

Lucha Libre: Anti-military Militants

By Matt Sanchez

In Spanish, Lucha means to fight, struggle, or contend, but if you add the word "free" or "libre" to that struggle, you get a wrestling match where badly choreographed "athletes" put on an amusing show for a rowdy audience desperate for entertainment.

As a member of Lucha, Karina Garcia is dedicated to persuading high school students that they don't have to join the military to get an education, and insists she is anti-war. But like those clueless wrestlers who shout into the microphone while the villain "sneaks" up behind him wielding a folded chair, Ms. Garcia makes her point ignoring the audience who's trying to warn her of what she's not seeing. It is easy to convince yourself you're on the right side of an argument, especially if that argument is the only one you'll listen to.

As a corporal in the Marine Corps reserves, I'm the first to admit I'm not the most knowledgeable person to speak on military affairs, but next to the members of Lucha I'm a friggin' four-star general.

If minority veterans were being unfairly targeted for exploitation, that's news to me-I've met far too many servicemen and women who speak proudly of the military. SIPA professor and former Mayor David Dinkins, still has a sparkle in his eyes when he talks of his tour as a Marine over 50 years ago-a service that took place when a very white, and very Southern, Marine Corps was hostile toward the recently mandated desegregation rules that predated Brown v. Board of Education by nearly a decade.

The myth of poor, clueless brown people who fall into the recruiter's silver-tongued lies for the sake of the GI Bill El Dorado is as much a stereotype as Latinos who can't show up to class on time. Even if the protest group Lucha did miss an important deadline to file the necessary paperwork for University recognition, stereotypes were meant to be broken.

Newly arrived General Studies student Erika Gallegos says she's often amazed by how misunderstood the military is by the civilian population, especially in academia. "The military does not exploit minorities, it empowers them," she says. This eleven-year active duty staff sergeant is grateful for what the Army taught her during her career with the California National Guard. She considers the military to have been a stepping-stone for her success. "I learned to put my soldier's well-being before my own," Gallegos said with a Cheshire grin that hinted at how important her career in the military has been to her character.

A California native who only recently took her first subway ride has learned lessons that simply do not fit into a college syllabus. As a certified yoga instructor, Gallegos is quick to cite karma as one of her guiding philosophies. "Everyone wants to live in peace, and thanks to an all-voluntary professional military, students on this campus have freedom ... freedom from the draft." As I'm writing about minorities in the military, I have to reveal that Gallegos is Mexican-American, but she spoke of her time with her soldiers in a truly color-blind way.

Of course, not everyone agrees. Groups like Lucha believe that if we were just dedicated to eliminating militaries around the world (starting with our own) we would also eliminate any need for war. By that logic, if we got rid of the police we would put an end to crime.

From my experience, the military is one of the few places in American culture that comes closest to a egalitarian society-regardless of race. The three men who taught our awkward platoon to stand straight, look forward and cock our shoulders back were all exemplary Marines. They also were all black and entirely indifferent to the ethnicities of the multi-racial group of recruits they were entrusted to train. For those drill instructors, we, as recruits from entirely different backgrounds, were not minorities, just potential Marines.

On second thought, it's very possible that the military does target minorities, if you mean that small segment of the population that recognizes military service isn't just about the great paychecks or the all-expenses paid vacations overseas. Groups like Lucha may have more camaraderie, dedication and professional pride, and as a minority myself, I may just be too naive to understand the seriousness of the Lucha mission. Yet, for some reason, I can't shake the feeling that this is just the latest form of entertainment that everyone knows is fake, even if the audience shows up to watch the spectacle, and cheer the pretenders on.