

Soldiers de Cristo: Latino Catholics and the Vietnam War

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Vietnam War touched every aspect of American society. In U.S. households, college campuses, and at the workplace, Americans discussed and debated the war. This was also true of American Latino households. Studies on Latinos and the Vietnam War has focused on the relatively limited examination of the Latino experience with the war. One aspect that is not discussed is religion. Latino culture, religion, and identity are often connected with the Roman Catholic church. The Catholic church's influence is largely unexamined; however, the Church was also a formative influence in the lives of Latinos in the United States.

From support towards confronting “godless” communism to protests by Roman Catholic priests against the war, American Catholics debated the conflict. But this examination has mostly focused on views of white American Catholics. Studies on Latinos and the war have examined the place of conservative Latinos versus Chicano politics and the war. Again, with a limited examination of how religion informed their perspectives.

This study re-examines the role that the Catholic church played among Latinos in the United States during America’s longest war. It reviews discussion in military and religious publications, as well as, oral histories during the time. Especially important are discussions about how World War II Latino veterans' influenced the views of draft-eligible Latinos during the Vietnam War. Also, discussions about Mexican American citizenship and their responsibility as citizen-soldiers are highlighted. Finally, questions about greater identification of mainly Mexican American youth had toward Chicana/o identity. These areas provide a new look at the interactions between Latino religion, politics, citizenship, and their understanding of the Vietnam War.