospital's could no longer ignore the fact that the Vietnam Veterans shared a common experience. The stresses of war had a chronic mental

and physical effect on the veterans which made it very difficult to manage and cope with the severity of their illnesses. As a result, families and loved ones were directly affected by the *Veteranos* condition. Many *Veteranos* turned to drugs and alcohol as a way to deal with the madness that was Vietnam. Further analysis of issues presented in this book is summarized in the third and final part.

Although the Vietnam War ended over thirty years ago, the Vietnam *Veteranos* continue to live with the impact the war had in their life, in their families, and in their communities. Some *Veteranos* interviewed went to college and are successfully contributing to society while physical and mental disabilities limited others from integrating back into society. As we have learned in this book, it is the socioeconomic disadvantaged individual who fought the war. This book is relevant today since the U.S. is embroiled in a conflict in the Middle East and many Hispanics are serving in the military.

Crescencio López
The University of Arizona

Mexico Otherwise: Modern Mexico in the Eyes of Foreign Observers
University of New Mexico Press, 2005
By Jürgen Buchenau

Para el estudioso interesado en conocer sobre México o para el estudiante con pretensiones de conocer, investigar, estudiar o analizar el país, la antología de Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexico Otherwise: Modern Mexico on the Eyes of Foreign Observers*, puede ser un buen punto de partida. En esta obra, como el título indica, se ofrecen varios documentos de cómo México ha sido percibido e interpretado a través de su historia. Buchenau nos entrega una antología de textos de los más diversos estratos: turistas, viajeros, críticos, historiadores, soldados, escritores y diplomáticos que han pisado suelo mexicano, así como gente que nunca ha estado físicamente

en el país. De esta manera, en esta antología se ofrece una colección de percepciones sobre México que van desde los ensayos de Alexander von Humboldt hasta cartas de turistas y de ciudadanos estadounidenses dirigidas al ex-presidente de México Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

La obra está estructurada en cuatro secciones, cada una de las secciones representa períodos diferentes en la historia de México. A su vez, las secciones están divididas en capítulos que contienen diversos escritos de las diferentes épocas. La primera sección cubre los últimos años de la Colonia y el México post-independientista, incluyendo el imperio de Maximiliano de Habsburgo. La segunda parte incluye documentos que discuten sobre un “porfirismo” déspota y su tendencia modernizadora y opresora del pueblo mexicano. La tercera sección trata sobre la etapa violenta de la Revolución Mexicana y la reconstrucción triunfante de un México post-revolucionario. Y, finalmente, la última sección incluye documentos sobre el México próspero y las crisis que siguieron a partir de la década de los 60.

De esta manera, en *Mexico Otherwise* se presentan una serie de escritos que tratan tanto sobre los momentos gloriosos y prósperos de un pueblo pujante que no se da por vencido, como sobre los momentos de crisis profundas y violentas. Observadores de las invasiones estadounidenses y francesa, de la Revolución mexicana y de la masacre de estudiantes en el 68, de la contrastante situación entre la ciudad y el campo han proyectado imágenes de México al mundo. Igualmente, espectadores de celebraciones patrias y eventos culturales como las fiestas de independencia y las corridas de toros han compartido con el mundo sus experiencias e impresiones. Todos han intentado definir a México desde fuera, ofreciendo, al parecer, una visión totalizadora de la realidad mexicana. Pero no es difícil descubrir que los textos seleccionados en esta antología ofrecen una perspectiva occidental y limitada de lo que es México.

Como un punto de arranque en el campo para estudios mexicanos, esta antología nos brinda una herramienta indispensable para estar al tanto, digamos, de una de las representaciones,