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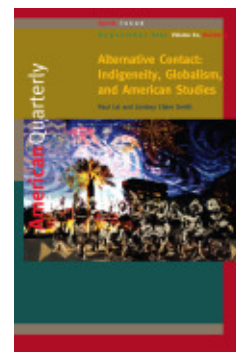
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## **No Golden Age: Television News and the Chicano Civil Rights Movement**

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American Quarterly, Volume 62, Number 4, December 2010, pp.  
897-923 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press



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## No Golden Age: Television News and the Chicano Civil Rights Movement

Randy Ontiveros

On August 30, 1972, a small group of young Chicano and Chicana activists invaded Catalina Island. The action was part of what they called *la Marcha de la Reconquista*, a three-month-long “March of the Reconquest” aimed at drawing attention to discrimination against Mexican Americans and at protesting what organizers said was the U.S. government’s illegal takeover of Mexican land in 1848. Dressed in combat boots, khaki uniforms, and their signature headwear, these Brown Berets traveled twenty-six miles from the Los Angeles shore, raised a Mexican flag over the Avalon harbor, and reclaimed the popular tourist destination for Mexico. Local authorities initially allowed the militant group to stay, but after two weeks they decided they had had enough. On September 12 the police issued an order to leave the island, and the Berets complied. The Chicano invasion of Catalina was over.<sup>1</sup>

This largely forgotten moment in the history of Chicano/a activism is striking in that it captures something of the ambiguous position that Mexican Americans have long occupied within the imaginary of the United States, the uncertain “third space” of a population at once not-quite-native and not-quite-alien. Ascending the hillside in their military garb, the young radicals looked the part of Cuban-style invaders, and yet they gestured toward a time when the United States was the aggressor. Just as striking, though, is what the Catalina invasion reveals about the inadequacies of the mass media and of the network news in particular during a period celebrated by many as the “Golden Age” of television. In the first decades after World War II the networks earned a reputation for quality journalism, particularly for their bold coverage of the black civil rights movement.<sup>2</sup> Yet they rarely reported on the Mexican American civil rights movement occurring simultaneously, and when they did cover events, it was often through a very narrow filter in which Chicanos and Chicanas were framed as threats to the integrity of the nation. Newsmakers ignored major stories such as the 1969 Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver, among others.<sup>3</sup> Yet the Catalina story—a minor episode in the chronology of

the Chicano movement by any measure—appeared on the August 31, 1972, edition of the *CBS Evening News*. In its framing of the incident, CBS tapped into viewers' fear that the country was under siege, while simultaneously offering an ideological assurance that government authorities were in control. At the end of that evening's broadcast Walter Cronkite reported that "a group of militant Mexican Americans" had "staged a peaceful invasion of Catalina Island."<sup>4</sup> Here was an opportunity for the network to inform its audience about the movement's complex goals, but instead Cronkite glossed over the protesters' motives, saying only that "they claim Mexico never ceded the island to the United States after the Mexican-American War in 1848."<sup>5</sup> He then fought back a dismissive grin as he noted that "everybody at least so far seems to be taking the invasion quite peacefully."<sup>6</sup>

CBS's unwillingness to engage with the politics surrounding this event is entirely consistent with most of the coverage of the Chicano movement during the 1960s and 1970s. To date no one has critically examined news footage of Mexican American activism in this era, perhaps because of the difficult nature of the television archive, or perhaps because we are only now beginning to understand where the Chicano movement fits into the mosaic of progressive social movements of the mid-twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> In the pages that follow I mine this footage for its patterns and its omissions as I argue that the network news had a substantive effect not only on how the Chicano civil rights movement unfolded, but also on how it has come to be remembered within the popular historical imagination of the 1960s and 1970s. Governed as they were by the black-white binary that has animated U.S. history since the beginning, the corporate-owned networks largely ignored Mexican American activism during these decades, and when they did cover the movement, they tended to represent the Chicano movement not as a complex campaign for equality, but as one of several forces destroying America from within.

To unpack this argument I have divided the essay into three sections. The first section discusses the near "brownout"<sup>8</sup> on news related to Mexican Americans between the unveiling of television at the 1939 World's Fair in New York and the historic farmworker strike that began in 1965. I track the dynamics surrounding this brownout, arguing that it emerged from specific limitations within the news business and from a persistent cultural tendency to view Mexican Americans as interlopers in the nation's primordial conflict between black and white. In the second section of the essay I examine footage from the archives, beginning with the landmark coverage of César Chávez and continuing through the mid-1970s, when many prominent Chicano/a

organizations collapsed and when coverage of civil rights activism all but stops. What one sees in this footage is a complex visual mechanics that situated Mexican American activists within a reductive filter that made them appear either as suffering saints or as dangerous radicals. In the mid-1960s Chávez became the template for the former as he strategically exploited TV's insatiable desire for hero figures. But by the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s, as demand for more sensational television intensified and as Nixon remade the political landscape, reporting on the Chicano movement was increasingly dominated by images and narratives of public disorder. Often these segments were placed alongside similarly anxious segments about black radicalism, the war in Vietnam, or a purportedly out-of-control youth counterculture, so that the Chicano movement appeared on the screen as just one more threat to a vulnerable America defined by politicians and pundits not as the protesters out in the streets exercising their democratic rights, but as those sitting in their living rooms consuming television. The impact of this visual binary between suffering saint and dangerous radical was profound. Television undoubtedly helped the farmworker cause, but the networks' paper-thin coverage of the Chicano movement also ensured that (1) most viewers would see Mexican American activism not for its rich complexity but through a grossly oversimplified filter, if they saw it all, and (2) that this filter would contribute to the erasure of the Chicano movement from the dominant historical imagination. In the final section of the essay I offer a critical commentary on how this coverage of the Chicano movement fits within larger efforts by conservatives to discredit the progressive activism of the 1960s and 1970s and to transform the state from a guarantor of civil rights into a guarantor of capital accumulation through increasingly draconian law-and-order policies.

The mid-twentieth century has been celebrated in films such as *Good Night and Good Luck* (2005) and elsewhere as a golden age in TV news, but in studying footage of Chicano/a politics we find reason to reconsider this sentimental narrative. Certainly there were fleeting moments of insight in this period. However, due to the technical limitations of a twenty-three-minute program that relied increasingly on arresting visuals and the political limitations of a corporate-funded, government-regulated monopoly system, it was all too rare for newsmakers during the 1950s, '60s, and '70s to stray beyond shallow consensus viewpoints and to provide substantive background on the social movements that were remaking the social landscape of the United States. As we will see, these limitations and their effects still register today.

## Early Television's Brownout

The network news made an inauspicious start at the dawn of the television age, with inaugural programs such as NBC's *Camel News Caravan* and CBS's *Television News with Douglas Edwards* functioning as little more than stale bulletin services.<sup>9</sup> Yet by 1965—the year that the National Farm Workers Association (later the United Farm Workers) declared its historic grape strike and the year sometimes cited as the beginning of the Chicano movement—television news had become a major institution in American society. As television critics have observed, the story that had facilitated this shift and made the evening news a nationwide authority was the struggle to end Jim Crow.<sup>10</sup> For more than a century, coverage of black civil rights activism had been the exclusive territory of black journalists, but when network producers went looking for a story that would demonstrate the power of television, they were drawn to the powerful scenes of white-on-black violence taking place in the South. As a result, events such as the murder of Emmitt Till, the integration of schools in Little Rock, and the 1963 March on Washington became major milestones in U.S. media history. Sasha Torres argues convincingly that civil rights activists and network journalists had reached an unspoken agreement with each other.<sup>11</sup> Television provided the publicity that activists needed to resist the Bull Connors of the world. In exchange, Martin Luther King Jr. and others provided the compelling images that networks wanted so that they could manufacture a sense of seriousness and establish themselves as the official chroniclers of the nation's history.

Of course, black civil rights activism of this era changed more than just television. It had a deep and lasting impact on nearly every aspect of contemporary life, including Mexican American politics. F. Arturo Rosales, author of one of the definitive histories of the Chicano movement, has said that he was inspired to become an activist as he read newspaper coverage of the Birmingham bombings and other events while stationed at an air force base in Great Britain. I know of no written account of Mexican Americans watching Martin Luther King's 1963 "I Have a Dream Speech," but it is reasonable to think that more than a few Chicanos and Chicanas were moved to action by what remains one of television's most influential moments.<sup>12</sup> Many young Mexican Americans became activists because of the work of King and other leaders, and some even became participants in the antisegregation struggle. Maria Varela, for example, worked in Alabama as a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) literacy tutor in preparation for the pivotal 1964 elections.<sup>13</sup>

Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez, for her part, was director of SNCC's New York office and also a volunteer in Mississippi.<sup>14</sup>

Grassroots narratives like these are significant because they draw our attention to often-observed intersections between black and Chicano/a activism during this period. They also challenge more recent efforts to use the exaggerated image of upwardly mobile Latinos/as as a counterpoint to the supposed intransigence of African Americans.<sup>15</sup> Yet even as we note connections between black and Chicano/a activism in the 1960s and 1970s we must be mindful of divergences as well, among them the fact that if television had been late in getting to the story of the black civil rights movement, it was even more dilatory when it came to stories involving Mexican Americans. Available records indicate that prior to the farmworker strike that began in 1965 there were only a handful of reports even remotely related to Chicano/as, most of them dealing rather predictably with alleged drug smuggling along the border, the controversial *bracero* program, or unauthorized immigration. There is one notable exception: the September 27, 1960, premier of ABC's *Bell and Howell Close Up!*, which, according to an archival summary, examined discrimination against blacks, Jews, Puerto Ricans, Japanese, Chicano/as, and Native Americans in selected communities across the United States.<sup>16</sup> Generally, though, television watchers in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s were more likely to see news coverage of Mexicans in Mexico than of Mexicans in the United States. Corporate networks were eager to create new markets for their media commodities in Latin America, so they supported State Department outreach to nonaligned countries with coverage that largely followed official positions.<sup>17</sup> Mexicans in the United States did not have an embassy, of course, and they had not yet been targeted as a growth market for advertisers, which meant that by and large the networks saw nothing to report about them.

Mexican Americans thus were excluded from what Gaye Tuchman calls "the news net," that collection of wire services, bureaus, and other news-gathering practices that generate content and create in audiences a sense of what is newsworthy.<sup>18</sup> With its promise of "catching" all of the meaningful stories on any particular day, the news net makes an implicit claim to universality. Yet in the 1940s and 1950s (and even today) the major networks lacked reporters with experience in covering Chicano/a stories. There were few, if any, Mexican Americans working in establishment media outlets, and since the nation's educational institutions largely excluded Mexican American history from their curricula, the mostly white journalists who staffed the major news organizations would have had little exposure to Chicano/a issues as part of their formal

education. These narrow institutional considerations were themselves bound up with broader cultural dynamics involving Mexican Americans, as large news organizations in the United States have tended to handle stories about the Southwest (where Mexican Americans have historically been concentrated) as regional items. This tendency exists in part because the nation's journalistic and political institutions are headquartered in New York and Washington, D.C., respectively, but on a more fundamental level, it is a residue of long-standing colonial perceptions of what we today call the Southwest. Mary Pat Brady has shown how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature—including journalism—imagined the territories expropriated from Mexico as barren lands without human agency, thereby rendering long-established Indian and *mexicano* communities as invisible and clearing the way for the capitalist development of the region's tremendous natural resources.<sup>19</sup> I would argue that the inability of television producers to engage with postwar Mexican American politics brought this tradition of erasure into a new medium and a new context. (Their failure was reinforced, incidentally, by early TV westerns such as *The Cisco Kid*, which also signified Mexicanness on the small screen in highly restrictive ways.) Newsmakers intuited that the black civil rights movement would make for captivating television because the story they were telling could be sutured into the nation's psychosocial drama of black versus white, freedom versus slavery—a drama that as Toni Morrison argues is related only by indirection to the lives of African Americans.<sup>20</sup> Coverage of the black civil rights movement thus encouraged viewers to situate what they were seeing on the screen within the fantasy of U.S. exceptionalism, to imagine a “more perfect union” unfolding before their very eyes. The Chicano movement, by contrast, did not offer similar narrative pleasures, for while African Americans through their persistent exclusion have been central to the founding mythologies of the United States, Mexican Americans have been detained at the border of the nation's racial imaginary, sometimes included but more often excluded from the stories and images that make up the dominant history of the United States.

The inability of the newsmakers to give meaningful coverage of Chicano/a politics in the early years of television represents a failure of the media industry, one that still has consequence. Not only did the networks do a disservice to their audiences by neglecting to inform them of a major story, but they also created the interpretive conditions for the Chicano movement to appear as if it came out of nowhere. Mexican American activism after World War II was similar to black politics of the same era in that soldiers and civilians alike were unwilling to tolerate a segregated status quo after participating in a conflict that had been fought in the name of democracy. Anticommunist policies were

doing considerable damage to the progressive infrastructure that had been built up within Chicano/a communities during the Great Depression, but in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s groups such as the Community Service Organization, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the American G.I. Forum, la Asociación Nacional México-Americano, el Congreso del Pueblo de Habla Española, and the Mexican American Political Association all worked to maintain a protest tradition that went back to the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Activists in these groups fought against the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act and in support of school desegregation, affordable housing, and equal employment opportunities. There were many defeats, but there were also important victories. In 1947 the federal courts ruled in *Westminster v. Mendez* that segregated “Mexican schools” were unconstitutional. It was a landmark case that later served as precedent in *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>22</sup> In 1949 activists made it possible for the decorated soldier Felix Longoria to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery after his family was denied use of whites-only facilities in Three Rivers, Texas.<sup>23</sup> The incident drew the attention of a young senator named Lyndon Baines Johnson and served as catalyst for the creation of the American G.I. Forum, a Mexican American civil rights organization that survives today. In 1954 the Supreme Court ruled in *Hernandez v. Texas* that the Fourteenth Amendment protected all racial minorities, and not just African Americans, as the law had previously said. The case would never have gone forward without the help of a nationwide fund-raising drive on Spanish-language radio and other Chicano/a communication networks to pay for legal expenses.<sup>24</sup>

Each weekday evening Walter Cronkite ended the broadcast with his signature sign-off: “And that’s the way it is.” The phrase was meant to assure viewers of the truth of what they had just seen, but in television’s early years CBS and its rivals ignored the stories mentioned here, along with many others. This news brownout did not keep Mexican Americans from organizing, but it did have an impact. Chicano/a organizations of this era faced tremendous obstacles in establishing themselves and often had to shut down because they lacked the cultural and political capital that media attention sometimes delivers. The networks also became complicit in the construction of a narrative still powerful today, one that suggests that Mexican Americans have been quiescent for much of their history. The 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s saw intense civil rights activism among Chicanos and Chicanas, but in part because of the network failure to cover this activism, it can appear in retrospect that Mexican Americans were not involved in politics until much later. The consequences of this myopia have been profound. Many Chicanos and Chicanas remain ignorant about an important chapter in their cultural history. Meanwhile, the



general public still perceives Chicano/a activism as a new or at best sporadic phenomenon, rather than as a persistent narrative in U.S. history tied to clear patterns of injustice.

### **Televising *el Movimiento***

In the previous pages we examined the scant coverage of Mexican American issues in the early years of television. The next section tracks the story of César Chávez and the California grape strike, the first that networks covered substantively. We will see that while the camera transformed Chávez into a global icon and advanced what had been an almost quixotic quest for farmworker justice, it also laid the foundation for a visual binary in which Mexican American activists appeared either as one-dimensional martyrs or as traitors. What got lost as a result of this binary was the ideological complexity and the moral urgency of progressive Chicano/a politics.

I begin with a brief history of the grape strike.<sup>25</sup> César Chávez had formed the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in 1962 after working for the Community Service Organization (CSO), a group that used Saul Alinsky's methods to increase Mexican American voter turnout. Frustrated by the CSO's unwillingness to organize farmworkers, Chávez formed the NFWA in the hopes of winning union protections for one of the nation's most exploited populations. In those early years Chávez did the nontelegenic work of driving up and down California's Central Valley, introducing himself to farmworkers, surveying their needs and opinions, and signing up members. He planned to do this tedious but essential groundwork for several years, but when Filipino farmworkers with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee declared a strike in 1965, Chávez realized he had an opportunity. Union leaders quickly organized a vote, and on September 16, 1965, the members of the NFWA decided to strike. Initially they received very little national media attention, but that changed in spring of 1966 when the television cameras arrived. Looking to pressure Governor Pat Brown into supporting the strike, union leadership organized a three-hundred-mile pilgrimage from Delano to Sacramento. Although there was internal disagreement about using religious iconography in a political campaign, scenes of humble farmworkers walking in the hot Central Valley sun made for good television.<sup>26</sup> Network coverage of the pilgrimage helped the farmworkers win their first major victory, a contract with winemaker and liquor distributor Schenley Industries.<sup>27</sup> It was the first time that workers in California's fields had won union recognition.

As the farmworkers pressed on, television coverage transformed Chávez into the only Chicano/a activist recognizable to a broad public, or what Todd Gitlin perceptively calls “a media-certified celebrity leader.”<sup>28</sup> The attraction of the camera to Chávez was not an accident, though, as the leader had learned early in his career just how powerful a tool television could be. In 1959, during one of his first attempts to organize farmworkers, Chávez arranged for the local news in Oxnard, California to film as workers set fire to a steel drum full of referrals for jobs being given illegally to exploited Mexican *braceros*. Not long after, owners agreed to give preference to local labor and to raise wages from sixty-five cents to ninety cents an hour.<sup>29</sup> When the NFWA went on strike six years later, Chávez once again found creative ways to exploit the media. The 1966 pilgrimage described above is one example of how Chávez used television to stir public sympathy for a population rarely seen in dominant media. But by far the most prominent example of Chávez using the camera for the benefit of *la causa* was his fast in the spring of 1968. With tensions running high inside the organization and with grower negotiations at an impasse, Chávez felt he needed to do something dramatic to refocus his energies and the energies of the union.<sup>30</sup> Initially he told no one about the fast, but by the time it ended twenty-five days later it had become a national media event. Seated beside the senator and soon-to-be presidential candidate Robert Kennedy, Chávez took communion on March 10 in front of network cameras. The iconic footage was broadcast by NBC that night, just three months short of Kennedy’s tragic assassination.<sup>31</sup>

Chávez’s critics accused him of pandering to the camera, and for this reason he and his supporters insisted that the fast was not an effort to draw media attention.<sup>32</sup> Chávez was undoubtedly sincere in his religious convictions, but his actions were by all appearances the product of careful strategy. Chávez seems to have understood that by performing the stereotypical role of “the humble Mexican,” he could allay any fears that might arise from that other deeply rooted stereotype, the figure of the Latin revolutionary (figure 1). He seemingly also understood television’s fascination with martyr figures, a fascination first cathected through coverage of John F. Kennedy’s assassination. Television was an increasingly crowded universe of people and events vying for screen time, but Chávez successfully drew media attention to the farmworker strike by transforming his body into a racialized spectacle of suffering, just as King, the Little Rock Nine, and many others had been doing in the South. Sasha Torres explains that images of racialized bodies enduring physical suffering made for powerful television fare because they demonstrated the new medium’s ability



**Figure 1.**  
César Chávez interviewed by  
Terry Drinkwater, CBS News,  
August 28, 1968.

to seemingly transport the isolated home viewer to the scene and to show there what appeared to be unfiltered reality. With activists such as Chávez giving apparently authentic performances of injury, viewers (primarily but not exclusively white) were able to indulge in a fantasy of cutting through the mythologies around race and grasping at long last the truth of what it meant to be black or brown.<sup>33</sup> To use Zora Neale Hurston's memorable phrase, television seemed to provide a window on "how it feels to be colored me," but without the risks of minoritized subjectivity.

Most white Americans in the mid-1960s knew far less about exploitation in the fields of California than they did about segregation in the South. In November of 1960, CBS had broadcast Edward R. Murrow's famous *Harvest of Shame*, but interestingly the program focused primarily on black farmworkers. Nevertheless, Chávez's media strategy gained extensive news coverage, more than any other single Mexican American activist, before or after. There was, as I mentioned, the groundbreaking coverage of the April 1966 pilgrimage to Sacramento, as well as the March 1968 footage of Chávez ending his fast. There was additional footage in the months that followed, including a brief NBC update on August 13, 1968, a May 1969 episode of the NBC program *Frank*

*McGee Reports* dedicated to the strike, and a CBS segment on September 29, 1969, in which Chávez utilized the new strategy of winning public support by warning of the dangers that pesticides posed to consumers.<sup>34</sup> Coverage picked up even more in the first years of the next decade. According to the Vanderbilt Television News Archive, between 1970 and 1973 the three major networks broadcast almost fifty segments on the union and related a number of important developments: historic contracts in the summer of 1970, a lettuce strike announced that same year, the violent efforts by the Teamsters to sabotage the farmworkers' union, Chávez's arrest for refusing a court order to suspend the boycott, the union leader's involvement in the 1972 elections, the murder of farmworker Juan de la Cruz in 1973, and more. In later years there would be limited coverage of Chávez's 1988 fast against pesticides, as well as news of his death on April 23, 1993.<sup>35</sup> Never again, though, would Chávez enjoy the level of visibility he had in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Television was inarguably an indispensable tool in the grape strike. Yet the invention of César Chávez as the first and perhaps only Chicano/a "civil rights subject" (to use Herman Gray's memorable phrase) came with considerable drawbacks.<sup>36</sup> First, it influenced leadership dynamics in often problematic ways. Television is a uniquely intimate medium in that it is watched mostly in private spaces, where it becomes a part of everyday life. Mobile media devices are transforming this intimacy in ways that are quite fascinating, but it remains the case that television viewers are drawn to characters who are paradoxically exceptional in their persona and common in their outlook. In other words, audiences identify most readily with figures they perceive as "average" but who still have a certain charisma.<sup>37</sup> (Think, for example, of ironic characters such as Lucille Ball, Cliff Huxtable, and Jerry Seinfeld, or of journalistic "everyman" figures such as Murrow.) Through this privileging of character, the television news tends to exacerbate what is always a danger in social movements, namely, the establishment of top-down leadership structures centered on a charismatic individual. We see this dynamic quite readily with black civil rights movement, where the figure of Martin Luther King, Jr overshadows the countless others who brought down Jim Crow. In the Chicano/a context, the cameras helped make Chávez's considerable magnetism a focal point of the entire struggle, even though (as he himself always insisted) the farmworkers were the soul of the union. As the strike went on, Chávez became so overwhelmed by publicity demands that he was increasingly unable to do the more important work of organizing.<sup>38</sup> This in itself was a problem, but even more problematic was the fact that television obscured the grassroots energy that powered the movement, particularly the work of the many women who served as organizers, adminis-

trators, child-care providers, negotiators, cooks, recruiters, and picketers. To give only the most prominent example, Dolores Huerta was as important to the United Farm Workers (UFW)<sup>39</sup> as Chávez himself, but cameras did not gravitate toward her because as a woman she did not fit the masculinist mode of the messiah come to deliver his people.<sup>40</sup> To be sure, television was not solely to blame for the autocratic structure that some say undid the UFW, but in building something of a cult of personality around Chávez, it played a key part.<sup>41</sup>

A second disadvantage to television's production of César Chávez as a synecdoche for the entire Chicano movement was the ensuing neglect of the movement's historical and ideological richness. The farmworkers' movement was just one of many elements that constituted what we have come to call the Chicano movement, and in fact the relationship between the UFW and other aspects of the movement was complicated because Chávez saw himself more as a labor leader than as a cultural defender. The grape strike presented journalists with an opportunity to inform their audience about the extent of Chicano/a activism in the 1960s and 1970s and to contextualize that activism within the political tradition described earlier. Journalists, however, rarely took this opportunity, both because they lacked airtime and because they lacked background. As a result, a viewer sitting in her living room watching coverage of the Chicano movement would likely get the impression that the events being reported had no history and thus no credibility. To give only one example, on June 3, 1969, ABC filed a brief report on a protest at the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court nominee Warren Burger by Reies López Tijerina.<sup>42</sup> Tijerina's admittedly theatrical effort to make a citizen's arrest of Burger was part of long-standing efforts to win recognition for Hispano communities in New Mexico that had been robbed of their land by the U.S. judiciary system. However, since no historical background was given, Tijerina came across as a lunatic, and (worse) his cause was made to seem like a farce. This sort of coverage was not an isolated example. Chicano/a activism was often reported with little or no context, and as a result activists routinely appeared on the screen not as part of a larger tradition of political dissent, but as troublemakers and malcontents.<sup>43</sup>

We have thus arrived at the other pole in the television news binary under discussion: the production of narratives and images that positioned Mexican Americans as radicals while discursively linking the Chicano movement to other perceived threats, including black militancy, war unrest, the youth counter-culture, and Latin-inflected communism. To put this framing in perspective, it is important to first note that while there was a contingent of Chicano/as

open to violence, especially in self-defense, the Chicano movement was overwhelmingly peaceable.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, activities such as voter education and antipoverty programming do not televise well, which meant that apart from the grape strike and its iconic leader, the networks usually only ran stories that involved rioting, vandalism, and other forms of public disorder. A powerful media dialectic was thus crystallizing on the airwaves, one in which Chicano/a activists were represented either as suffering saints or (more often) as dangerous revolutionaries. On one side was the figure of César Chávez. On the other side were those violent, undifferentiated masses threatening to bring the American experiment to an end.

Once again there is a telling parallel to black activism. Herman Gray and Sasha Torres both argue that while the creation of “the civil rights subject” proved pivotal for racial progress, it also established a polarized vision of black personhood in which the only two images available to the TV-consuming public were the noble middle-class citizen eager to realize the American dream and, on the other hand, the pathological subject—what Torres calls “the civil rights subject undone.”<sup>45</sup> The sympathetic figure of King was replaced in the second half of the 1960s by unsympathetic figures such as Malcolm X, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Angela Davis, leading eventually, Torres says, to “representations of blacks as crack addicts, homeless people, teenage mothers, gang-bangers, drug dealers, and children threatened by ‘random’ ghetto violence.”<sup>46</sup>

Mexican Americans found themselves subject to the same reductive treatment and were even at times linked to this specter of black militancy. For example, on August 31, 1970, the *CBS Evening News* ran a segment on what it called “a nationwide menace” of violence against police officers.<sup>47</sup> Reporter John Laurence first describes a raid on a Philadelphia Black Panther headquarters following the murder of a Philadelphia cop. Commissioner Frank Rizzo then gives an on-camera interview in which he cites the shootout as evidence of America’s decline: “It’s just the society we live in today . . . the law only applies to the law-abiding and the police. We let idiots like this [nodding at the Panthers headquarters] survive under our form of government. Maybe we’ll have to change it.”<sup>48</sup> The irony is remarkable: here is the police chief of a major American city suggesting that the United States might have to end democratic governance if it wants to protect citizens from armed “idiots” with radical ideas. The Panthers, however, are not allowed an opportunity to respond. Instead, CBS producers cut to the story of four police officers in California who were ambushed in what Sergeant Lee Hayes thinks might be part of an imminent “revolution” being stirred up by “agitators that came out of this Chicano dem-

onstration in Los Angeles.”<sup>49</sup> Two days earlier a large antiwar rally in East L.A. called the Chicano Moratorium (discussed below) had devolved into a bloody confrontation with the police. Hayes links the Riverside shootout with this recent news item, asserting that rioters from L.A. “whipped our people up into doing it.”<sup>50</sup> The sergeant gives no evidence, though, and Mexican Americans are again not allowed a response. Broadcasts such as this one fomented concern among many whites (and more than a handful of nonwhites) that the nation was being imperiled by recalcitrant minorities, since in stacking reports the newsmakers made it seem that black and Chicano/a activism represented a coordinated attack on the forces of law and order.

There were numerous other occasions in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Chicano/a activism was filtered through the prism of real or imagined violence. On April 28, 1970, ABC reporter Gregory Jackson warned viewers that “a Mexican American upheaval is gathering force in Southern Texas.”<sup>51</sup> In this instance the implied comparison was not to the domestic threat of black radicalism, but rather to the foreign threat of Fidel Castro. Jackson reports that this insurgency in South Texas—a region long associated with civil unrest imported from Latin America—will be led by José Angel Gutiérrez, a man who “looks like an accountant, but talks like a revolutionary” (figure 2).<sup>52</sup> A similar report ran on June 15, 1971, but this time it was “two days of rioting and burning” in Albuquerque by Mexican Americans, “many of them high on marijuana and drink.”<sup>53</sup> Associating Chicano/a activism now with countercultural deviancy, the segment quotes city officials as saying that “hippie outsiders were behind the chaos.” Yet again the reporter gives no basis for such a claim. Two months later, on August 1, 1972, ABC updated viewers on the April hijacking of Frontier Airlines Flight 737 by Ricardo Chavez Ortiz.<sup>54</sup> Chavez Ortiz claimed he was acting on behalf of all Chicanos and Chicanas, and so reporter Dick Shoemaker traveled into East L.A. for a melodramatic exposé of the social conditions there. One could argue that at least the journalist attempted to educate viewers about the economic problems faced by many Mexican Americans, but the segment makes the barrio a site of pathology rather than the product of policymaking. Also, Shoemaker merely hints at Chavez’s likely severe mental health problems, which made him a questionable spokesperson at best for the Chicano movement.

Reporting on Chicano/a activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s characteristically represented the Chicano movement as a menace, and not simply as a matter of story selection, but also in terms of framing. Despite network claims of objectivity, their limited coverage of Chicano/a activism was bent both aurally and visually toward the police interpretation of events over and



**Figure 2.** José Angel Gutiérrez (“who looks like an accountant, but talks like a revolutionary”), ABC News, April 28, 1970.

against the perspectives of Mexican Americans. We can see this dynamic most clearly in television footage of the Chicano Moratorium, a major milestone of the Chicano movement. On August 29, 1970, an estimated 25,000 mostly Mexican Americans assembled together in East Los Angeles to protest the Vietnam War.<sup>55</sup> The event had been planned for months as a peaceful assembly, but by the end of the day clashes with the police left more than 150 arrested, more than 60 injured, and 3 dead—including esteemed Chicano journalist Ruben Salazar. All three major networks gave at least passing coverage to the event, but the relatively extensive reporting by NBC stands out as an example of how TV journalism coverage oriented viewers toward the police point of view. The initial report that aired on August 30 begins with reporter Frank Bourgholtzer giving viewers an on-camera exposition of what had taken place the day before. Trouble began, he says, when some of the participants at the “spirited antiwar rally” were allegedly caught shoplifting at a local liquor store.<sup>56</sup> Emphasizing the effectiveness of law enforcement in dealing with this stereotypical barrio behavior, Bourgholtzer says that “the police quickly solved the problem at the Green Mill, but that small confrontation set off a chain of reactions that



exploded into a wild and vicious riot.”<sup>57</sup> By the time his recap has finished, the visuals have shifted from the reporter’s direct address to footage of the riot. The viewer watches as police officers march in formation, first pushing against the crowd and then drawing back as rocks and other projectiles fly across the top half of the television screen. Amid this chaos one hears the voice of an angry protester who yells from off-screen: “You guys, don’t forget you guys started this.”<sup>58</sup> His comment is a powerful counternarrative to the official version of what happened that day, but it becomes lost in sounds and images edited through the lens of what Aaron Doyle calls a “law-and-order ideology” that sees aggressive policing as the only remedy for a society being destroyed from within by its underclasses.<sup>59</sup> Shooting from behind police lines so as to protect the crew and add drama, NBC cameras at the Chicano Moratorium give the viewer a police-eye perspective that allows viewers to look down the barrel of a gun and to imagine themselves as heroes in the unfolding social drama (figure 3).

This law-and-order orientation of the riot footage is reinforced by those who appear on camera to interpret the event. As usual, Chicano/as were not given the opportunity to provide their accounts of what had unfolded that tragic day. Instead, Mexican Americans are visible only as an undifferentiated mass or briefly as injured suspects being reined in by the more powerful authorities. To be fair, the reporter gestures toward an alternative perspective by saying that the protest was motivated by “the unfairness evident in Vietnam casualty figures.”<sup>60</sup> Yet Bourgholtzer’s voice-over is overpowered by the accompanying images of chaos. Bureaucratic spokespersons, on the other hand, are allowed considerable screen time to give their perspective. In the follow-up report that aired on August 31, Chief Davis of the Los Angeles Police Department makes a startling claim:

I would say they’re [the protesters] definitely carrying out the orders of the Communist Party of the United States of America . . . more than ten months ago a decision was made to more or less give up on the black people, other than the Black Panther activity . . . the efforts [by Communists] have been concentrated in the Mexican American areas, and with this riot you’d say with some success.<sup>61</sup>

The official is not pressed by the reporter for evidence. Instead, as in other broadcasts, a white male authority is projected into living rooms as the voice of order—no matter how absurd his reasoning—while Chicano/a activists become associated with irrationality and violence.

To be sure, there were fleeting moments when TV journalism’s binary of noble crusader or ignoble revolutionary seems to bend a bit, making visible the



**Figure 3.**  
A police-eye view of the Chicano Moratorium, NBC News, August 30, 1970.

always incomplete process of hegemony. For example, in July of 1970 NBC aired a two-part special report on “the Mexican Americans.” Set in San Antonio, the broadcast opens with an on-camera commentary by Mayor W. W. McAllister on “our citizens of Mexican descent.” McAllister opines:

They’re very fine people. They’re home loving. They love beauty. They love flowers. They love music. They love dancing. Perhaps they’re not quite as, uh, let’s say as ambitiously motivated as the Anglos are to get ahead financially, but they manage to get a lot out of life.<sup>62</sup>

Absurd remarks by authorities often go unquestioned in network journalism, but in this segment McAllister’s paternalistic racism is challenged by Mariano Aguilar, a young Chicano who offers his own blunt assessment of McAllister’s opinion: “Racism. The whole attitude. The Anglo community, the gringo community as we call it here, they believe that anybody who is not white Anglo-Saxon Protestant is culturally and physically inferior, so what the hell. So we’ve been dealing with this for two hundred years.”<sup>63</sup> It is remarkable that Aguilar appears on screen at all, but even more remarkable is how the report is

assembled. In most coverage of this period, Chicano/a bodies are filmed with a long shot or a medium-long shot, if they are recorded at all. In the NBC footage of the Chicano Moratorium, for example, protestors consistently appear at some distance away from the camera lens. The viewer is placed at a literal and figurative remove from Mexican American subjects and sees not their individuality but rather their collective pathologies. In this broadcast from San Antonio we see something different. Aguilar and two friends are sitting with reporter Jack Perkins at a table. The camera is positioned close to the three Chicanos and at eye level, and when Aguilar is speaking we get a close-up shot. Through these editorial decisions the viewer is invited to sit down with the young men while they share a beer and a cigarette and talk—without anger and with obvious insight—about their lives (figure 4). Instead of screening Mexican American activism as deviance, NBC gives us a brief glimpse of the Chicano movement as a reasoned response to a long and painful history of racism in South Texas.

Regrettably, we know very little about Mexican American television watching during the 1960s and 1970s, but we do know that this particular broadcast had an impact on contemporaneous Chicano/a politics. Angered by McAllister's racist remarks, activists from Texas boycotted the San Antonio Savings Association, a bank then owned by the mayor.<sup>64</sup> Yet even this special report moves toward the saint/rebel binary, with the reporter warning of "a potentially explosive situation. There are those in San Antonio working to cool it, but there are also those plotting to make it explode."<sup>65</sup> The following night's broadcast considers at some length the threats that Chicano/a activists might pose to whites. "Do they hate the gringo?" Perkins wonders.<sup>66</sup> "If they do," he continues, "why have the barrios—unlike the black ghettos—never exploded?"<sup>67</sup> Perkins has no answer to these questions, but he does claim that "there are today young firebrands growing in the barrios, secret men in hidden places who are plotting violence."<sup>68</sup> These "hot radicals" may now be on the "fringes" of Mexican American politics, but Perkins concludes that without reform, even moderates will decide that violence is the only answer.<sup>69</sup> As in all traditions tied to marginalized subjectivity, Mexican American politics has always been marked by an uneasy tension between militancy and pacifism. Yet because of its need for dramatic narrative and accessible images, the network news in the 1960s and 1970s proved incapable of mining the complexities of Chicano movement activism. Instead it swung between two poles—the suffering saint on one hand and dangerous radical on the other—without ever giving viewers insight into how they themselves might be implicated in the story.



**Figure 4.**  
Mariano Aguilar on racism in  
Texas, NBC News, July 6, 1970.

Television coverage of Chicano/a activism dropped off considerably toward the latter part of the 1970s. There were broadcasts such as the May 8, 1978, CBS report on rioting in Houston after the death of a Mexican American man while in police custody, as well as coverage on July 4, 1980, of Chicano/a reactions to the acquittal of two men in Arizona accused of torturing and killing three Mexican immigrants.<sup>70</sup> For the most part, though, coverage began to shift away from the binary that had dominated coverage in the earlier part of the decade. In its place was the emergence of Chicano/as (or “Hispanics” as they were increasingly called in government and advertising circles) as a constituency to be courted by politicians looking for votes and by corporations looking for markets. When it existed at all, nightly news coverage of Mexican Americans increasingly consisted of stories about elected officials making publicity visits to the barrios, or of soft news stories about the growing numbers of Hispanics and how they are changing America—as if the influence of Mexican Americans and other Latino/a populations on U.S. history and culture was something new.<sup>71</sup> The only notable exception to this broad trend occurred in 1993 when students demanding a Chicano/a studies program at UCLA went on a hunger strike.

More recently, networks covered the momentous immigrants' rights marches of May 2006, but by then new media and grassroots independent reporting—"citizen journalism," as it is sometimes called—was already turning the evening news into a relic.

### Corporate News and Movement Memory

Having glimpsed the evolution of TV coverage of the Chicano movement, we must ask why the networks shifted from largely sympathetic to largely unsympathetic representations of civil rights activism. The issue is complex, of course, but it has much to do with increased competition in the television industry. In the early 1960s, producers had sought images of political violence as a means of manufacturing a sense of journalistic seriousness. By the late 1960s, the situation had changed dramatically. Saturation coverage of Kennedy's assassination had persuaded most people of TV's power as chronicler of the nation's official history, so newsmakers were no longer as anxious to prove themselves.<sup>72</sup> Also, television sets had become furniture in almost every home, which meant that networks had to find new ways to attract audiences.<sup>73</sup> ABC, which for many years had run a distant third in the ratings chase, was airing sexier and more violent programming, motivating others to follow suit.<sup>74</sup> Executives who were once willing to broadcast the evening news at a loss because they believed it would contribute to the network's "prestige" were now ordering news divisions to contribute to the network's bottom line, and news producers responded by pursuing stories with high-impact images and unambiguous "good-versus-evil" narratives.<sup>75</sup> The Chicano movement was falling victim to the intensified tabloidization of TV news.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the institutional dynamics reshaping the television news dovetailed with larger currents in U.S. politics, for, despite Richard Nixon's frequent protestations that the so-called liberal media had it out for him, the reframing of the civil rights movement that took place on TV screens at the end of the 1960s aligned well with Nixon's strategy of exploiting white paranoia about the collapse of America.<sup>76</sup> Earlier I discussed how coverage of the black civil rights movement in the 1950s played into nationalist fantasies about the march of American democracy. Nixon turned this logic on its head by claiming that progressive political struggles such as the Chicano movement, feminism, the gay and lesbian rights movements, the black power movement, and others were fundamentally un-American. No longer was civil rights activism seen on the small screen as part of a tradition of dissent. Instead it was televised as a threat to the well-being of the "silent majority," Nixon's famous codeword

for the white, middle-class, straight families that were increasingly represented in popular media and by the political establishment as the “real” America. I am not arguing that the networks were taking their marching orders from the president; the relationship between political power and cultural power is rarely that direct in a democracy. It is the case, however, that television has historically been highly sensitive to executive power, largely because it is FCC appointees who grant licenses to private interests seeking access to public airwaves. A kind of symbiotic relationship emerged in which the increasingly sensationalized programming of the networks—including the news—stirred in viewers a sense of perpetual unease and thus reinforced Nixon’s message that the nation itself was in peril.<sup>77</sup> The result: Chicano/a activism of the 1960s and 1970s became conflated with and was ultimately obscured by the disparate social, political, and moral threats that were reportedly endangering the American dream.

This symbiosis between televised representations of civil rights and the Nixonian rhetoric of decline was not a simple failure on the part of the networks to honor the objective ideals of journalism. It was instead a by-product of the ideological and practical work that dominant media performs within a neoliberal economy in which the state serves as guarantor of the efficient movement of private capital and citizens carry out their civic duty by shopping. Corporate television journalism, then as now, was structured around an assurance that the state would protect viewers in troubled times. We saw this dynamic operating quite clearly in coverage of the Chicano Moratorium, as images of unruly minorities were counterbalanced by an implicit promise that the “thin blue line” of police officers seen on the screen would ultimately restore order. In a period when global flows of capital were reorganizing the state in fundamental ways, nightly images of authorities apparently restoring order after events like the Chicano Moratorium offered viewers a visual basis for the kind of confidence in governing institutions that is necessary for the continued investment of capital by individual consumers and corporate investors. Sandwiched between segments, the commercials are easily overlooked, but they too played a part in shaping how the Chicano movement was received during the sixties and seventies and how it has been incorporated within the dominant historical memory. Advertisements, with their implicit promise of abundance, made for a sharp contrast with the images of political unrest, allowing viewers to detach themselves from the realm of participatory politics and to identify instead with the seemingly apolitical life of the commodity. There is something profoundly strange in watching an up-tempo commercial for Lanacane (“For itching problems anywhere, except your eyes”) used as a lead-in to scenes of rioting in Los Angeles, as NBC had done with its coverage of the

Chicano Moratorium.<sup>78</sup> Yet, if the uncanniness of this jump went unnoticed by most viewers, it was because they had been trained to make careful distinctions between the imagined unruliness of the street and the no-less-imagined safety of the domestic sphere and its consumer logic. Political institutions in the United States were increasingly making the same distinction, responding not to activists using public space to demand recognition of their rights, but to private corporations. The result of this ongoing process has been the consolidation of a neoliberalism that compels us to think that the market rather than collective action is the best remedy for social and political injustice.

The mid-twentieth century is often remembered as the golden age of broadcast journalism, a time when the television news was more than the alarmist headlines, shallow reporting, kneejerk punditry, and tabloid features that dominate today's media landscape. This nostalgic narrative is compelling because it allows us to hope that things might be better, but the archive of TV coverage of Mexican American politics suggests the need for a different story. There were moments of remarkable insight and courage, just as today there are examples to be found of network reporting that is informed and independent. However, in watching network reporting on the Chicano movement, one is not struck by the professional nature of journalism but by a lack of research and the frequent inability to get around narrow conventions of race and politics in the United States. It was not for a lack of alternatives. Print journalists such as Carey McWilliams and Stan Steiner had shown that it was possible to reflect intelligently on the Chicano movement as it unfolded. The networks, though, showed themselves largely incapable of recognizing the significance of postwar activism by Mexican Americans. The impact of this exclusion has been considerable. During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, paper-thin coverage by newsmakers made it difficult for movement activists to gain the sympathy of members of the public, who, when they saw the Chicano movement at all, saw it as a threat or as a curiosity. Activists had some success in challenging the dominance of traditional media through the creation of an independent Chicano/a press, but there can be little doubt that the networks stood in the way of a meaningful democratic debate about the issues raised by Chicano/a activists. Moreover, because the network news established itself during these same decades as the official "first draft" of the nation's history, its insipid handling of Mexican American activism all but guaranteed that the movement would be inscribed only on the margins of U.S. history. Given the power that television continues to have in shaping popular perceptions of the sixties, it is unsurprising

that many people are limited in their knowledge of the Chicano movement to a hazy recollection of César Chávez, if they know anything at all.

If the news landscape looked the same today as it did during the 1960s and 1970s, it would be tempting to despair. Fortunately, the explosion of online media such as blogs, social networking sites, podcasts, and video-sharing sites is fast eroding the enormous influence that the networks have had over the reception of new social movements in the public sphere. Obviously the Internet is not a silver bullet. (The mere existence of digital media does not guarantee an informed public, let alone bring about social justice.) Still, the proliferation of news and opinion platforms means both that the networks are more accountable in terms of fact checking, and also that progressive activists—Chicanos and Chicanas included—can find alternatives to the narrow filtering that makes the evening news as pallid today as it was forty years ago. Ultimately, though, the most important lesson to be learned from network coverage of the Chicano movement in the 1960s and 1970s might be that media should not be allowed to define political priorities. In our image-oriented society, visibility is often equated with power. There are real limits, though, to defining what is meaningful as that which can be seen. We often imagine racism through its most spectacular forms: dead or damaged bodies, segregated facilities, or unbearable labor conditions. These are real enough, of course, but many forms of social injury are woven into the fabric of everyday life, and their very banality makes them hard to communicate through the surface of the television screen. Likewise, many of the things that progressive activists fight for do not televise well: the opportunity to do meaningful work, the freedom for communities and individuals to live where they choose, the right to control our own bodies, and the chance to learn. The archive of television news coverage of the Chicano civil rights activism teaches us a great deal about the cultural politics surrounding civil rights at a pivotal moment in U.S. and world history. Its most important lesson, though, might be that what matters most in politics—as in life—often goes unrecorded.

#### Notes

My thanks to staff at the Vanderbilt Television News Archive, the Library of Congress, the Library of American Broadcasting, and the NBC News Archives for their invaluable assistance with this essay. Many thanks also to John Rowe, Inderpal Grewal, Laura Kang, Rafael Pérez-Torres, Ricardo Ortíz, Yolanda Padilla, Curtis Marez, Ricky T. Rodríguez, Elena Machado Sáez, Sarah Banet-Weiser, to the Minority Cultural Studies Group at the University of Maryland, and to my many wonderful colleagues,



especially Kandice Chuh, David Wyatt, Peter Mallios, Kent Cartwright, Robert Levine, Sangeeta Ray, Mary Helen Washington, Ana Patricia Rodríguez, Zita Nunes, and Jonathan Auerbach.

1. For fuller accounts of this incident see Marguerite V. Marin, *Social Protest in an Urban Barrio: A Study of the Chicano Movement, 1966–1974* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1991), 165–69; Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 65–66; Dial Torgerson, “Rumors Are Rife in Avalon Over Brown Beret Invasion,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 1972, sec. 1.
2. Sasha Torres, *Black, White, and in Color: Television and Black Civil Rights* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006).
3. For more on the landmark Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, see Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government’s War on Dissent* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999). For general histories of the Chicano movement, see Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011); George Mariscal, *Brown-eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965–1975* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Carlos Muñoz Jr., *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 2007); Francisco A. Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston, Tex.: Arte Público Press, 1996).
4. *CBS Evening News*, CBS, August 31, 1972.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. The television archive is problematic, as anyone who has spent time studying the medium can attest. Much of the programming of the 1940s and early 1950s is lost, and while things improved in the late 1950s after video-recording technology became available, even then preservation was spotty. To make matters worse, networks keep a tight grip on what they do have, despite the fact that their programming was transmitted on public airwaves. (Lawmakers could do a tremendous service to society if they required that broadcasters make their archives freely available for educational purposes as a condition of use.) In writing this essay, I consulted the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division at the Library of Congress, the Paley Center for Media, the UCLA Film and Television Archive, the Library of American Broadcasting, and the Vanderbilt Television News Archive, which has been recording the news every evening since August 5, 1968. Unless otherwise indicated, television broadcasts cited herein refer to material found in the Vanderbilt archive.
8. My thanks to the anonymous reader at *American Quarterly* who suggested this phrase and who made several other helpful suggestions.
9. Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 102–3.
10. Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*; Torres, *Black, White, and in Color*.
11. Torres, *Black, White, and in Color*, 15. For a detailed analysis of how the national news intervened in racial politics at the local level, see Steven D. Classen, *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles Over Mississippi TV, 1955–1969* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).
12. Rosales, *Chicano!*, xiii. Sadly, we do not have many published reflections by Chicano/a activists on how they encountered African American civil rights activism and what it meant to them, although we do have general commentary on the subject. See Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power*, 66.
13. María Varela, “Time to Get Ready,” January 6, 2007. I have a copy of this unpublished autobiographical essay in my possession.
14. Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).
15. For an insightful study of the discourse of Latino upward mobility and its meanings for contemporary racial politics, see Arlene Dávila, *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).
16. “Cast the First Stone,” *Bell and Howell Close Up!*, ABC, September 27, 1960. The program is cited in Daniel Einstein, *Special Edition: A Guide to Network Television Documentary Series and Special News Reports, 1955–1979* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1987), 95.
17. Michael Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politics* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 60–91.
18. Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 23.

19. Mary Pat Brady, *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 13–48.
20. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 6.
21. For more on Mexican American civil rights activism immediately before and after World War II, see Zaragoza Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Mario T. García, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930–1960* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); Vicki Ruíz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930–1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Cynthia Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009). On social protest in the nineteenth century, see Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).
22. Rosales, *Chicano!*, 104–5.
23. Patrick Carroll, *Felix Longoria's Wake: Bereavement, Racism, and the Rise of Mexican American Activism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).
24. Rosales, *Chicano!*, 108. See also the 2009 PBS documentary *A Class Apart*, which incidentally makes an excellent resource when teaching comparative racial formation and the law.
25. There is a large body of literature on César Chávez and the grape strike, including Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (New York: Norton, 1975); Peter Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes (Escape If You Can): Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Margaret Eleanor Rose, “Women in the United Farm Workers: A Study of Chicana and Mexican Participation in a Labor Union, 1950–1980” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1988); Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement*, ed. Diana Hembree (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997); Cesar Chavez, *An Organizer's Tale: Speeches*, ed. Ilan Stavans (New York: Penguin, 2008); Miriam Pawel, *The Union of Their Dreams: Power, Hope, and Struggle in Cesar Chavez's Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009).
26. Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes*, 127–28.
27. “Farmworkers Complete Their 300-Mile March from Delano to Sacramento, California,” NBC, airdate unknown, <http://nbcnewsarchives.com>, Media ID#1070BU96. The archive does not indicate when this report was aired, but the online description suggests that it was broadcast on the *Huntley-Brinkley Report* on Monday, April 11, 1966, one day after the conclusion of the march.
28. Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, 2d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 3–4.
29. Ferriss and Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields*, 58–60.
30. Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 272.
31. NBC, March 10, 1968, <http://nbcnewsarchives.com>, Media ID 0186BURB.
32. Ferriss and Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields*, 144.
33. Torres, *Black, White, and in Color*, 10. Torres borrows the phrase “the burden of liveness” from Jose Muñoz in order to name the imperative that television placed on blacks to give apparently authentic performances of minoritized suffering. She writes, “In the context of the civil rights movement, bearing ‘the burden of liveness’ required movement workers to produce arresting television images juxtaposing peaceful protest with physical suffering at the hands of violent segregationists.” This is precisely what César Chávez did during his 1968 fast and repeatedly throughout his career, including in the 1988 fast that was to be one of his last major public protests.
34. According to one account, the United Farm Workers began using public concern about the safety of pesticides as a means of garnering support for the union in 1968. See Laura Pulido, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 85.
35. According to the Vanderbilt Television New Archive’s searchable online database (<http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>), Chávez’s second high-profile fast was covered by ABC, CBS, and NBC on the evening of August 21, 1988. The labor leader’s death was covered by all three networks on April 23, 1993, with additional coverage of his funeral on April 29.

36. Writing about the cultural politics of African American activism, Herman Gray uses the term “civil rights subjects” to describe “those black, largely middle-class benefactors who gained the most visibility as well as material and status rewards from the struggles and opportunities generated by the civil rights movement.” Just as the television camera turned King into the face of the integration struggle, so too did the network news transform César Chávez into a Chicano civil rights subject, a public figure whose particular image came to represent Mexican Americans as a whole. See Herman Gray, “Remembering Civil Rights: Television, Memory, and the 1960s,” in *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin (New York: Routledge, 1997), 353.
37. Todd Gitlin has commented on this phenomenon. Drawing on the work of Francesco Alberoni, he writes: “The modern person, lacking either roots in tradition or a powerfully present God, longs for contact with an idealized parent and identification with an idealized self. But in a society formally committed to egalitarian values, he or she also wants to bring the idealized parent back down to human scale, to the scale of the *admirable*.” See Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching*, 147.
38. See Ferriss and Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields*, 225–27.
39. In 1966 the National Farm Workers Association merged with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee to become the United Farm Workers.
40. For a groundbreaking collection of Dolores Huerta's writings, see Mario T. García, ed., *A Dolores Huerta Reader* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).
41. Ferriss and Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields*, 225–27. See also Pawel, *The Union of Their Dreams*.
42. *ABC News*, ABC, June 3, 1969.
43. This failure was of course not limited to coverage of the Chicano movement. Television journalism is often criticized for its inability to give meaningful context to current events, which is one reason why public debate in the United States so frequently suffers from historical amnesia. Budget constraints, the need to cover multiple stories in a short time period, and above all the demand for high-impact visuals make it difficult for producers in the commercial news system to give anything but the most basic background. This reality proves particularly problematic in the case of a topic such as the Chicano movement, for research suggests that TV has the greatest influence on audience perception when viewers have little other exposure to the issue at hand. Since few viewers during the 1960s and 1970s were educated about Mexican American history, the mediocre coverage by the media may have proved especially influential. See Edwin Diamond, *The Tin Kazoo: Politics, Television, and the News* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1975). For a discussion of television's sway over uniformed audiences see Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland*, 195.
44. Armando Navarro claims that the more militant activists were often barrio youths who found in the Chicano movement an alternative to gang life. See Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization*, 60–61.
45. Torres, *Black, White, and in Color*, 89.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *CBS News*, CBS, August 31, 1970.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. *ABC News*, ABC, April 28, 1970.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *NBC Nightly News*, NBC, June 15, 1971.
54. *ABC News*, ABC, August 1, 1972.
55. For information on this event and a thorough study of Chicano/a antiwar activism, see Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí!; Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
56. *NBC News*, NBC, August 30, 1970.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*
59. Aaron Doyle, *Arresting Images: Crime and Policing in Front of the Television Camera* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 38. For a deft commentary on how the Chicano Moratorium ignited “a Chicano public sphere over and against a national one,” see Chon A. Noriega, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xxix.

60. *NBC News*, NBC, August 30, 1970.
61. *NBC News*, NBC, August 31, 1970.
62. *NBC News*, NBC, July 6, 1970.
63. *Ibid.*
64. Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization*, 180–81.
65. *NBC News*, NBC, July 6, 1970.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.* Perkins here articulates what Arlene Dávila argues is an ideologically driven contrast between African Americans as a troublesome minority and Latino/as as an exemplary one. In certain respects this comparison is not a new one: María Amparo Ruiz de Burton in her 1885 novel *The Squatter and the Don* relies on a narrative strategy of denigrating blackness in order to argue for the incorporation of the formerly Mexican citizens of the newly conquered U.S. Southwest into a “white” America. However, as Dávila notes, this contrast is asserted with increasing frequency in order to deflect attention from the growing inequality produced over the last forty years by neoliberal policies. Just one month after Perkins made this remark on air the barrio of East Los Angeles did indeed “explode” at the Chicano moratorium, though more because of police aggression than because of Mexican American rage. See María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don* (New York: Modern Library, 2004).
68. *NBC News*, NBC, July 6, 1970.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *CBS Evening News*, CBS, May 8, 1978; *NBC News*, NBC, July 4, 1980.
71. Dávila makes this point when commenting on a May 2005 *Newsweek* article on the election of Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa that was titled “How Hispanics Will Change America.” She writes: “Are Latinos not part of that ‘America’ they are supposedly said to change and affect? In other words, a Latino victory is celebrated, but the specter of foreignness remains, as Latinos are presented as a threat that could ‘change our system.’” See Dávila, *Latino Spin*, 48.
72. Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty*, 332.
73. Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.
74. Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty*, 260–65.
75. *Ibid.*, 346.
76. For a brilliant account of how Richard Nixon used white paranoia to rebuild the GOP, see Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008). For commentary on how television fit within this shifting political landscape, especially with respect to youth culture, see Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 16.
77. The normative television viewer is often imagined as white, but evidence suggests that Mexican Americans were also influenced by network representations of the Chicano movement (and left politics more broadly) as menace. For example, Congressman Henry Gonzales of Texas garnered support from Anglos and from moderate Mexican Americans by contrasting himself with the supposed radicals seen on TV. On April 3, 1969, he gave what became in movement circles a notorious speech on the floor of Congress in which he denounced José Angel Gutiérrez and the volunteers of MAYO as “drawing fire from the deepest wellsprings of hate.” Something similar happened in California when the struggle to incorporate East L.A. in the early 1970s was defeated by (among other things) fears that Chicano radicals would take over the machinery of city government. Such fears would likely not have had the traction they did had it not been for the paranoid perspective circulating even among Mexican American families that watched the evening news. For Congressman Gonzales’s speech see “Race Hate,” 91st Congress, 1st session, *Congressional Record* 115 (April 3, 1969): H 8590–8591. For more on the debate in East L.A. see Ernesto Chávez, “¡Mi Raza Primerol!” (*My People First!*): *Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966–1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 94–97.
78. *NBC News*, NBC, August 30, 1970.