

The Forgotten Foundations of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Studies

El Plan de Santa Barbara and Damián García's Revolutionary Communist Synthesis, 1967–1980

B. V. Olguín and Edward Giardello

On February 22 and 23, 2019, the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) held a conference commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of *El Plan de Santa Barbara: A Chicano Plan for Higher Education*, written by the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education (1969).¹ The event feted Chicana/o/x students and staff who were part of this epochal 1969 initiative, several of whom were conference panelists and audience members. They included Cástulo de la Rocha, a prominent member of the group and the CEO of a chain of community health centers that made him a multimillionaire (Thurlow 2019). He had recently helped establish a scholarship fund in the UCSB Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies for students majoring in the field, and his attendance and prominent role in the conference represented a symbolic confirmation of the success of *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, as well as the achievements of the broader Chicano movement, or el movimiento, of which it was part.

This study, however, challenges the nostalgic historiographies of the field's founding and the corresponding celebratory appraisals of its contemporary contours that were exhibited at the conference. We return to the turbulent milieu surrounding the drafting of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* to recover a little-known figure: Damián García, a Chicano undergraduate majoring in cultural anthropology at UCSB. His contemporaneous intersections with the document's drafters, related student organizations, community initiatives, and broader political activities, along with his

eventual gravitation toward revolutionary nationalism and then international communism, particularly Maoism, introduces an important alternative frame of reference for understanding the milieu of *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, its contemporary legacy, and the work that remains not only for Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x egalitarian empowerment but also the broader emancipation of humanity.

Through his navigations of various ideologies, García embodied the debates that Michael Soldatenko (2009) identifies in his study of the field's founding, particularly the schism between cultural nationalists and (more or less) Marxist revolutionary nationalists. We argue that García's Marxist synthesis of Chicana/o/x and broader subaltern history and counterhegemonic praxis from the 1960s to the 1980s offers an important touchstone for Chicana/o/x and broader Latina/o/x studies as it faces lingering racialized class segmentation alongside growing middle- and upper-class formations, an expanding military caste, ever more complex migration demographics, and compounding ethnic, cultural, and spiritual subgroups during this latest era of globalization.

The Right-Wing Turn in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Studies, and the Contemporary Conjuncture

Cultural nationalist-cum-capitalist Cástulo de la Rocha and revolutionary nationalist-cum-communist Damián García were contemporaries at UCSB, and their overlapping activities illuminate the turbulent ideological contours of the conjunctural moment in the late 1960s and early 1970s that presented radically different possibilities for a coordinated systematic analysis and intervention into Chicana/o/x subjective ideological and objective material conditions. The cultural nationalist trajectory of *el movimiento*, of course, ultimately gained prominence, though not without myriad leftist challenges and proposed alternatives, which continue to this day. In his

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study of the Chicana/o/x Marxist organization August 29th Movement (1974–78), Eddie Bonilla (2022) notes that scholarship of the era overwhelmingly focused on cultural nationalism, thereby contributing to the sense that its ascendancy was inevitable and the only viable option, then and now.² The persistence of a Marxist cadre throughout Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x history notwithstanding, the liberal reformist as well as blatantly free-market-oriented trajectories of *el movimiento* inevitably metastasized into contemporary proto-right-wing ideological nodal points in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x departments, programs, and centers throughout the nation. In 2020, just one year following the conference celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, for instance, the UCSB Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies endorsed the awarding of the Luis Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature to Francisco Cantú, a Mexican American former US Border Patrol Officer (Estrada 2020).³ Revealingly, Cantú's angst-ridden memoir about being a borderlands law enforcement officer glosses Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) paradigmatic aesthetics and discourse about *mestiza/o/x* borderlands subjectivity, inevitably underscoring the ideological malleability of foundational concepts in the field. Moreover, in addition to celebrating Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x agents of empire, the award inadvertently validated Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2004) "Latin Americanization" of the US thesis, according to which, "honorary white" Chicana/o/x people come to play a critical role in the subordination of the Black population: the white-Black racial binary that characterized much of US history ultimately developed into a racial structure in which white and Brown-as-honorary whiteness united in their opposition to Blacks and, we add, abjected underclass and foreign Brown bodies.

The UCSB Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies's pairing of these two ideologically laden events—celebrating a cultural nationalist paradigm and a US border patrol officer just one year apart—is not anomalous. On the contrary, various Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies departments, centers, and programs have become infamous for conservative, capitalist, and outright imperialist politics. In 2005, Michigan State University's Julian Samora Research Institute published a monograph in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institute, *U.S. Latino Patriots: From the American Revolution to Iraq 2003—An Overview* (Rochín and Fernandez 2005), which profiles Latino (primarily cisgender heterosexual male) military veterans. This document adds to the long legacy of scholarship reifying Chicano and Latino warrior heroes who anchored civil rights struggles as they advocated for their community's enfranchisement within

the US empire—a stance they helped actualize and extend globally (Olguín 2021). The Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies at the University of Texas at Austin joined the university's Center for Mexican American Studies to extend this legacy by jointly awarding their inaugural Latina/o Leadership Award to George P. Bush in 2015. He is the nephew and grandson of two former US presidents who bear his name, and despite his dark brown skin and mixed-heritage identity as the son of a white father and Mexican mother, he is a militant, anti-immigrant politician who is infamous for advocating draconian border enforcement policies.⁴ The list of similarly problematic ideological spectacles in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies is expansive and ever growing.

It is important to note, however, that this prominent attention to Latina/o/x conservatives and elites is *not* part of a metacritical research trajectory, which might have added an important new dimension to mapping the ever-changing nature of Latina/o/x life, culture, and politics. On the contrary, this conservative trend reveals hegemonic paradigms that coexist alongside, and frequently eclipse, more or less counterhegemonic visions. To be sure, the field's right-wing turn has been contested, including by scholars in the aforementioned departments, programs, and centers. Moreover, the field had already been complicated, and its cultural nationalist, Mesoamerican genealogical premises and oppositional presumptions contested, by a resurgence of the long-elided Central American population that had been subsumed in the field's Chicana/o/x-centric nomenclature and dominant discourses. The first Central American Studies Program in the United States was founded at California State University, Northridge in 2000, ultimately becoming the Department of Central American and Transborder Studies. Following suit, the César Chavez Department of Chicana/o Studies at UCLA added "Central American Studies" to its name in 2019.

This evolution in the field's ideological spectrum, epistemic range, and corresponding nomenclature was preceded by a longstanding dissensus between East Coast, Caribbean-based paradigms and the lingering Chicana/o/x-centric paradigms animating most academic units in the southwestern United States. The latter only recently has begun to address the salient anti-Black bias embedded in the field's foundational operational concepts (such as *mestizaje*), as well as its general historiographies, intellectual histories, and research productivity. All these changes came to a head in Los Angeles in 2019, at the national conference of MEChA, which was founded as *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* during the Santa Barbara conference in 1969. Representatives of the student

organization voted to drop the words “Aztlán” and “Chicanx” (the latter adopted in 2016) from the name. These proposed changes led to mass secessions by recalcitrant local chapters. (At present, there is no consensus on a new name for this storied organization.) Amid this increasing dis-sensus, the field’s adoption of the X at the turn of the twenty-first century productively signaled gender and sexuality as fluid continuums, thereby challenging ways in which the category of the human has been theorized in proposed liberatory projects, particularly in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies. All these developments confirm that the field, related programs and organizations, and its very epistemic bases, have arrived at yet another provocative conjuncture.

Mystifications and the (Inter)National Question in El Movimiento

The present instability in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies nonetheless productively reveals its expansive and dynamically evolving epistemology, and this invites a revisiting of the foundational debates in which Damián García modeled important insights about the field’s ethical imperatives and future possibilities. Having developed from a community-based cultural nationalist to a communist organizer, García modeled the type of “homegrown communists” active in California in the 1970s that Bonilla (2022) has been recovering in a challenge to the nostalgia associated with the 1960s and 1970s and the era’s privileging of reformist activists (90). The Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x reification of this era as an epistemic rupture, and even a revolution, actually conceals the field’s saliently petit bourgeois designs. Ironically, this ideological conservatism is performed and actualized through flamboyant militancies and spectacles that are proclaimed to be “radical” and, more recently, “decolonial.” Yet, instead of being oppositional to capitalism and imperialism, such proclamations frequently are mere challenges to lingering racism, sexism, and homophobia through reified identitarian politics that sublimate attention to perennial class hierarchies—and latent middle- and upper-class desires—pursuant to the ultimate goal of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x inclusion in the US polis, with only a modicum of reforms.

Such obfuscatory and, indeed, mystifying rememberings of el movimiento are frequently pitted against the various Marxist trajectories subsumed under the category of “revolutionary nationalism,” which is depicted as foreign, too internationalist at the expense of Chicana/o/x and

Latina/o/x localities, and even harmful to these communities. In his “Chicano Liberation Report to the 1971 Socialist Workers Party Convention,” party militant Antonio Camejo ([1971] 1987) explained that

many revolutionary nationalists, however, have no clear, thought-out perspective on how liberation will be won. Thus they are subject to pressure from the liberals and reformists, leading them sometimes to red-bait socialists in the movement and at other times to use ultraleft rhetoric and engage in ultraleft actions. (96)

This scenario manifested itself in a multiplicity of ways, most notably in the ostracism visited upon members of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (1978–90), a panracial Marxist organization that grew out of a union between the August 29th Movement and the Asian American organization I Wor Kuen. It later incorporated various Japanese American, Dominican American and Puerto Rican organizations, as well as Black parties and organizations on both coasts. Referred to as La Liga by its detractors, members were accused of attempting to co-opt various MEChA chapters and *el movimiento* more broadly.⁵ Such anticommunist hysteria and widespread red-baiting of even non-Marxist dissent suggest that the inchoate ideological texture of *el movimiento* may be its most enduring legacy. This is not to dismiss the many social and political reforms that certainly provided important challenges to de facto segregation, enabling new consciousness-raising opportunities.

Despite the proliferation of leftist organizations in the era, there was never a mass Chicana/o/x revolutionary insurrection in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the frequent localized uprisings in the era, which are grouped together as *el movimiento*, illuminated how Chicana/o/x people shared cultural, linguistic, ethnic and racial, and geographic commonalities, which were recognized as constituting nationhood by cultural nationalists and revolutionary nationalists, as well as various Marxist party formations. Caribbean-heritage Latina/o/x movements on the US mainland—primarily involving Puerto Ricans on the East Coast and Chicago—were even more recognizably part of a national liberation struggle, given the armed insurrections and mature *independentista* parties on the island of Puerto Rico. Despite considerable dissensus among various Marxist ideological formations, such national liberation struggles—even nascent and underdeveloped ones in the Chicano movement and intersecting movements—were seen as having the potential to become revolutionized during and after a necessary war of independence and secession from dominating hegemons. That is, the

framework of cultural nationalism versus revolutionary nationalism is somewhat of a false dichotomy, as Marxists embraced and invested much hope in cultural nationalists and had even higher expectations of revolutionary nationalists.⁶ This hope for a revolutionized movimiento never became the dominant trajectory, for various internal reasons unique to each group, and leftist theoretical underdevelopment, as well as external global contexts outside their control. More immediately, pedestrian, capitalist-friendly forms of cultural nationalism were more familiar and thus more accessible and ideologically flexible, and much more practical in ways that involved far fewer commitments and dangers, a situation that persists into the present.

Despite the underdevelopment and ideologically inchoate contours of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x revolutionary nationalisms within the large and complicated genealogy of wars of national liberation throughout the world from the 1950s to the 1970s, there nonetheless was a large and strong Marxist presence when *El Plan de Santa Barbara* was drafted. This network of leftist cadres contributed to lingering tensions between nationalism and internationalism, and also professional scholasticism and historical materialist praxis, which in essence can be distilled into a more salient dichotomy: de facto assimilation into the capitalist imperialist polis versus actual revolutionary ruptures. (In another irony of cultural nationalism that extends into the present, dogmatic adherents actually see themselves as anti-assimilationists for their emphasis on linguistic and cultural autonomy, in addition to other superficial cultural traits that are reified as “resistance.”) The dialectical tension between nationalists and internationalists contemporaneous with the drafting of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* in the late 1960s and early 1970s actually inspired some UCSB Chicana/o/x students to gravitate toward the United Front, an umbrella grouping of multiple organizations that included a formal alliance with the UCSB Black Student Union and the local chapter of the white-majority Students for a Democratic Society. Unfortunately, this alliance did not last long, and neither did United Mexican American Students (UMAS), which was absorbed by MEChA at UCSB and elsewhere. UCSB MEChA also was involved in an important ideological schism when García and other leftists formed La Raza Libre, which introduced alternative panracial revolutionary nationalist and simultaneously internationalist possibilities. In organic processes that emerged from Chicana/o/x cultural nationalism, large numbers of young people, including contemporaries and personal friends of García, turned to communist party organizing during this era. This remains an understudied subject, albeit with notable exceptions.

The contours of these evolutions and schisms, and their attendant ideological fissures, are illuminated in a series of interviews conducted in 2001 by Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval, a faculty member in the UCSB Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies. His interview with Chicano muralist and musician (and later politician) Manuel Unzueta (2001) about the 1971 creation of La Casa de la Raza is especially revealing. Unzueta, who had served as La Casa de la Raza president during García's tenure as executive director, recalled that the formation of this barrio community center involved "conservatives, community, and intellectual radicals," the latter seeking to make the center "very much like the Brown Berets or something like that." He recounted "radical" student incursions into the non-university community center.

Here come the radicals from the university—those that were disenchanted with MEChA—some of them were very radical and semi-radical, including non-Mexican Americans. They come to La Casa disenfranchised from MEChA, and they call themselves La Raza Libre. There was a division in 1971, '72. La Raza Libre decided to break away from MEChA. And La Raza Libre decided that they were confused and frustrated because MEChA was getting all the breaks from the administrators and everything, because they were able to infiltrate very well into the system. And La Raza Libre people felt, hey, you know, let's go back to the community. So, some of them came to the community and they felt like La Casa de la Raza was the best place to start getting involved in the community, while MEChA did not agree with that. They [MEChA] did not want to get involved with the community because they felt the university was their platform.

Elaborating on the range of discussions held over the course of weekly La Casa de la Raza board meetings, he added,

One meeting this doctor from [inaudible] come[s], and he kinda [says] "La Casa de la Raza should not become a place where we can embarrass the United States of America! You know, we have been accepted into this country." Then, I, my memories bring me to a guy saying, "This is what we gotta read!" You know, he had a book of Mao Tse-Tung . . . and I'm just checking it out, you know. I say, "Okay, so which way?"

Unzueta challenged Carlos Muñoz's (2007) hagiography of Chicana/o/x student organizations, particularly Muñoz's claim that "the MEChA strategy was to establish itself as both a legitimate community organization and a student group" (98), stating that members of the UCSB MEChA chapter became more focused on their own upward class mobility,

made available by their university degrees, and were increasingly less committed to grassroots community engagement. This ideological dissensus also was present among La Casa de la Raza's founding board members and volunteers. Some eventually became wealthy private entrepreneurs, as noted above. Tomás Castelo, a cofounder and the initial executive director, became a wealthy real estate entrepreneur, and he provided the center with multiple high-interest loans that he foreclosed in 2020. He is now the sole owner of the multimillion dollar historic building, and the priceless community murals within, which he leases to a nonprofit community organization that coordinates programming. In contrast to Castelo and his opportunist monetizing of community activism, many other founding board members remained grounded in grassroots organizations and revolutionary politics, including overtly communist party activities that García framed as being inherently part of *el movimiento* from its beginning and into its future.

Who Was Damián García and Why Does He Matter Today?

The political climate of the 1960s and 1970s is imbued with an aura of “radicalism,” a highly promiscuous term that is applied to a hodgepodge of different actors and ideologies: social liberals, leftists across a wide philosophical spectrum that included anti-Marxists along with Marxists, and even capitalist cultural nationalists. It should also be noted that in domestic US academic as well as international governmental forms, Marxism was highly reformist. The Revolutionary Communist Party, USA has significance as a representative of the “revolutionary socialism” tendency within the Marxist tradition. It was headed by Bob Avakian, who cut his teeth as a white ally of the Marxist tendency within the Black Panther Party in Oakland in the 1960s and as a militant with ties to other communist panracial parties. The RCP—and its antecedent the Revolutionary Union—had a substantive affinity with the Communist Party of China from 1969 through 1976 (Leonard and Gallagher 2022, xxiv–xxv).⁷ The RCP attracted academics at a range of institutions, from elite private universities to state schools, as well as students and young people generally (Elbaum [2006] 2018). Party membership during this era even included students from UCSB, with some of their activities chronicled in interviews conducted by Jack Whalen and Richard Flacks (1989). Damián García was one of the students who gravitated toward Maoism.

García, who was possibly the person who introduced Mao Tse-Tung's "Little Red Book" at a La Casa de la Raza board meeting (Unzueta 2001), proposed a Chicana/o/x communist synthesis of the nationalism-versus-internationalism dichotomy simultaneously with *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, and that still has relevance today within the broader movimiento milieu. García was born in 1949 in San Bernardino. His father, a Mexican American World War II veteran, and his mother, a Mexican American from Los Angeles, had five children together. Growing up working class in San Bernardino, García's public education at San Bernardino High School set the foundation for his political education through a range of athletics, service, and bilingual academics, which included a trip to Mexico with the school's Quetzalcoatl (National Spanish Honors Society) chapter. Two years later, he served as president of the separate Spanish Culture Club. Because of his well-rounded academic achievements, he was awarded a scholarship to attend UCSB in 1967, and he graduated in 1971 with a bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology. García was at UCSB during the US war in Vietnam; until September 1971, university students who were enrolled full time were eligible for deferment from US military service, although it is unclear if he received a deferment. García was a member of UMAS (fig. 1) and active in various Chicano cultural nationalist initiatives, as noted above. He served



An UMAS member talks to two high school students seeking to discover their opinions and answer their questions. This was just one of

the many discussion groups held during the weekend conference to delve into various aspects of the lecture program.

Figure 1. UCSB sophomore Damián García talking with two high school students, circa 1969. From *La Cumbre* (UCSB yearbook), vol. 49 (1969), 40. The photograph is in the UMAS professionalization and political conference series section. Photography by Bill Chapman. Image in the public domain.

as assistant director of La Casa de la Raza in 1973, acting executive director the following year, and executive director from 1974 to 1975.

In the early 1970s approximately fifty students with Spanish surnames were enrolled at UCSB, all of whom had been contacted by UMAS members as part of their organizing efforts (Thurlow 2019). When asked if she had known García, a Chicana involved in the drafting of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* remarked that she and all the drafters knew him. Noting that he was “buena gente,” or a good person, she added, “but he was with the gabachos [whites],” alluding to his gravitation toward a Marxist paradigm and eventual membership in the RCP (Anonymous 2019). García’s girlfriend and future wife, Carol Faxon, was a white UCSB student, born in Montana, who had been an RCP member. This added to the racialized dismissals of García and his communist ideology as being extraneous to *el movimiento*, a widespread sentiment among cultural nationalists then and now. Castelo (2001), the aforementioned co-founder and initial executive director of La Casa de la Raza, belittled García’s communist politics as uxorious.

And that, that executive directorship, you know, did a lot of good. As a matter of fact, one of them, Damián García, ended up being boyfriends with one of the girls from the Communist group and they turned him into a Communist. [Castelo laughs] And he got stabbed at a demonstration in Los Angeles and died, you know, when he was involved with the organizing, you know, down there after he had been our director for, for a couple years.

Ironically, Castelo praised García’s effective leadership of this former grassroots community center, which is now part of Castelo’s real estate empire.

Notwithstanding the commonly expressed, ethnocentric cultural nationalist framing of communism as a “gabacho” paradigm, García gravitated toward Marxism, explicitly an American permutation of Maoism that recognized the revolutionary potential of peasants and immigrants in addition to industrial workers. This further enabled his advocacy for Chicana/o/x people rather than diminishing it, as some of his fellow student and community activists have suggested. García’s commitment to the Chicana/o/x community, including but not limited to university students, never waned. Indeed, in 1974, while he was executive director of La Casa de la Raza, the executive board voted to be a plaintiff in an equal opportunity lawsuit against UCSB and its leading administrators, including UCSB’s chancellor, Vernon Cheadle, and the president of the University of California, Charles Hitch.⁸

Yet, fissures between García and La Casa de la Raza’s board eventually emerged. Minutes from the meeting on March 24, 1975, record executive

director García's advocacy for funding the La Casa de la Raza library, the El Centro scholarship program, and the Escuela community education program. The board instead voted to allocate all available funds for more university scholarships.⁹ Additionally, García pursued training in grant writing in 1973, but the board later denied him the opportunity to travel to Washington, DC for this purpose.¹⁰

Having departed as La Casa de la Raza's executive director in 1975, García nonetheless continued associating with the center and other Chicana/o/x organizations, even as he gravitated toward organizing as a communist. In 1976, for instance, the May Day Coalition and La Casa de la Raza were part of a broad network of supporters for striking sanitation workers in Santa Barbara. García was active in this campaign, and he is quoted in the May 14, 1976, issue of the UCSB student newspaper, the *Daily Nexus*, complaining that a union shop steward involved in this strike had been fired without "just cause" (James 1976, 5). He moved to Los Angeles around 1977 to formally join the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, where he worked as an organizer on multiple campaigns targeting workers, lay people of all backgrounds and occupations, and other marginalized sectors such as prisoners and the lumpenproletariat (figs. 2, 3). Three years

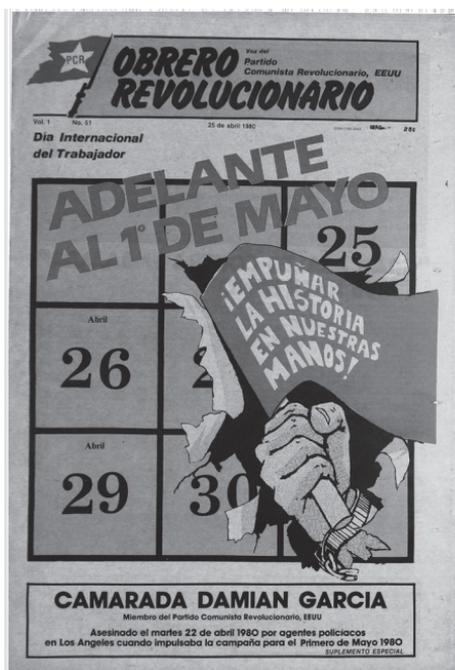


Figure 2. Front page of the *Obrero Revolucionario/Revolutionary Worker I*, no. 51 (April 25, 1980). Reprinted courtesy of RCP Publications/Revolution.



Figure 3. "Comrade Damian García [left] talking with Meat Packers in Los Angeles," late 1970s or early 1980. From *Revolutionary Worker 1*, no. 51 (April 25, 1980), special supplement, 2. Reprinted courtesy of RCP Publications/Revolution.

later, on April 22, 1980, as he was becoming a more prominent organizer in the RCP, García was stabbed to death while organizing for the upcoming May Day rally in Los Angeles's MacArthur Park, which was sponsored by the RCP's May Day Brigade.

Despite García's rather seamless navigation of the nationalism-versus-internationalism debates, his status within the history of this foundational period in Chicana/o/x and broader Latina/o/x studies remains vexed. He was honored in the spring 1980 issue of *La Casa de la Raza's* journal, *Xalmán: Alma Chicana de Aztlán*, with a dedication that reads "gracias por tu trabajo en beneficio de la raza" (*La Casa de la Raza* 1980, 4). The succeeding special issue, published in fall 1980 and titled *Corridos y Canciones de Aztlán*, included the lyrics to "El corrido de Damián García" (87–88) (fig. 4). García's grounding in barrio-based activism is recounted in this corrido, the popular ballad form that serves as living oral history for the Mexican and Chicana/o/x underclass. The lyrics have the reverent elegiac

El Corrido de Damián García

Señores tengan presente
que el 22 de abril
de este año presente
algo tragico pasó

Damián García el amigo
que a toda la gente amó
la policía americana
a la mala lo mató

En California creció
en el barrio aprendió
a llevar la frente en alto
no se les vaya a olvidar.

Allá en San Antonio
al Álamo tomó
y allí con toda su gente
su bandera levantó.

Y en la Casa de la Raza
Santa Bárbara lo vio
a defender al caído
ideas que a la tumba llevó.

De luto se encuentra Aztlán
y la vida sigue igual
y en los Angeles se llora
allí su muerte encontró.

Adiós Damián compañero
un humilde servidor
a la gente le recuerda
que no se les vaya olvidar.

Adiós Damián compañero
te aseguro que el pueblo
jamás te ha de olvidar.

Letra: Armando Vallejo
Música: Manuel Unzueta
Santa Bárbara, Ca.

El Corrido de Damián García

Transcripción por Luis Sanchez *Letra por Armando Vallejo*
Música por Manuel Unzueta

la la la la la la la (Gitarra) se - re que el ven - te y dos de abril de es - te año o - ciente pre - sen - te al - go tra - ji - co pa - so en Ca - li - for - nia cre - cio en el bar - rio apren - dio a lle - var la fran - te en al - to se nos va - ye a ol - vidar la la la la A dios de - man com - pa - ñe - ro un hu - mil - de - ser - vi - dor a la gen - te le re - cuer - dan que no te va - ya a ol - vidar fin

Figure 4. "El Corrido de Damián García," 1980. Lyrics by Armando Vallejo and music by Manuel Unzueta. Reproduced in Xalmán: Alma Chicana de Aztlán 3, no. 2: 87-88. Published by La Casa de la Raza, Santa Barbara. Reprinted courtesy of La Casa de la Raza.

tone that is reserved for people who are beloved by the corrido's primarily working-class audience, as this excerpt illustrates.

En California creció
en el barrio aprendió
a llevar la frente en alto
no se les vaya a olvidar.

Allá en San Antonio
al Alamo tomó
y allí con toda su gente
su bandera levantó.

Y en la Casa de la Raza
Santa Bárbara lo vio
a defender al caído
ideas que a la tumba llevó.

De luto se encuentra Aztlán
y la vida sigue igual
y en Los Ángeles se llora
allí su muerte encontró.

Adiós Damián compañero
un humilde servidor
a la gente le recuerda
que no se les vaya olvidar.

(In California he was raised
the barrio is where he learned
to always keep his head up high
so do not ever forget him.

Over there in San Antonio
the Alamo he took over
and there with all of his people
he raised his flag for all to see.

In la Casa de la Raza
Santa Bárbara all saw him
defending anyone in need
ideas he followed to his death.

Aztlán finds itself in mourning
and life continues all the same
and in Los Angeles they cry
there where death found him.

Goodbye our dear comrade Damián
humble dedicated servant
all of the people remember
so do not ever forget him.)

Significantly, “El corrido de Damián García” claims García as simultaneously a barrio member—and, indeed, part of Aztlán—and a communist who, as will be discussed below, dramatically raised the communist banner—his flag—from the barricades of the Alamo in San Antonio one month prior to his murder. This song appears on *Corridos y Canciones de Aztlán*, a collection of corridos recorded and produced by La Casa de la Raza and released in 1980. Corridos, which are heard throughout the Eastside barrio where La Casa de la Raza is located, feature a pantheon of Mexican revolutionaries from the revolution onward—many of whom were anarchists and communists—along with other popular figures. In his introduction to the special issue of *Xalmán*, contributing editor Luis Leal (1980) discussed the composer of “El Corrido de Damián García.”

The corridos of Manuel Unzueta, famous muralist, artist, musician, guitarist and poet, deal with social themes related to the life of the Chicano in Aztlán: his personal and social experiences, his highs and lows, his encounters with the “*migra*” (Office of Immigration), his pride in being Chicano. (40, translation and emphasis in original)

Leal reminds us of the huge ideological and intellectual chasm between grassroots organizers and their constituencies vis-a-vis the academy and its reformist and increasingly mystified cultural nationalist members. His comments also highlight the disgrace of giving the Leal award to a former Border Patrol Officer who was selected by fiat by one faculty member but was nonetheless cosponsored by almost a dozen supporters inside and outside the department.¹¹ And contrary to characterizations of García as being “with the gabachos” due to his communist ideology, in his lifetime the barrio community actually claimed—and continues to claim, by demanding we remember—his message of revolutionary nationalism and international communism. Travis Morales (2023), a long-time supporter of the RCP and García’s personal friend, states that

Damián’s great breakthrough is his rupture out of nationalism and also revolutionary nationalism to embrace international communism. His starting point became the emancipation of all humanity through revolution to overthrow the system of capitalism/imperialism. He came to see that his people are the proletariat and oppressed humanity all over the world.

Morales underscores how García represented a significant alternative trajectory concurrent with the *El Plan de Santa Barbara* milieu, and his message is still relevant today, as many of the same conditions that undergirded el movimiento persist alongside new precarities.

Yet, despite García's popularity in the barrio, when his widow proposed hosting an event at La Casa de la Raza to raise money for a wrongful death lawsuit against the Los Angeles Police Department, which was accused of being involved in the killing, the executive board unanimously refused over concerns about the RCP's involvement, as Tomás Castelo related to the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* (1983).¹²

Philosophically there was no support for the request. Emotionally the board members would have liked to honor Damien's [sic] memory and to express their appreciation for his work here and for La Casa but they felt this was not the way to do it.

By 1980 the cultural nationalist trajectory of el movimiento had consolidated itself in universities and community centers throughout the Southwest and elsewhere. While Mechistas defiantly distinguished themselves from the "Hispanic Generation" that Rodolfo Acuña (1987) identified through his generational paradigm analysis of Chicana/o/x history, the group degenerated into an inchoate mix of mostly capitalist nationalist politics. In Southern California, many MEChA chapters became rabidly anticommunist, despite members' predilection for Che Guevara T-shirts. The Stanford University MEChA chapter, which counted members oriented toward revolutionary nationalism among its generally upwardly mobile members, went so far as to change its constitution in the late 1980s to explicitly include Republicans!

Storming the Alamo: Recentering Historical Materialism in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Studies

Damián García's navigation of the national question during the tumultuous period of the drafting of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* and his subsequent culturo-political activities were an adumbration of the supra-identitarian maneuver for which he is best known: staging a demonstration on the roof of the Alamo. The 1980s were also marked by an important feminist corrective to and institutionalization of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies. García's synthesis of protest and change, which accounted for, yet refused to reify, race and other important markers of identity, resonates today, as

the field is being transformed in the crucible of yet another era of capitalist globalization and its attendant problems: intensified deregulation, privatization, and profit schemes facilitated by the exploitation of low-wage global labor pools. It should be noted that neoliberalism is well suited to identitarian discourses, as it can easily assimilate overtly racialized, gendered, and sexualized subjects as capitalists, managers, workers, and consumers.

García's contemporary relevance for the field is most clearly demonstrated by the events of March 20, 1980—one month prior to his murder—when he joined two fellow revolutionaries in storming the roof of the Alamo in San Antonio. García addressed onlookers using a bullhorn as the Texas flag was lowered from the side of the building and the red flag of revolution took its place (fig. 5). The Alamo, which was erected as a Catholic mission in the 1700s, during the Spanish colonization of the region, is among the world's most renowned battle sites and war memorials. After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, the area was known as Coahuila y Tejas. It was renamed the New Republic of Texas when proslavery settler-colonialists declared independence from Mexico in 1836. In March of that year, Mexican troops, sent to the region to put down the secessionists, massacred some 180 white and Tejano defenders



Figure 5. Damián García atop the Alamo, speaking to the crowd below, March 20, 1980. From Revolutionary Worker 12, no. 50 (April 21, 1991), 12. Reprinted courtesy of RCP Publications/Revolution.

at the Alamo. This sequence of conflict became inevitable after Mexico outlawed slavery in 1820, prompting proslavery Euro-Texan settlers and their Tejana/o/x allies to declare independence. The region was annexed by the United States in 1845, and Texas was admitted to the union. These events anticipated the US invasion of Mexico in 1846, which resulted in US occupation and annexation of half of Mexico's land in 1848. The Alamo's iconic bell-shaped facade (added in the 1850s), has subsequently gained a metonymic resonance for myriad causes: it is proclaimed as the "shrine of Texas liberty" by Texan and even Tejana/o/x nationalists, as well as an array of US imperialists and various competing cultural nationalists, not to mention an assortment of crackpots, all of whom frequently, and sometimes simultaneously, use the site as a venue to promote their causes.

The conclusion of the proslavery war of secession, inaccurately referred to as the "Texas Revolution," marks the earliest iteration of proto-Latina/o/x subjects, which was expanded and legally codified at the conclusion of the US-Mexico War in 1848 (Gómez 2018). It therefore is no surprise that the Alamo battle has become a prominent touchstone in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies. The genocidal and proslavery war that the Alamo emblemizes inevitably involves a unique blend of settler colonialism that is predicated upon the "logic of elimination" of preexisting populations (Wolfe 2006) and classical colonialism that involved deliberate exploitation of native populations and their descendants. This was compounded by the ignominy of Black chattel slavery, which served as an important engine for the rise of capitalism in this semifederal and only moderately industrialized region. Within this genealogy, the Alamo becomes a founding conquest narrative for colonialists and settler-colonialists alike, replete with martyrs who presumably consecrate the settlers' claimed rights to the land, and a subsequent claim to being "native" to it, even as competing Chicana/o/x and local Indigenous communities (particularly Cuahuiltecan) also claim this space as their birthright. Moreover, the Alamo also becomes a marker in the shift of a semifederal episteme toward capitalism.

Not unexpectedly, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies scholars have had a troubling relationship with this iconic, floating signifier, largely as the result of the inconvenient presence of Mexican, Mexican American, and Tejana/o/x elite and, to a lesser degree, middle and lower classes from these communities, who supported Texas secession and its proslavery motivations. Ironically, some of these same people were opposed to the subsequent US annexation of Tejas/Texas, resulting in a diminishment of their civil and economic status, which some descendants claim as a "dispossession" despite

the settler-colonialist legacies, proslavery politics, and genocidal designs of their ancestors and current family members.

Cultural anthropologist Richard Flores's 2002 study, *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol*, and historian and novelist Emma Pérez's 2009 historical novel, *Forgetting the Alamo, or Blood Memory: A Novel*, frame the field's lingering ambivalence about the assemblages—the arrangement of heterogenous elements (people, things, narratives, and so on)—that characterize palimpsestic sites throughout the region now called the southwestern United States. Indeed, the field that frequently is presented as an alternative and even as a challenge to colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism is punctuated by myriad competing Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x nationalisms, capitalisms, and imperialisms from various Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x populations (Olguín 2021). This certainly is the case in Pérez's novel, which revolves around the ill-fated life of its protagonist, a mestiza lesbian counter-nationalist Tejana avenger warrior hero, who retains life-long nationalist desires fueled by the multiple atrocities and traumas that she and her family endure; she vainly tries to forget these incidents, all the while harboring salient desires for a nation of her own, as it were. Similarly, while Flores (2002) duly recognizes the need to remember and understand “the conditions that gave rise to the Alamo” (xviii), he overemphasizes “the equally necessary pursuit of analyzing how the emergence of this ‘master symbol’ affected the lives of Mexicans and Mexican Americans” (xviii). Glossing over Mexican and Mexican American settler colonialism, and the settlers' concomitant interpolation as capitalists and, later, US imperialists, Flores emphasizes a key nodal point in the Alamo assemblage that has mystified as much as it has illuminated in regard to the complexities of this place and space. Deploying a familiar, and nearly tautological rhetoric endemic to some cultural nationalist trajectories within the academic area of ethnic studies, he adds that the “Alamo affected notions of cultural otherness through the ‘production of difference’” (xix).

To a certain degree, Flores is correct about the function of the Alamo in the creation of difference, a process that Emma Pérez's novel very successfully illuminates in all its violent and tragic dimensions. But Flores, like legions of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x scholars and artists, misses a fuller explication of the status of the Alamo in the shifting episteme of the age, from semifeudal agrarian political economics to nascent capitalism, all of which is subtended by the Spanish colonial model of life-long indentured servitude through the *encomienda* system, alongside Euro-American-imposed chattel Black slavery. The production of “difference” is but a

means to an ends—the development of capitalism as the next logical step in human political-economic history—and not the other way around.

After all, there is no shortage of examples from the proliferating layers of difference—all features of modernity and postmodernity—emanating from various spectacles centered around and within the Alamo. These include a panoply of ridiculously carnivalesque events such as Nazi sailors making a salute to Hitler in the Alamo chapel in 1935. The all-white members of the Daughters of the Texas Republic also famously draped a black tarp over the Alamo facade to suspend filming of Jerry Paris's 1969 comedy, *Viva Max!*, about a fictitious Mexican general's takeover of Texas's most prized possession in the 1960s to impress his girlfriend, while an equally libidinous white blond female anthropologist pursues her fetish for dark-skinned male warrior heroes. This already surreal farce was compounded by a group of Chicano lumpenproletarian males who, hoping to be hired as scab extras in the film, purposely loitered in a strategic location to catch a glimpse of the blond starlet's panties during multiple shootings of a scene in which she mounts a stallion. Musician Ozzy Osborne added to the assembly of idiocy in 1982 by famously taking a midnight piss on the Alamo wall while allegedly dressed in a pink tutu. For this he was arrested, jailed, and subsequently banned from San Antonio. Contemporaneous with Ozzy's irreverent act, his fellow British musician Phil Collins was compiling the world's largest collection of Alamo memorabilia, which he spirited away to a castle in Switzerland. He donated it in 2014 to the Texas General Land Office for display in the new Ralston Family Collections Center, which opened in March 2023. Paul Reuben's closeted alter ego Pee-wee Herman set the standard for lowbrow reclamation in the risqué 1985 comedy *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*. His performance queered the space of the Alamo, belying the legions of bible-thumping preachers who daily offer fire-and-brimstone sermons in front of the building, with requisite pauses to collect donations, of course.

There are more, including filmmakers Laura Varela and Vaago Weiland's 2009 video installation, *Enlight-Tents*, in which images of Indigenous and mestiza/o/x faces were projected onto the Alamo's facade. The following year, Chicano performance artist Rolando Briseño brought *Flippin' San Alamo Fiesta* to the Alamo's plaza. The centerpiece of the event was a larger-than-life rotating statue of Saint Anthony standing on an inverted Alamo. Flipping the statue positioned the saint upside down, akin to the practice of upending a likeness of Saint Anthony when a favor is requested—here, to upend the narrative. And, of course, there is the recurring ritual in which

an RCP cadre honors their martyred comrade García by raising a red flag on the Alamo grounds on the anniversary of his death, which is routinely disrupted by troops of Boy Scouts singing “God Bless America.” Likewise, the local Ku Klux Klan would sometimes show up too, to “protect” the Alamo. And so on.

Figures within this Alamo gallery of characters are all different in their own way, each with a micronationalist and sometimes imperialist claim of their own, such that a focus on the Alamo’s production of difference, as Flores advocates, is both redundant and inadequate for a historical materialist understanding of the place. Surprisingly, despite the volume of historiography about the Alamo, in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies there has been a scarcity of historical materialist interpretations of the convoluted history and overall reification of this space that do not degenerate into solipsistic meditations on identity.

The 1980 RCP spectacle featuring García atop the Alamo challenges this tendency and inevitably disrupts the dizzying and mystifying parade of remembrances and suspicious forgettings, even as this drama was itself immediately folded into the Alamo assemblage. But the one-of-a-kind event of Chicanos taking over the Alamo had not been accomplished since the battle in 1836, when the Mexican Army obliterated the genocidal, proslavery, settler-colonialist whites and Latinos. The act by García and his comrades remains unprecedented to this day. And it continues to resonate in all popular historiographies of the place.

Moreover, while García’s address to curious groundskeepers, passing pedestrians, and bewildered tourists might have been indiscernible through his small bullhorn, he and his fellow communists left behind an archive in the form of the light blue pamphlets that were flung from the Alamo’s barricades. They serve as a literal blueprint for a historical materialist supra-identitarian paradigm. The Associated Press (1980a, 1980b) reports of the incident stated that the fliers describe the Alamo as “a hated monument to slavery, U.S. plunder of Mexico, and the vicious oppression of the Chicano people” and noted that the authors “remember it as it has stood for over 100 years—as a monument to the tiny handful of parasites who have sucked the blood of the Chicano people, driving them into the ground, destroying their language and culture and trying to force them to live on their knees.”

This litany of complaints provides multiple entrées into the carnivalesque Alamo assemblage that ultimately enable a historical materialist analysis. And in contrast to too many Marxist parties and paradigms, García’s synthesis does not efface the particular subjects of history in this

hyperlocal space. On the contrary, the nodal points in his explication of the space include Black chattel slavery; capitalist imperialist expansions into Mexico; racialized capitalism leading to the “vicious oppression of the Chicano people” and the recognition of this population as a coherent national group whose “language and culture” are being destroyed; and “parasites,” which in Marxist parlance is shorthand for capitalists.

While schematic and certainly sloganeering, as any political party’s communications tend to be, the RCP cadre’s network of signifiers nonetheless manages to identify, and validate, the complexity of Chicana/o/x history as part of a Marxist teleology and, importantly, vice versa. This dyad is central to what many more-or-less leftist theorists would later try to capture in various definitions of “racial capitalism,” which, unfortunately, more often than not privileges race as the precursor and determinant of capitalism rather than a dialectical understanding of the creation of race as a function of political economy (Ferguson 2015; Meyerson 2000). García’s act of resistance—like those of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x communists before him, such as Emma Tenayuca, Gloria La Riva, Olga Rodríguez, Jesús Colón, and many more—reveals two things: that scientific Marxist understandings of this particular history, and *history* in general, is not foreign to Chicana/o/xs and Latina/o/xs but fundamental to understanding their constitution as a people; and that the necessary analyses and actions required for their egalitarian empowerment and liberation is inextricable from the emancipation of all humanity.

In a 2006 tribute by Miguel Alfonso Cañero from the L.A. Writer’s Collective titled “Light Up the Sky with the Red Flag—Live Like Damián García,” the writer offered an alternative paean to a “martyr” who fought for a very different type of revolution, one that is antithetical to the colonialist, capitalist, imperialist, and pro-slavery “revolution” of the 1836 Alamo defenders and the parade of fools who followed.¹³

On that day, March 20, 1980, Damián García and two other revolutionaries climbed to the top of the Alamo, threw down the Texas flag, and raised in its place the red flag of the international proletariat. Damián told the entire world: “We’ve come to set the record straight about the Alamo. This is a symbol of the theft of Mexican land, a symbol about the murder of Mexicans and Indians, and a symbol of oppression of Chicanos and Mexicanos throughout the whole Southwest.” And he called on people, together with the proletariat worldwide, to come out in struggle on May First, International Workers Day.

Emphasizing the global, and deliberately internationalist, dimensions of Chicana/o/x and broader Latina/o/x local realities and nationalist desires, Cañero added,

Damián's life concentrated this experience for Chicanos and Mexicanos living in the Southwest. He grew up in the projects of San Bernardino, California, and watched his Mexican father get denied job after job because of the color of his skin. Damián grew up being looked down upon and humiliated. Like many youth, Damián was always trying to find a way out.

Damián graduated from UC Santa Barbara. In the mid-'70s he was the executive director of La Casa de la Raza—but Damián wanted more. He hooked up with the Revolutionary Communist Party, and he dedicated his life—not just to the liberation of his *raza*—but to the liberation of *all* of humanity. He came to see that he was part of an international class of people—of different nationalities, cultures and languages—whose labor produces tremendous wealth that gets stolen by a small class of capitalist-imperialists. (emphasis in original)

García was murdered one month after the dramatic Alamo spectacle as he distributed leaflets in the Pico Gardens housing project in the Boyle Heights barrio of Los Angeles—while a nearby undercover LAPD officer did nothing to stop the killing. The alleged culprit was suspiciously murdered in the same fashion the following month. The RCP saw this as a coverup, as the RCP's chairman, Bob Avakian (2005), underscored: "We always understood the murder of Damián García to be not only an attack on our Party in general and on our building for revolutionary May Day 1980 in particular, but also retaliation for that internationalist act" (408). In his 2005 memoir, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist*, Avakian recognizes García as an RCP "martyr," and quotes the statement he made at the time of the murder.

To die in the causes for which the imperialists and reactionaries have and will on an even more monstrous scale enlist the people, or to give up living and to die a little death on your knees, or to consume oneself in futile attempts at self-indulgent escape; all this is miserable and disgraceful. But to devote your life, and even be willing to lay it down, to put an end to the system that spews all of this forth, to live and die for the cause of the international proletariat, to make revolution, transform society and advance mankind to the bright dawn of communism—this is truly a living, and a dying, that is full of meaning and inspiration for millions and hundreds of millions fighting for or awakening to the same goal all around the world. Such was the life and death of Comrade Damián García, a fighter and martyr in the army of the international proletariat. (408–9)

This sentiment is shared by those in the Chicana/o/x community who in 1980 marched to the spot where García had been murdered the day before (fig. 6) and is further immortalized as part of Chicana/o/x history in “El Corrido de Damián García”: “la policía Americana / a la mala lo mató” (the American police / with malice murdered him). In an additional indication of García’s passage into the pantheon of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x revolutionaries, he continues to be honored in Chicana/o/x popular culture and by intersecting Chicana/o/x communists. Shortly after García’s death, the poem “Rebel” (fig. 7), by an anonymous Chicano from Chicago, was printed in the RCP’s *Revolutionary Worker*, alongside a now iconic picture of García.

Damián García
Our brother is dead
Our brother has died
Our brother, they killed him because he struggled against oppression
They killed one and produced a thousand

Yet another poem, “Damián García is Dead, But in His Death I Came Alive” (fig. 8), was published in the *Revolutionary Worker* in 1980 with this inscription:

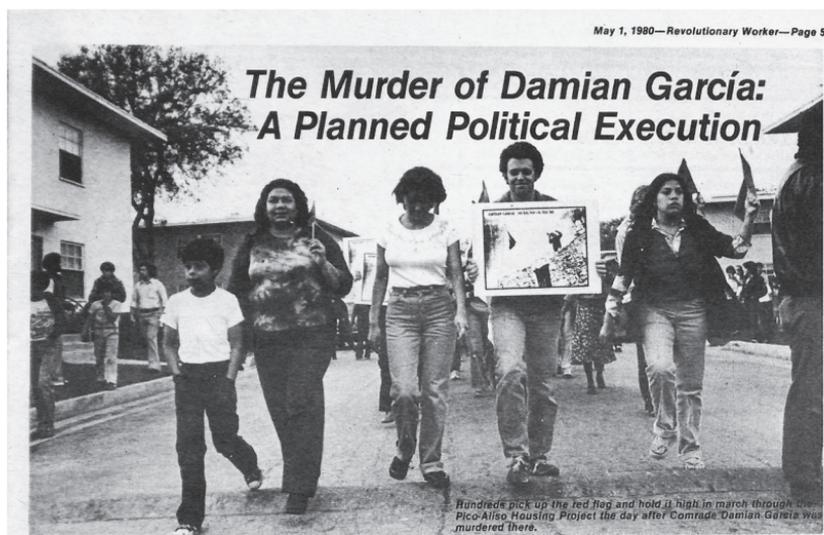


Figure 6. Marchers protesting the murder of Damián García, April 23, 1980. The caption reads, “Hundreds pick up the red flag and hold it high in march through the Pico-Aliso Housing Project the day after Comrade Damian García was murdered there.” From *Revolutionary Worker* 2, no. 1 (May 1, 1980), 5. Reprinted courtesy of RCP Publications/Revolution.

This poem was written by a 40-year-old Black man in the Atlanta City jail in 1980. It was written on a brown paper bag, just after he received the special supplement of the Revolutionary Worker on the murder of Damián García. The poem was the first he had written in 5 years. It was read at May 1st rallies in cities across the country last year.

In this paean to García, the anonymous poet, who identifies himself as a veteran and survivor of police brutality, extends the trope of a blood-red flag toward support for the kinetic insurrection that García advocated as the necessary culmination of his organizing activities: “Pass me a red flag/

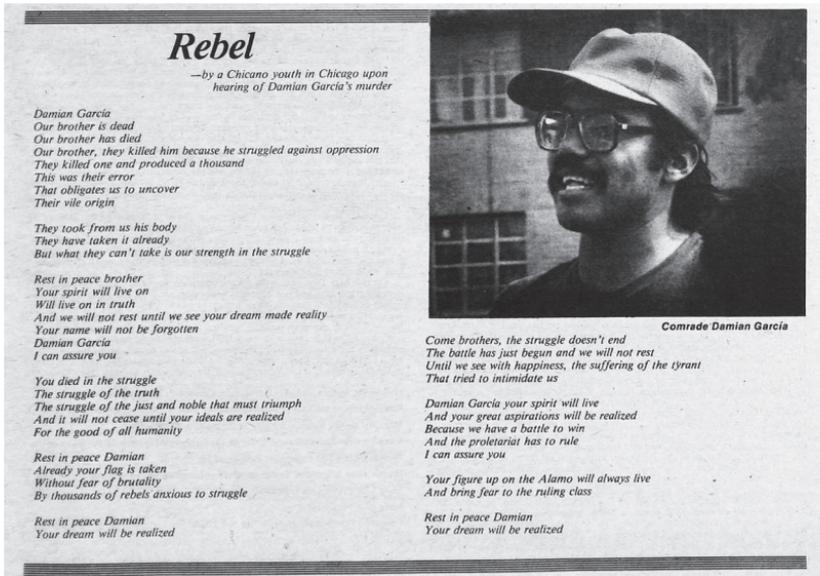


Figure 7. “Rebel,” 1980. A poem by a Chicano youth in Chicago. From *Revolutionary Worker* 2, no. 1 (May 1, 1980), 5. Reprinted courtesy of RCP Publications/Revolution.

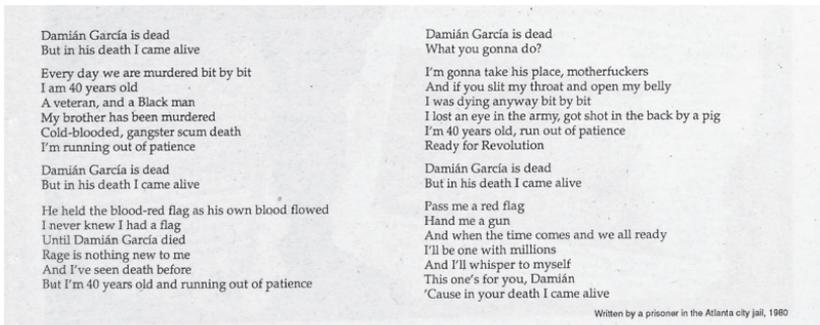


Figure 8. Untitled poem by a prisoner in the Atlanta city jail, 1980. From *Revolutionary Worker* 12, no. 50 (April 21, 1991), 12. Reprinted courtesy of RCP Publications/Revolution.

Hand me a gun,” the poet writes in the last stanza, adding “And when the time comes and we all ready/I’ll be one with millions/And I’ll whisper to myself/This one’s for you, Damián/’Cause in your death I came alive.”

Conclusion: Theory and Praxis for a Global (Supra) Latina/o/x Studies

While the battle over the perpetrators of Damián García’s death and the overall meaning of his legacy continues, the fact remains that he was one of many activists who offered a coherent Marxist synthesis of a paradigm for Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies as not just an identitarian field of study that facilitated upward class mobility for its practitioners, but also as a praxis rooted in historical materialist methods and ethics. He performed this model through multiple strategic interventions during the foundational moment of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies at UCSB, in the surrounding region of the California Central Coast and in Southern California municipalities, in San Antonio, Texas, and also more broadly. The historical materialist trajectory García advanced is not new to the field, as Enrique Buelna noted in his 2019 biography of Chicano communist Ralph Cuarón, who as a merchant marine helped exfiltrate communist internationalists fleeing Spain after their defeat in the Spanish Civil War in 1939 (Buelna 2019, 43). Cuarón later played a prominent, behind-the-scenes role in foundational episodes of the Chicano movement, such as the high school walkouts in Los Angeles’s Eastside schools in 1968 (chapter 5). Cuarón and García are part of a long legacy of Chicana/o/x communists who formed a trajectory that never disappeared. It has been subsumed, however, by a cultural nationalist thrust in the field that has metastasized into a solipsism that easily accommodates, and even embraces, capitalism and imperialism while glossing Marxist and anarchist vocabularies and paradigms.

What is different in García’s historicizing project at the Alamo, as well as in his life’s work overall, is that it necessarily introduced, but refused to reify, race. His Alamo synthesis is a precursor to the large body of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Marxist theorizing, particularly to Mario Barrera’s (1979) class segmentation model, which he developed in his *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*. That García has been forgotten and even dismissed as being “with the gabachos” is deliberate and revealing. Symptomatic of the eventual marginalization of Chicana/o/x communists in the field, Cuarón, who had only a high school education,

worked as a custodian at the University of California, Riverside beginning in 1974, where he surreptitiously taught unsanctioned, uncompensated advanced tutorials on Marxist theory and praxis to legions of students at the university as well as off campus (205).

Similarly, García's model involves a decidedly Marxist understanding of the oft-misused term *praxis*. In lay terms, it means practice, usually informed by a theory, paradigm, or motivation. But in the Marxist paradigm, *praxis* is more specific. It is deliberate human action to change one's material reality and subjectivity, meaning both conscious values and unconscious intuition. For Mao Tse-Tung ([1963] 1994), "correct ideas" do not come from outside humanity or from the mind but rather "from social practice, and from it alone"—that is, "the struggle for production, the class struggle and scientific experiment" (1). Consequently, within a Marxist paradigm, *praxis* is privileged over theory, under the belief that material contradictions in society can be changed only through a dialectical process of action and theorizing of action. This formulation, of course, is the basis of virtually all political parties, particularly Marxist-inspired ones, with the distinction that Marxist *praxis* is also motivated toward a revolutionary transformation of heteropatriarchal and racist capitalism and imperialism.

Throughout Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x history, there has been no shortage of Marxist and other leftist party and organizational formations. These include, but are not limited to, the Chicano Revolutionary Party of East Oakland (1968–74) and August 29th Movement (1974–78). The latter grew out of the Labor Committee of the Los Angeles Raza Unida Party and took its name from the tumultuous and bloody Chicano Moratorium against the Vietnam War in 1970. As noted above, this organization later merged with I Wor Kuen, an Asian American Maoist organization, to form the League of Revolutionary Struggle (1978–90). Its "Resolution on the Chicano National Question" (1979) was contemporaneous with García's Alamo project and similarly issued a call for militancy.

It is also important for communists to uphold the right of self-determination of the Chicano nation in order to help lead the Chicano national movement in a revolutionary direction. This demand, once taken up by the Chicano masses, will lead them into struggle against the U.S. capitalist class. As opposed to other partial demands, the right of self-determination presupposes a struggle for power and is aimed at a central pillar of imperialism. Self-determination simply cannot be won without a revolutionary struggle.

These and myriad other examples of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x communist organizations remind us of a very important lacuna in the field: the profound disconnect from organized revolutionary political action both on and off university campuses.

The *El Plan de Santa Barbara* milieu has bequeathed us a paradigm that has enabled the growth of a professional Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x middle class. These professionals are sufficiently endowed with self-love and a vocabulary relevant to their particular history, culture, art, and politics, attributes that are accompanied by an obligatory social liberalism that offers a litany of reforms and interiorized self-actualization formulas. But *El Plan de Santa Barbara* is also framed by the margins in which Chicana/o/x and a broader array of Latina/o/x communists demanded—and also performatively modeled—a theory of praxis that could never be seduced into a detente with capitalism under the hope that the system can be changed from within, as the old reformist adage proclaims. Therein lies the field's greatest and almost impossibly irreconcilable contradiction. An important question emerges: if Damián García's Chicana/o/x Maoist praxis had prevailed to become the predominant paradigm animating *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, would we have had a Chicana/o/x revolution and not just a field of study within the hegemonic structure?

Where we go from here is another question too huge for anyone to conclusively answer in definitive terms. But in response to this inquiry, it is clear that we cannot continue with the field's current inertia. Neither can we keep obfuscating the toxic solipsistic identitarianism and the ideological rightward shift that has now come to distinguish ethnic studies in general. In Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies, we can begin the process of demystification and degeneration of the field by first refusing to continue reifying a past that has been reclaimed only in part—and never really fully understood as part of a never-ending and dynamic dialectical process.

c/s

Notes

In memoriam of our communist friend, mentor, and colleague Glyn Salton-Cox (1983–2022). We also would like to acknowledge support from the UCSB Global Latinidades Center; research from Global Latinidades Center Research Fellow Marina Chavez; archival support from UCSB Library staff Angel Diaz, Gary Colmenar, and Raul Pizano; and external readers Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval, Edwin Lopez, and Travis Morales, who read drafts, provided feedback and references, and also important background information.

1. The essay's nomenclature corresponds to use in particular contexts and respects the preferences of people referenced.

2. Bonilla notices that the marginality of the left is not just a result of cultural nationalist anticommunism but also the hesitancy of people to speak about their involvement in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x leftist politics out of fear of ostracization and retaliation by their own community, employers, and also U.S. law enforcement agencies.

3. This award is named after the distinguished scholar of Mexican and Chicana/o/x literature, who was a visiting professor in the UCSB Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies from the early 1980s until his death in 2010. Leal was a recipient of the *Águila Azteca Award*, the highest honor given by the Mexican government to foreigners, and the National Humanities Medal, which he received in 1987 from President Bill Clinton.

4. After community complaints and a nationwide faculty and community petition to oust one of the faculty administrators responsible for selecting the inaugural award's recipient, the Latina/o Leadership Award was discontinued.

5. Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval (2017) notes that the League of Revolutionary Struggle allegedly "infiltrated" MEChA chapters in California: "UCLA was a MEChA Summit chapter, and in 1985 and 1986, along with other MEChA Summit chapters, denounced the Liga and disrupted a National Chicano Student Conference held at UC Berkeley on the grounds that it was a secretive, undemocratic organization that limited freedom of speech (92). After this conference, anti-Liga MEChA chapters left the California state-wide MEChA, leaving the Liga to consolidate its power over the next three years (1986–1989)" (75). More broadly, and beyond the small localized challenges that the League of Revolutionary Struggle posed to MEChA chapters in California in the brief period Armbruster-Sandoval chronicles, MEChA chapters throughout the country actively excluded leftists and were notorious for their heteropatriarchal praxis well into the 1990s.

6. For example, according to Juan Gómez-Quiñones (1990), the August 29th Movement "emphasized the so-called 'Chicano question,' that is the proclamation of the right to self-determination, while, in effect, remaining anti-nationalist" (152).

7. After the death of Mao Tse-Tung in 1976, the RCP split from the Communist Party of China, arguing that the country had abandoned revolutionary socialism by adopting capitalist reforms.

8. Minutes of La Casa de la Raza meeting on July 19, 1974, Santa Barbara, CA, Casa de la Raza collection, CEMA 147. Department of Special Collection, UC Santa Barbara Library, University of California, Santa Barbara. Hereafter Casa de la Raza collection.

9. Minutes of La Casa de la Raza meeting on March 24, 1975, Casa de la Raza collection.

10. Minutes of La Casa de la Raza meeting on December 10, 1973; and minutes of La Casa de la Raza meetings on May 12 and May 19, 1975, Casa de la Raza collection.

11. UCSB co-sponsors (in the order of appearance on the flyer promoting the event) included the Office of the Chancellor, Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor, Equal Opportunity and Discrimination Prevention Office, Chicano Studies Institute, Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, Luis Leal Endowed Chair, Educational Opportunity Program, Dean of Graduate Students, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Mosher Alumni House, and the Chicano/Latino Research Group IHC (Interdisciplinary Humanities Center).

12. At least one Los Angeles Police Department undercover officer, Fabian Lizarraga, was present when Damián García was stabbed to death. Another RCP member was stabbed but survived. The assailant was stabbed to death four weeks later. These circumstances led the RCP to believe that the LAPD had orchestrated an assassination and coverup. Carol Faxon García filed a lawsuit against the LAPD and Chief Daryl Gates, but a Los Angeles district judge dismissed the case in 1985. Apparently a separate case also was filed. The LAPD's Public Disorder and Intelligence Division suspected of being involved in García's murder was disbanded in 1983, but there has been no independent investigation into the suspected link between the unit and García's death.

13. "Light Up the Sky with the Red Flag" is frequently republished in the RCP's weekly newspaper, *Revolution*, on the anniversary of García's death.

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