Private Suffering and Public Strife
Delia Alvarez's War with the Nixon Administration's POW Publicity Campaign, 1968–1973

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In the frantic moments after his fighter plane was shot down, and he ejected from his aircraft and hit the waters off the Gulf of Tonkin, twenty-six-year-old naval lieutenant Everett Alvarez Jr. tore off his wedding ring and let it sink to the ocean floor. He believed that ridding himself of the ring would prove essential to his survival should he be captured by the North Vietnamese. “Survivor school instructors had warned us not to wear them in combat,” he recalled in his 1989 memoir, Chained Eagle, “because communists would inflict further mental torture on a captured married pilot by fabricating stories about the aviator’s wife abandoning him for another man.”

As Alvarez’s wedding band sank to the bottom of the ocean, the current carried the pilot toward dry land, and soon he was discovered by the North Vietnamese coastal militia. On the afternoon of August 5, 1964, Everett Alvarez Jr. became the first U.S. fighter pilot to be taken prisoner in the North, where he remained in captivity for eight and a half years. By the time he returned home to the United States in February 1973, he had become the longest-held American prisoner of war (POW) in North Vietnam.

There are several ways readers of Alvarez’s memoir might interpret this account of his capture. At one level, the discarding of the wedding ring signals Alvarez’s departure from the world of marriage and his entry into the solitary world of the prison camp. At another level, as readers later learn, it is a moment of foreshadowing, since Alvarez’s wife eventually fell in love with another man and divorced him while he remained imprisoned in Hanoi. This early scene in the memoir is also notable for its selective treatment of violence. Predictably, given the patriotic genre of the POW memoir, the violence unleashed by the U.S. bombing raids over North Vietnam is far from view. In its place are images of the shoot-down itself: Alvarez’s fighter plane coming apart in midair, the sensation of his body hitting the water, and Alvarez feverishly tearing off his face mask and helmet as he struggles for orientation. But Alvarez’s fear about the violence that awaits him should he be taken prisoner is even greater than his
fear of crashing. Immersed in the waters off the Gulf of Tonkin, Alvarez thinks first about what he had been told during his military training: that for the communists, even the most intimate spaces are violable. By dropping his wedding rings into the ocean, Alvarez attempts to shed his personal identity, believing that the North Vietnamese will trade on domestic secrets (either contrived or real) in order to inflict psychological injury, and that this strategy could prove devastatingly effective as an instrument of torture.

When Everett Alvarez made the fateful decision to pursue a career as a naval pilot in the early 1960s, the threats of captivity and torture in a foreign war seemed remote. Born and reared in northern California, Alvarez was a young Mexican American man from a working-class family who hoped that by entering an elite corps of the military, he would be able to secure a viable economic and professional future for himself. In choosing this path, he was also participating in a long tradition of minority men affirming their patriotism and vowing for their citizenship rights through military service. Only dimly aware of the war in Southeast Asia when he joined the navy, he could hardly have imagined that he would find himself at its center.

But between 1964 and 1973, Everett Alvarez and his family were in fact at the center of several local, domestic, and global transformations: the bloody and protracted conflict in Vietnam, rising international opposition to the war, heightened generational tensions within the Mexican American community, the advent of women's liberation, and the explosion of the Chicano movement. The story of the Alvarez family touched on all of these transformations, while also revealing a constitutive feature of the POW controversy—the fear, expressed by Alvarez in his memoir, that the private realm of the family would be incorporated into the public world of war and politics. This fear had surfaced first in 1968, when the Nixon administration launched a publicity campaign to call attention to Hanoi's alleged refusal to comply with the rules for prisoners of war laid out in the 1949 Geneva conventions. At the heart of the campaign was the spectacle of an innocent family drawn into a war over which it had no control. Between 1968 and 1973, a range of sentimental images designed to elicit both rage at the North Vietnamese and sympathy for the relatives of POWs bombarded the American public: bewildered children growing up without fathers, frightened wives living in a state of quasi widowhood, mothers and fathers desperate for any information about their captured sons. With little available information about the condition of the captives, prisoners themselves were conspicuously absent from the campaign. Instead, the campaign focused almost entirely on the prisoners' families, precipitating a host of questions: When and how could the stories of POW families be “made public”? What was the connection between the private suffering of individual families and the Nixon administration? Above all, what was the relationship between the POW's familial identity as a husband, brother, father, or son and his military status as a fighter pilot and, in the eyes of the North Vietnamese, a war criminal?

This history of the POW publicity campaign between 1968 and 1973 adds a new layer to the cultural history of the Vietnam War. Scholars have shown that as the war ended and in the years that followed, the POW became an object of intense emotional and cultural investment. Historian George Herring has argued that when the POWs returned to the United States in early 1973, they received the “only heroes’ welcome” from a war nearly devoid of heroism. Noting the ubiquity of the POW in post-Vietnam literature, film, and television, Elliott Gruner and Susan Jeffords have suggested that the POW embodied the rebirth of heroism out of defeat, a rebirth tied to the project of national re-militarization in the 1980s. What defined the POW, they argue, was his hyper-masculinity: the complete and successful exclusion of any traits traditionally identified with the feminine, including weakness, passivity, vulnerability, or loss. According to Gruner, the POW evoked a nation "whose most recent heroes are overmuscled male bodies bristling with an array of lethal weaponry." The POW narratives, according to Jeffords, conform to the larger picture of American war narratives. Their defining feature is that they are "a 'man's story' from which women are generally excluded." The story of the POWs, like that of American war in general, Jeffords concludes, was shaped precisely by what it repressed—the feminine realm. This essay takes issue with this contention. Regardless of the hypermasculinity associated with the POW in post-Vietnam film and literature, the "go public" POW campaign proceeded from a radically different logic. Between 1968 and 1973, it consistently identified the captured soldier with those realms traditionally linked to femininity and womanhood: domesticity, sentimentality, privacy, and the affective ties of the family. By linking captured men to their families and transforming the POW story into a domestic drama, the campaign simultaneously vilified the North Vietnamese as transgressors of the boundaries between the public and the private and figured the American nation as the war's victim rather than aggressor.

By placing the family at the center of the drama, the POW publicity campaign drew on a second literary tradition—not traditional war stories but the captivity narratives that were so popular in the colonial landscape of the late seventeenth century. Often featuring a white female captured by Indian savages and torn away from her community, these first-person accounts—not unlike Alvarez's memoir—typically opened with violent scenes of family disruption, dissolution, and death. While these accounts declined in popularity over the course of the eighteenth century, scholars have shown that they exerted
a lasting influence on both American literary and political culture. The captivity narrative's tropes of bondage and family disruption have reappeared at moments of national upheaval, ranging from the American Revolutionary War to the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979. In such moments, captivity narratives work by analogizing the nation to the family in ways that idealize both institutions simultaneously. Within these narratives, the entire nation is transformed into a family under siege, the private sphere of the family becomes a locus of unjust injury inflicted from the outside, and the enemy's violent act of separating captive from kin constitutes incontrovertible proof of national rightlessness and unity.

The row publicity campaign between 1968 and 1973 constitutes a significant moment in this longer history. In contrast to many of the first-person accounts that emerged from Puritan New England, the campaign did not feature female captives. But it did not have to in order to make its case. The power of the campaign hinged on whether the prisoner was a man or woman but rather on the successful identification of the prisoner of war with the affective bonds of family life. As Melanie McAlister has pointed out, the classic move of the captivity narrative is to identify the captive "with the feminized space of the family and sexuality" as a way of conferring innocence on the nation. In contrast to the images of hypermasculine POWs that pervaded the popular culture in subsequent decades, this move underwrote the row publicity campaign of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

But if the publicity campaign's cultural power resided in domestic images of imperiled families, the relatives of American prisoners were not passive participants in this process. Its very emphasis on the private sphere made it possible to challenge the captivity narrative from within. Because Alvarez was the longest-held prisoner in the North, he was one of the most visible prisoners of war, and the plight of his family was the subject of considerable media attention. During the early years of the campaign, the women in Alvarez's family were portrayed as the innocent victims of Vietnamese aggression, drawn into the conflict through no fault of their own and left in an unnerving state of suspense as they awaited word about Alvarez's fate. But by 1973, Alvarez's sister Delia began speaking out publicly against the war and the Nixon administration. In the process of publicly condemning the war, she challenged many of the campaign's defining features: its unrelenting emphasis on family suffering; its insistence that the wives, sisters, and children of American prisoners were the war's true victims; and its implicit claim that the American nation was a casualty rather than itself bearing some of the responsibility for the violence.

Like Everett Alvarez's decision to join the military, Delia Alvarez's condemnation of the war was linked to a struggle over racial identity. As historian Lorena Oropeza has shown, the opposing choices made by a brother and sister—to fight in a war and to fight against it—captured two distinct moments in the history of race after 1945. Everett Alvarez's choice was dictated by a postwar definition of racial pride that equated masculinity, militarism, and patriotism. But by the early 1970s, when Delia Alvarez began speaking out against the war, the racial landscape had changed dramatically, and nowhere more so than in her native northern California. There, Chicanoos were analyzing their racial subordination in ways that challenged earlier definitions of patriotism; they were positing theories of nationalism that undermined traditional conceptions of the nation-state; they were developing new understandings of manhood, womanhood, and family life; and they were questioning the authority of their elders. Ultimately, it was Delia Alvarez's growing affiliation with this movement that enabled her to break with the Nixon administration and challenge the row publicity campaign. Drawing on a radicalized notion of Chicano racial identity, Delia Alvarez was able to develop a powerful critique of the official row story that circulated throughout the public sphere during the Vietnam War.

At the time that Everett Alvarez became the first American prisoner of war in North Vietnam, his shoot-down and capture received relatively little attention in the press. Still, on August 6, 1964, the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle featured a photograph of the fresh-faced, youthful pilot in naval uniform. The photograph's caption described him as "an introspective man," and the accompanying story reported that he was one of two naval lieutenants from the USS Constellation whose plane had been shot down by North Vietnamese antiaircraft fire. One of the two pilots was dead. Unconfirmed reports suggested that the other pilot had been captured. No one knew which pilot had lived and which had died.

The next day, the Chronicle published a second story confirming that it was Everett Alvarez who had survived his shoot-down and been taken prisoner. His portrait appeared again, but this time, it was featured within a second photograph of Alvarez's wife, Hortencia (who went by Tangee), and his young goddaughter Denise Sanchez. In the photograph the little girl looks small and vulnerable as she clings to her godmother with one arm and to Alvarez's portrait with the other. The godmother protectively holds the little girl close to her, as she stares down at the picture of her husband. A quiet smile on her face suggests that she is relieved to have learned that her husband is alive, yet she is still apprehensive. Although this story appeared four years before the launching of the formal row publicity campaign, it anticipated several of the campaign's defining features. Importantly, the photographic image of Alvarez in uniform was not
displaced entirely but was subsumed within a domestic portrait of an innocent woman and child newly imperiled by the conflict in Vietnam. The setting for the article was not Southeast Asia but rather the Alvarez family’s “sunny ranch style home” in Santa Clara, California, where readers were introduced to a cast of family characters: Alvarez’s mother Soledad and father Everett Sr.; his twelve-year-old sister Madeleine; his “slim and graceful” wife Tangee; and his twenty-three-year-old sister Delia, who, when the family was asked to speculate about her brother’s capture, eloquently told reporters that “it is enough right now to know that he is alive.”13

Given the significance accorded to the Pows after the war, the fact that Alvarez’s capture received little press coverage in 1966 may be surprising. But it is important to realize that, although U.S. personnel were captured and taken prisoner in Southeast Asia as early as 1961, the dramatic story of the Pows and their families did not begin to receive public attention until 1966.14 Prior to that time, the government had pursued what it called a policy of “quiet diplomacy,” later dubbed the “keep quiet policy” by one disillusioned POW wife.15 Premised on the assumption that publicizing information about the Pows might jeopardize their safety and derail ongoing negotiations with the North Vietnamese, this policy advised the families of captured and missing men to stay out of the public eye, refrain from contacting the press, and keep their private concerns about their men precisely that: private.

In the beginning, the Alvarez family complied with the policy of quiet diplomacy, a compliance that reflected their faith in the government and support of the war effort at the time of Alvarez’s capture. “We all used to have great respect for the flag and the uniform,” Delia Alvarez recalled about her family in a 1973 interview. “I believed in the domino theory, fighting communism and killing the enemy.”16 According to Everett Alvarez’s memoir, Delia had “cursed her gender for disqualifying her from a combat role” when she learned of her brother’s capture.17 Yet by the time that Everett Alvarez returned to the United States in 1973, his family had publicly denounced the Nixon administration, and his sister Delia had emerged as a highly visible and outspoken critic of the war. What had changed during the eight and a half years of Alvarez’s captivity?

Part of the change had to do with the gradual collapse of the official policy of quiet diplomacy. This collapse was due to pressures both within and outside of the government. Within the government, officials began to receive reports of prisoner mistreatment, and the Johnson administration established a Committee on Prisoner Matters within the State Department in April 1966. Around the same time, both the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency became heavily involved in POW information-gathering. Two months later, the theme assumed greater public urgency when the North Vietnamese

(in what U.S. intelligence forces interpreted as a misguided attempt to garner international sympathy) released film footage showing manacled American prisoners, among them Everett Alvarez, being marched at gunpoint through the streets of Hanoi, surrounded by hostile crowds.18 Less than a year later, in April 1967, Life magazine featured a full-page photograph of captured naval officer Richard Stratton at a Hanoi press conference, apparently bowing in submission. It was, according to one sympathetic POW chronicler, an arresting image of “a big, husky pilot” now looking “like an automaton, like someone who had been made into a puppet.” A haunting reminder of the speculations about brainwashing and collaboration that had surrounded the experience of Korean War Pows, Stratton’s “Pavlovian performance” alarmed his family, government officials, and the American public.19

However disturbing these images, what the press would later dub the “go public” campaign did not take off in earnest until late 1968. By the late 1960s, many of the relatives of Pows had grown angry and frustrated, not only by the dearth of information coming out of Vietnam, but also by the policy of quiet diplomacy, which they had come to see as an excuse for government inaction. Sybil Stockdale, a mother of four whose husband, naval commander James Stockdale, had been captured in 1965, had met on numerous occasions with officials in the Naval and State Departments and had come to the disheartening conclusion that “official silence and secrecy can cover up incompetence and just plain inertia.”20 On October 27, 1968, she defied the government’s policy and went public with her husband’s story in the San Diego Union Tribune. Stockdale was not acting alone but rather was part of an informal network of POW wives, parents, and siblings who were taking matters into their own hands and engaging in grassroots organizing, many for the first time in their lives. Launching letter-writing campaigns to members of Congress and the White House, they appealed to the press, attempted to establish direct contact with Hanoi in the hope of gathering information, and sent POW wives to Washington, D.C., and to the Paris peace talks to demand North Vietnamese compliance with the terms of the Geneva conventions. In 1970 this informal network of family lobbyists became the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia. The league is still in operation today.21

By 1969 the Nixon administration had its own reasons for wanting to publicize the POW issue. With opposition to the war growing, the new president believed that Hanoi’s refusal to disclose information about missing and captive men could become a public relations boon, one that would deflect attention away from disturbing reports coming out of Vietnam: reports of the My Lai massacre, the indiscriminate killing of Vietnamese civilians, the free-fire zones, napalm, and defoliation. Indeed, within a context of widening scrutiny of
American war conduct, the interests of row families, the Nixon White House, and Congress converged, however provisionally. On May 19, 1969, Defense Secretary Melvin Laird formally ended the policy of quiet diplomacy, publicly charging Hanoi with prisoner mistreatment and demanding that if the Vietnamese did not release the prisoners, they at least had a humanitarian obligation to disclose information about their condition.22

As an aggressive row publicity campaign replaced the policy of quiet diplomacy, the Alvarez family also underwent a transformation. In truth, their lives had begun to change from the moment they learned about Everett Alvarez’s shoot-down. In his memoir, Alvarez recalled that as soon as he was taken prisoner, his parents attempted to steep themselves in Vietnamese history. Despite their lack of formal education, they scoured public libraries and seized on any book or article about Vietnam that they could find. Gradually, this process of self-education convinced Alvarez’s mother Soledad (known as Chole) that the war was misguided. “As she read about the millennium of subjugation by the Chinese, followed by a century of colonial rule,” Alvarez recalled, “she began to doubt the wisdom of the American presence in Vietnam.”23

Significantly, Chole’s political education led her to a deepening sense of racial affiliation with the Vietnamese people. As Alvarez later recalled, Chole’s passion for history was rooted in an attempt to understand her own Mexican American identity. As a girl, she had played among the ruins of a mission in Lompoc, California, and the landscape had provoked questions: “Where did [my ancestors] come from? Why were some in [my] family light-complexioned and blue-eyed while others resembled burnished, copper-colored Aztecs?” By the time her son became the first American row in North Vietnam, Chole had visited twenty Christian missions throughout the state of California in an attempt to make sense of her own racial and national past. As her son remained imprisoned, she became convinced that there “was something comparable . . . between the poorly armed Mexicans who fought for their sovereignty against a much better equipped army, and the out-gunned Vietnamese who appeared night after night on her television screen.”24

“What a man said in the confines of his own home was his own business,” Everett Alvarez later wrote of his father’s position, “but he’d better watch his tongue in public.”25

As Alvarez later realized, the power struggle within his family hinged not on the morality of the war but rather on identifying the appropriate line of demarcation between the public and the private spheres. Initially, his father was successful at policing that line. His mother asked deeply troubling questions about the war, but only “in the privacy of her own home.” What Alvarez later called the family’s “free-for-all” about the war were hidden from “the watchful and critical eye of the public.” As Alvarez’s captivity approached the extraordinary five-year mark, his family continued to abide by the policy of quiet diplomacy, remaining, in Alvarez’s words, “forever conscious of the boundaries between private license and public constraints.”26

It was Delia, Everett Alvarez’s sister, who ultimately insisted that her family break their silence about the war and “go public.” Shortly after Alvarez’s capture, his father had appointed Delia the spokesperson for the family. It was a choice that made sense, particularly in light of the cultural authority sometimes ascribed to the younger generation within Mexican American families.27 Delia was charismatic, beautiful, and educated, and she “articulated with ease what her parents struggled to express.”28 By 1969, however, father and daughter were on divergent paths. At a moment when many youths both within and outside of the Mexican American community were questioning the authority of an older generation, Delia insisted that the family publicly condemn the war despite her father’s objections. Lalo lamented the decision as one that undermined his own authority and revealed that he was no longer “the final arbiter in his own home.”29

Delia’s political evolution from cold warrior to dissenter was shaped by local, national, and international forces. Like many relatives of rows, Delia found herself frustrated by Defense Department officials who provided virtually no information about captured and missing men. Like her mother, the more she read about Vietnam’s history, the more convinced she became that the United States was on an errant mission. But Delia’s growing critique of the war also emerged from what she was witnessing at home and overseas. After college, she had worked for the Santa Clara County Welfare Department, where she observed young Mexican American men who should have been enrolled in college being sent to Vietnam in disproportionate numbers. In 1967 she quit her job and traveled for twenty months in Europe, where she palpably felt “the depth of rage against the American role in Vietnam.” Winding her way through thirteen countries, she saw protests everywhere she went and watched as the American flag was “torn, trampled on, and burned.”30

But it was ultimately the burgeoning Chicano movement within the United
States that compelled Delia Alvarez to turn against the war. As she explained in a 1973 interview in *La Raza*, a Chicano activist newspaper, “My involvement with the Chicano movement has done more than anything to open my eyes to things as they really are.” In the fall of 1965, as Everett Alvarez began his second year in captivity, the movement exploded in the California town of Salinas, where brother and sister had come of age. As Everett Alvarez remembered postwar Salinas, it was “a town divided . . . by the tracks of the Southern Pacific Railroad.” To the east lay the camps where Mexican migrant workers lived, and to the west stood the affluent homes of the Anglo businessmen and farm owners, who controlled and profited from the Central Valley’s rich agricultural resources. In 1965 Mexican farmworkers, under the leadership of César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, fought back against these stark economic and geographic inequalities by going on strike against the large agribusiness companies that dominated the region.

After 1965, the Chicano movement gained momentum, particularly in the West and Southwest, where Mexican Americans fought for labor, land, and educational reform. As Chávez and Huerta organized laborers in California, Reies López Tijerina spearheaded a land grant movement in New Mexico. In 1966 Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales founded the Crusade for Justice, an organization that sought to reach out to urban Mexican youth. By 1969, Chicano activists were drawing connections between racial oppression at home and the war abroad, in which working-class men of color bore the brunt of the fighting. In 1970 antiwar activists formed the Chicano Moratorium Committee, and in August of that year, they organized a rally against the war in East Los Angeles that drew 20,000 demonstrators.

This was the world that Delia Alvarez came home to when she returned to northern California in 1969. Meanwhile, she had left Europe with a new determination to do more to secure her brother’s release from captivity. At a family gathering on Labor Day in 1969, she joined with other members of the extended family in drafting a petition demanding that “more forceful, positive action” be taken toward the release of Alvarez and the other American prisoners of war. Throughout the fall, family members went door to door, stood on street corners, and approached strangers at churches, banks, and businesses. By December they had gathered over 70,000 signatures, and the petition had received national media coverage. But while the petition drive was a courageous step for the Alvarez family, it was one that remained consistent with the larger aim of the “go public” campaign—to keep the plight of POWs and their families in the public eye. The navy even voiced its approval of the petition, although one official revealingly felt the need to remind the Alvarez family to “place the blame where it most properly belongs, namely the North Vietnamese government.”

In May 1971, however, Delia Alvarez went further. Along with several other relatives of POWs who had originally been involved in the National League of Families, she formed a splinter group called POW-MIA Families for Immediate Release. The group urged the families of POWs to adopt an overtly antiwar position. “We are advocating complete withdrawal,” Delia Alvarez explained in the *Los Angeles Times* on May 18, “The only way the prisoners are going home is by the cessation of hostilities.” By July 1971, approximately 300 relatives had joined the group, claiming that the Nixon administration was using the prisoners as a justification for prolonging the war; they demanded that Nixon negotiate the prisoners’ release without regard to the political fate of South Vietnam. As one member of the new group exclaimed, “They cannot use my husband to spread the blood of 45 young men a week on Viet Nam.” Rejecting the ostensible political neutrality of the National League of Families, these relatives insisted that their missing men were now being held hostage by both Hanoi and the Nixon administration. While some of them aligned themselves with the antiwar movement for pragmatic reasons (believing that ending the war would be the quickest way to get the prisoners home), others had come to believe that American military involvement in Vietnam was morally wrong, above and beyond the POW issue.

After the formation of POW-MIA Families for Immediate Release, Delia Alvarez emerged as one of a handful of POW relatives who openly condemned the war. Between May 1971 and her brother’s repatriation in February 1973, she spoke at protest rallies, appeared with high-profile antiwar activists like Jane Fonda, participated in press conferences, and traveled to Paris to meet with a peace delegation from Indochina. Turning against the National League of Families, she dismissed the women involved in the organization as “Pentagon Princesses.” These actions entailed personal risk and violent confrontation. POW wives appeared at meetings where Alvarez was a featured speaker to publicly scorn and ridicule her. She received hate mail and anonymous phone calls accusing her of being a communist traitor. Once a staunch supporter of the war, she now blamed her brother’s lengthy captivity on the failure of political leadership within the United States. As she explained it at the May 1971 press conference announcing the formation of the splinter group, “I remind people that my brother was first sent to Vietnam under the Kennedy administration, he was captured under the Johnson administration, and he has been used by the Nixon administration, and I don’t want to stay around here any longer to wait for another administration to do something.”

In the process of condemning the war and breaking with the National League of Families, Delia Alvarez subverted the logic of the “go public” campaign in complex ways. In order to understand how she did this, it is necessary to take a
closer look at the campaign itself. Initially, the explicit aim of the campaign had been relatively narrow: to bring international pressure to bear on the North Vietnamese by calling attention to Hanoi's alleged refusal to comply with the rules for prisoners of war that had been laid out in the 1949 Geneva conventions. The conventions, which the North Vietnamese had signed in 1957, required that the names of all captured prisoners of war be released, that all prisoners receive adequate medical care and food, that camps be inspected by a neutral third party, and that captives and their families be allowed to exchange mail. While the United States accused North Vietnam of flagrantly violating these requirements, the North Vietnamese countered that, because the United States had never formally declared war against North Vietnam, the requirements did not apply. In their estimation, the men being held captive were not prisoners of war at all but were, in fact, war criminals.

When viewed historically, however, it is clear that the “go public” campaign hinged on much more than the correct interpretation of the Geneva conventions. In truth, the campaign advanced a vision of American victimization that would shape Vietnam War discourse for years to come. Whatever physical wounds the U.S. military had inflicted on Vietnam, the psychological wounds inflicted by the Vietnamese on the United States were ultimately direr. The claim that, through defying the Geneva conventions, communism had extended its vile reach into the most intimate sphere of the family became a constitutive part of the process of recasting the United States as a victim rather than an aggressor. By repudiating the role that the state had scripted for her as a loyal, domestic victim of Vietnamese violence, Delia Alvarez refused to be implicated in this narrative, one that cited family suffering as proof of American virtue.

Delia Alvarez's refusal was no simple matter. Rather, it required that she thwart several of the campaign's defining discursive strategies. At the most basic level, Alvarez challenged the campaign by insisting that the POW issue could not be divorced from the larger politics of the war. Throughout the campaign, government officials and other POW family members insisted that Hanoi's silence regarding the rows constituted a humanitarian crime rather than a political or military one. Despite its informal ties to the Republican Party, the National League of Families positioned itself as “politically neutral,” and military officials advised POW relatives to adopt an explicitly humanitarian approach when talking to the press, one that shied away from partisan politics and emphasized the anxieties they were forced to endure as a result of Hanoi's refusal to release information about their loved ones' welfare.

The North Vietnamese, by contrast, insisted that the prisoner of war issue was deeply political, in that it spoke to the illegality of U.S. military intervention in Southeast Asia. But American government officials countered that compliance with the Geneva conventions was a “basic, simple humanitarian question.” This claim was a central feature of the National Ad Council's 1971–72 campaign, which, using photographs of POW wives and children, called on Hanoi to allow neutral observers into the prison camps in order to assure the world that they were treating the prisoners “according to humane standards long practiced by civilized nations.” “That's the issue,” the advertisement declared; “It's that simple. It's that non-political. It's that human.” Through developing radio spots and print advertisements that appeared in nationally syndicated newspapers and magazines, the campaign attempted to delineate the terms of the debate for the public. Through complying with the Geneva conventions, Hanoi would not only “earn the gratitude of millions of Americans,” the campaign promised, but it would also “find new stature in the eyes of the world.” As the international community expressed mounting horror at the war's deadly toll among Vietnamese civilians, the “go public” campaign attempted to shift the humanitarian burden to the North Vietnamese, contending that the central humanitarian question of the war revolved not around the U.S. military's war conduct but rather around the treatment of captured American soldiers: would Hanoi act in compliance with the universally accepted norms laid out in the Geneva conventions, or would it continue to violate them?

By using her position as a POW relative as a platform for condemning the war, Delia Alvarez undercut the campaign's central premise. By breaking with the Nixon administration and insisting that the fate of the POWs depended on the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam, Delia Alvarez challenged the campaign's efforts to separate the POW issue from the legality and morality of the war. In transgressing the circumscribed role that the Nixon administration had envisioned for the wives, sisters, and mothers of POWs, family members whom they hoped would provide a “human face” for the POW story, but nothing more, Delia Alvarez forced the suppressed political content of the POW issue to the fore.

A second, related strategy of the campaign was its erasure of the POW's military identity and the foregrounding instead of his civilian, and specifically his familial, identity. In contrast to the working-class and minority men who were disproportionately represented on the frontlines in Vietnam, the vast majority of captured men were elite and overwhelmingly white, a fact that reflected the stratified character of the military. On the whole, they were “glamorous aviators” and commissioned officers whose planes had been shot down during Operation Rolling Thunder, the planned bombing raids over North Vietnam between 1965 and 1968. But as the publicity campaign took off, the military role that these men had played slipped from view as the public was

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instructed to consider the POW problem through the eyes of a child. "Pretend you're 12 years old and your father's a Prisoner of War in Southeast Asia," instructed the National Ad Council's 1971–72 POW advertising campaign. A twelve-year-old child would not understand the "maneuvers of the bargaining table," the advertisement conjectured, but would only want someone believable to tell him that his father was safe. Calling on Hanoi to allow neutral observers into the prison camps, the advertisement claimed to speak for "all the boys and girls, wives and parents whose fathers, husbands, and sons are being held in secret captivity."26

Because she was Everett Alvarez's sister, Delia Alvarez served as a reminder of her brother's identity as a member of a family. But Alvarez also refused to elide her brother's military role. "When he was captured he was a lieutenant jg [junior grade]," she explained to an ABC News reporter in a television news story that aired on October 12, 1972, "and he is now a lieutenant commander." Gesturing toward her mother, she continued, "she [Chole] doesn't want him to remain in prison to become an admiral."50 By informing viewers of her brother's changing military rank, Alvarez's ostensible aim was to illustrate the long duration of her brother's captivity. Moreover, her reference to her mother's desire to have her son return home certainly conveyed the family's suffering, an objective that was at the heart of the publicity campaign. But Delia Alvarez's reference to her brother's military rank was also jarring in light of the news story's intimate domestic setting: mother and daughter were filmed sitting on their couch in the Alvarez family living room, watching television. If news stories like these served to convey the sense that this could be any American family, then Delia Alvarez's invocation of her brother's changing military rank reminded viewers that he was a war combatant, not a civilian.

News stories like these reflected the most significant feature of the POW campaign—its focus on family suffering, rather than on the trials of the POWs themselves. Indeed, the campaign was obsessed with the impact of a father's absence on those families left behind. Editorials in both the military and the mainstream press blamed the North Vietnamese for transforming the home front into a "fatherless world," one of sons and daughters who, according to one editorial in the Armed Forces Journal, had "a right to know if their fathers [were] dead or alive."51 In December 1970 Life and Look magazines featured photo-essays documenting POW children growing up without fathers, contrasting early photographs of cheerful, intact families with more recent, somber photographs in which the father was absent.52 Meanwhile, the POW wife was left with the painful task of explaining her husband's disappearance to children with no understanding of war. As Frank Sieverts, the State Department's top official on POW/MIA matters, reported, "The telephone rings all the time. In the holiday season, it is especially bad. Wives call up asking me what to say to their children, how to explain that they don't know where their husbands are, whether they are dead or alive, when all the other kids have their fathers."53 Through its policy of silence and secrecy, according to these accounts, Hanoi had placed innocent women and children in a cruel state of suspension, alienating them from the rest of society and generating enormous confusion and uncertainty within the family. "It's a very lonely existence," explained one POW wife whose husband had been shot down in 1967; "You're married but you're not married. You're not single. You're not divorced or widowed. Where does that put you in society? That puts you in your own world."54 These portraits of family suffering emphasized women's traditional roles as wives, sisters, mothers, and daughters. By asserting herself as a moral and political actor in the public realm, Delia Alvarez challenged this exclusive association of women with familial obligation and attachment, a challenge that resonated powerfully with the women's liberation movement of the era. By the early 1970s, Alvarez was not alone in countering the highly traditional gender constructions that shaped the early "go public" campaign. On the contrary, by that time, many women associated with the campaign were beginning to question its narrow conceptions of female identity through both political action and personal life choices, suggesting that the rise of feminism shaped the campaign's history in significant ways.

In order to understand the relevance of feminism to the Alvarez story, it is important to recall the women who spearheaded the campaign in the late 1960s. Initially, the women who formed the National League of Families insisted that their cause was apolitical. While they condemned the government's policy of "quiet diplomacy," they repeatedly expressed their discomfort at having to take an antagonistic stance vis-à-vis the state.55 Many of these women had spent their entire lives in military communities, strongly supported the war in Southeast Asia, and insistently distanced themselves from protest movements. To be sure, they were engaging in women's grassroots organizing, but they were worlds apart from the feminist activists of the period, not least in their divergent approaches to the family. In contrast to feminists, who identified motherhood and marriage as primary sites of women's oppression, the military wives were mobilizing a maternalist discourse that appealed to essentialist ideals of motherhood in order to make demands on the state. But while maternalism had historically been aligned with pacifism, these women were unapologetic hawks, foregrounding their roles as wives and mothers in order to demand more American military intervention, not less.56 Thus, the political profile of the woman-turned-activist was complex: loyal to the government but also increasingly antagonistic and distrustful of it; maternalist in her rhetoric.
but in the service of militarism; longing for her loved one’s safe return while simultaneously wanting him to wage and win the war. What was not ambiguous, however, was that the POW wife, mother, and sister believed that she was acting in the prisoner’s interest and doing what he would have wanted her to do. During the early years of the publicity campaign, she emerged as his loyal advocate, the champion of his cause, and a heroine who worked tirelessly to remind the nation of its “forgotten men.”

But by the early 1970s, as more and more women like Delia Alvarez became active in the antiwar movement, this portrait began to change. In contrast to the original founders of the National League of Families, the later recruits insisted that they were moral, intellectual, and political arbiters who could draw their own conclusions about the war regardless of their private suffering. Their growing activism challenged the earlier image of the ever-loyal wife, sister, and mother. By 1970, reports of the burgeoning antiwar movement in the United States had penetrated the prison camps, and POWs recalled feeling demoralized by the news.57 Their memoirs suggest the extent to which prisoners not only felt uniquely wounded by women’s opposition to the war, but also how much they identified antiwar activism with women, regardless of the movement’s actual gender composition. Highly visible antiwar figures like Joan Baez and Jane Fonda were angrily labeled “traitorous bitches,” women’s antiwar organizations like Women Strike for Peace were singled out for condemnation, and POWs expressed a sense of shock that American women could turn on them through wartime opposition.58 One POW recalled his captors forcing him and other prisoners to listen to an audiotape of women demonstrating outside an army base at Fort Dix, New Jersey, singing a song entitled “Fuck the Army!”: “We sat there in shock, trying to adjust to the harsh realization that these were our own American women! We couldn’t believe that they would involve themselves in such filth to show their dissonance and encourage our soldiers to desert.”59

Adding to the POW’s sense of political betrayal was the fear that women might abandon their marriages and families while men remained imprisoned. Indeed, political mobilization turned out to be a transformative experience for many women. Despite the sentimental images of marriage that dominated the campaign, a significant percentage of POW marriages collapsed between 1964 and 1973, and several highly publicized divorce proceedings were initiated by POW wives who chose not to wait for their husbands’ return.60 Even within marriages that survived, things changed irrevocably. During their husbands’ captivity, many POW wives managed household economies, reared children by themselves, and pursued paid employment for the first time in their lives. By 1973, news accounts noted the irony, pointing out that many wives who had become active in the National League of Families in their husband’s behalf were unwilling to “return to the role of a docile homebody whose highest achievement is a casserole,” “to change back into major’s sweet wife,” or to “revert to their passive ‘yes, dear’ roles.”61 For their part, many women described themselves in similar terms. One POW wife remarked that she had “become pretty aggressive” in her husband’s absence, while another stated simply, “I’m not a honey anymore.”62 By the early 1970s, many POW wives wondered what would happen to their newfound independence once their husbands returned to the family fold. If the early years of the “go public” campaign had showcased an ideal of the traditional nuclear family, by 1973, the year that the POWs returned to the United States, the campaign evoked themes that were at the heart of the contemporary women’s movement: the diminishing role of male authority in the family, the political and moral agency of women in the public realm, and the impact of women’s growing economic, emotional, and intellectual autonomy in heterosexual love and marriage.

Thus, the women’s liberation movement, like the Chicano movement, provided a crucial backdrop for Delia Alvarez’s break with the Nixon administration. Between 1971 and 1973, the years that Alvarez was most visible as an antiwar activist, the “go public” campaign continued to mobilize the image of an imperiled but united family. But at the same time, the politics of feminism was subtly but unmistakably transforming the campaign, pushing to the surface the private conflicts and public constraints that the idealized image of an imperiled family had concealed. When Delia Alvarez rejected her sentimentalized, sisterly role as the only legitimate justification for her political activism, she did so within this context. At the same time, her activism departed from mainstream feminism in two revealing ways. First, Delia Alvarez consistently emphasized her race rather than her gender, telling the press that when her brother returned to the United States, she hoped to convince him that “Chicanos are the Vietnamese of this country.”63 Perhaps this decision reflected the constraints confronting Chicanas during this period, who often felt forced to choose publicly between their allegiance to feminism and their loyalty to the Chicano movement, even as they engaged in their own passionate debates about gender and family life within the Mexican American community.64 But this was also a strategic choice when considered in relationship to the “go public” campaign. By emphasizing her racial identity, Alvarez posited an alternative model of kinship, one in which the biological family model so central to the campaign was replaced by a kinship model based on racial affiliation among people of color across national borders. The campaign had proceeded from the premise that blood ties to captive family members gave POW relatives their moral authority. Alvarez, in contrast, suggested that it was her racial
identification with the Vietnamese people rather than her identity as a POW sister that ultimately determined her political loyalties.

The second way that Alvarez’s activism deviated from mainstream feminism concerned the status of the private realm throughout the “go public” campaign. In the early 1970s the women’s liberation movement insisted on the inherently political character of private life, an insistence captured in the famous slogan, “the personal is political.” This meant that feminists challenged the historical division between the public and private spheres in order to reveal the political content of ostensibly private activities, including housework, childrearing, and sex. But privacy took on a very different hue throughout the campaign. Because the Nixon administration was attempting to appropriate the private suffering of POW families for political ends, Alvarez found herself in the position of defending and safeguarding her family’s right to privacy, even as she insisted that they publicly condemn the war. Because the campaign encouraged family members to enact and express their pain on the public stage, at crucial moments Delia Alvarez strategically insisted on a clear line of demarcation between the public and the private in order to undermine the efforts of the Nixon administration and the National League of Families.

Delia Alvarez policed this line between public and private in several ways. By focusing on private family suffering, the campaign aimed to elicit public sympathy for POWs and their relatives. Alvarez dismissed this aim as a dangerous diversion from the real business of ending the military conflict. “Sympathy is not enough for any of us,” she declared in an interview about her brother in La Raza magazine in February 1973. There was no shortfall of public sympathy for prisoners and their families, she insisted. Rather, the problem was that Americans had been too apathetic for too long in the face of an unjust and immoral war. Delia Alvarez’s earlier belief in a foreign communist enemy had given way to perceptions of a different kind of danger. “Now the enemy to me is the apathy of the American people,” she explained in the same interview, “That is the enemy we have to fight. Nixon is the opponent, instead of the Vietnamese.”

By foregrounding apathy rather than sympathy, Alvarez sought to bring the POW story back from the realm of sentimentality and into the realm of political action. By rejecting her prescribed role as an object of pity, Alvarez sought to remind the public that, ultimately, the POW issue was not about wounded families and grieving women within the United States but rather about the violence unleashed by the United States in Southeast Asia.

Alvarez’s eschewal of domestic sentimentality was evident in an ABC report that aired on December 22, 1971. A news story broke that was ripe with the potential to make audiences teary: Shortly before Christmas, the North Vietnamese released 1,001 letters from captured men, including eighteen letters

from South Vietnam, that provided the first confirmation to families that their loved ones were still alive. The ABC news story portrayed the very different responses of two POW relatives (one of whom was Alvarez) to the arrival of the letters. The report focused first on Mrs. Peyton Mecleary, the mother of a navy pilot who had been captured five years earlier. Visibly overjoyed, Mrs. Mecleary shared her son’s letter in its entirety at a press conference, smiling broadly and beginning by reading its reassuring generic opening lines: “Hi Mom! I’m okay and in good health.” Understandably relieved to have received her son’s letter, Mrs. Mecleary provided reporters with an uncomplicated and instantly recognizable family image—that of a grateful and jubilant mother who has received an invaluable gift just in time for Christmas.

Delia Alvarez provided a marked study in contrast. She appeared somber, wary, and fatigued before the camera, as the reporter relayed in a voice-over, “Delia Alvarez … wanted more than a letter.” “This is the eighth Christmas mailing we have received from my brother. There are four letters and three cards,” she stated simply and without even the hint of a smile. “But we would have appreciated and wanted my brother home instead of the letters.” Appearing over six months after Delia Alvarez had formed POW-MIA Families for Immediate Release, the story suggested that her disappointment and frustration were directed not at the North Vietnamese but at the Nixon administration for its refusal to name a withdrawal date for U.S. troops. In contrast to Mrs. Peyton Mecleary’s very public moment of private disclosure, Alvarez refused to divulge either the content of the letter or her family’s emotions upon receiving it. In this instance, she became a powerful guardian of family privacy. By refusing to disclose her brother’s personal letters, she subverted her scripted role of domestic sentiment and condemned American foreign policy instead.

Press conferences like these advanced the U.S. government’s thesis that Hanoi had drawn innocent women and children into the fold of war. Significantly, this accusation was also premised on a racial discourse that assigned Asian captors a unique capacity for psychological cruelty. Here, too, Delia Alvarez deviated from the logic of the administration’s campaign. The stereotype of the sadistic Vietnamese captor hinged on the claim that, for American prisoners of war, the experience of Asian captivity was demonstrably worse than the experience of captivity in the West. With little information at their disposal, military psychologists drew on historical examples in order to speculate about what might be occurring in Southeast Asian prison camps. Contrasting the repatriation of POWs from Germany to those from Japan and Korea, they concluded that being captured by “Oriental forces” entailed a higher degree of stress and that prisoners returning from “Oriental captivity” were more prone to auto accidents, mental breakdowns, divorces, and suicides. In an argument that attempted to
offer a historical explanation for this purported difference, Dr. Charles Stenger, a
clinical psychologist for the Veterans Administration POW program, attributed
this pattern of “Asian cruelty” to the excesses of Western imperialism, specu-
lat ing that Asian captors seized the opportunity to direct their rage at Western
arrogance toward their captives. Referring specifically to the Japanese treatment
of American prisoners during World War II, Stenger recalled, “They had to
humiliate them and show them that they weren’t king. So there was a purposeful
humiliation and degradation in Oriental POW situations.”

Both throughout the “go public” campaign and in the years after repatria-
tion, condemnations of Hanoi’s silence surrounding the POWs appealed to this
notion that Asian captors possessed a unique propensity for psychological
cruelty and were inherently more secretive than their Western counterparts.
This racial profile combined with the Cold War contention that communists
refused to honor the sanctity of the private sphere. According to one congress-
man speaking at a Committee on Armed Services hearing in 1970, North Viet-
nam had adopted a “barbaric policy,” one that was using the prisoners as
“pawns” in an attempt to “wage psychological warfare against the United
States.” The communists of both Hanoi and Korea were “master psycholo-
gists,” a representative speaking on the House floor proclaimed.
Taken together, such accusations formed a damning portrait of the prototypical Viet-
namese captor, one that POWs would revive in their memoirs after the war.

While the campaign was preoccupied with the distinct racial character of
Asian captors, Delia Alvarez chose a path of racial identification with the North
Vietnamese people. “The mentality that calls Vietnamese ‘gooks’ is the same
mentality that calls brown people ‘spics,’” Alvarez explained to a New York
Times reporter in February 1973. “It’s the same battle,” she added. In light of
her affiliation with the Chicano movement, it is not surprising that Alvarez
drew analogies between domestic racial politics and the war in Southeast Asia.
By the early 1970s, many race-based social movements (including the Chicano
movement) were contending that persistent racial oppression within the nation
and U.S. foreign policy in places like Asia, Africa, and Latin America were, in
fact, cut from the same colonialist, white-supremacist cloth. Alvarez’s claim
that anti-Vietnamese racism abroad and antibrown racism at home were part of
the “same mentality” reflected the deep influence of this mode of analysis
within the Chicano movement.

The statement is more remarkable, however, when viewed within the context
of the POW publicity campaign. Delia Alvarez’s assertions appeared in the New
York Times on February 8, 1973, only four days before the first POWs (including
Everett Alvarez) were repatriated to the United States via Clark Air Force Base
in the Philippines. A month earlier, American and North Vietnamese officials
had signed a ceasefire agreement in Paris that included a provision for the
repatriation of American prisoners of war. As the long-awaited return of the
prisoners approached, POW relatives and government officials wondered about
their condition. How had these men fared psychologically, emotionally, and
physically? How would they be reintegrated into their families and commu-
nities? Would they confirm earlier reports of indoctrination, malnutrition, and
torture within the camps? What had they endured?

All of these questions proceeded from a premise that would prove crucial to
the POW’s symbolic valence in the decades after the war: the premise that
returnees were simultaneously victims and heroes. They were victims because
they had endured incalculable suffering at the hands of Vietnamese aggressors,
and they were heroes for having survived and adhered to the military’s code of
conduct. At a moment when many were exonerating the POWs and hailing their
return as an opportunity for national reconciliation, Delia Alvarez offered a
more complicated picture, reminding readers that it was the Vietnamese, not
the POWs and their families, who had been the war’s primary victims.

Ultimately, this attempt to remind the public of the actual relationship be-
tween the war’s victims and its perpetrators was Alvarez’s fiercest challenge to
the campaign. The campaign identified the relatives of POWs as the innocent
victims of North Vietnamese aggression, even though they remained within the
territorial boundaries of the United States. According to one 1969 editorial,
POW wives, no less than their husbands, were “captive of fear as the Commu-
nists play cat and mouse with their emotions.” This was the linchpin of the
“go public” campaign: through extending its reach into the sanctified sphere
of the family, Hanoi was violating not only the rules of war but also the norms
of Western liberal humanitarianism. At the moment when a burgeoning antiwar
movement was accusing the American military of indiscriminately bombing
Vietnamese schools, hospitals, and homes, the “go public” campaign deftly
redirected the accusation: it was communist Hanoi, through its conspiracy of
silence, that had drawn innocent civilians into the hellish world of war.

With her family’s emotional suffering the source of widespread speculation
and curiosity, Delia Alvarez refused to play the role assigned to her. Ten months
before her brother’s repatriation, she reflected on the prerequisite for his safe
return in the pages of La Raza: “Everett will return when Vietnamese children
will be able to look at the sky and clouds and not fear that a bomb will drop that
will burn and tear their bodies. Everett will return because the Vietnamese will
live! Because the Vietnamese will win!” While the National League of Families
and the Nixon administration urged the public to direct its sympathies to the
children of American POWs, Delia Alvarez insisted that Vietnamese children
deserved not only sympathy but also justice.
When Everett Alvarez did return to the United States in February 1973, the reunion between brother and sister was not seamless. In a press conference shortly after his return, Alvarez diminished the significance of his sister’s opposition to the war, telling reporters who were curious about the family rift that “I’m convinced to a large degree, her activities were based on emotion. We were there for a long time and she wanted us home.” His conviction is ironic given Delia Alvarez’s efforts to purge the POW story of its excessive emotionalism. Like most returnees with relatives who turned against the war, Everett Alvarez eventually reconciled with his sister. Relieved that the ordeal of captivity was over, they agreed to disagree about the morality of the war. But it was clear that the political differences engendered by the war within his family had been deeply unsettling for Everett Alvarez. As late as 1991, Alvarez lamented his sister’s “defection from the cause I’d nearly died for and suffered a long time for.” The breach between brother and sister reflected divisions in the United States that have persisted to our own time.

In the early 1980s, former secretary of state Henry Kissinger would remember the Vietnam War as a conflict between two aggressors who had wielded very different kinds of weapons, writing that “Hanoi and Washington had inflicted grievous wounds on each other; theirs were physical, ours psychological and thus perhaps harder to heal.” The notion of the war “coming home,” as suggested by Kissinger, remains a standard feature of both scholarly and popular treatments of the Vietnam War, and it is usually used to connote the profound domestic political divisions engendered by it. But to those who were championing the cause of the POWs between 1968 and 1973, the war had come home in a more literal sense. According to the administration and its supporters, Hanoi had wreaked emotional havoc on the private sphere by creating a world robbed of fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, one in which loyal women did not know whether they were wives or widows and innocent children did not know whether their fathers were dead or alive. Tender images of women and children generated a resilient narrative, one that identified the United States as the war’s primary casualty.

The image of an endangered family helps explain the persistence of this narrative. The prisoner of war story was never solely about the martial virtue or imputed masculinity of captured men. The story was also always about the interior feminized space of the family, a space that was constructed as the site of the war’s most grievous wounds and injuries. But the history of the “go public” campaign does more than shed light on the war’s cultural afterlife. It also provides a crucial prehistory to contemporary debates about terrorism. Today, policy experts and scholars define terrorism as a form of political violence that deliberately targets civilians; what differentiates terrorists from other actors is their refusal to honor the distinction between civilians and combatants. Without denying the vital need to differentiate terrorism from other forms of political violence, I would argue that the POW publicity campaign reminds us that these contemporary accusations are not wholly new, but rather they resonate with earlier Cold War constructions of the enemy. The story of Delia Alvarez reminds us that these constructions always require consent.

NOTES
2. Jim Thompson, imprisoned in South Vietnam from March 1964 until February 1973, was the longest-held American prisoner of war.
3. While this essay does not focus on the collapse of Alvarez’s marriage, it is an interesting story in its own right. Public revelations that Tangee Alvarez was involved with another man and filed for divorce during her husband’s imprisonment were part of a larger wartime discourse about women’s betrayal at home. See Elliott Gruner, Prisoners of Culture: Representing the Vietnam POW (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 89–108. For examples of news coverage about the divorce, see “Wife of Longest Imprisoned U.S. POW Seeking Divorce,” Los Angeles Times, October 12, 1972, 1; and “POW Wife’s Story: Mrs. Alvarez Tells of New Marriage,” San Francisco Chronicle, October 13, 1972, 1.
5. Gruner, Prisoners of Culture, 171.
10. Lorena Oropeza, Raza Si! Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the
13. Ibid., 16.
14. Stuart Rochester and Frederick Kiley, Honor Bound: American Prisoners of War in
15. On this policy of “quiet diplomacy,” see George Veith, Code-Name Bright Light:
The Untold Story of U.S. POW Rescue Efforts during the Vietnam War (New York: Free
  Press, 1998), 245; Rochester and Kiley, Honor Bound; and Jim and Sybil Stockdale, In
  Love and War: The Story of a Family’s Ordeal and Sacrifice during the Vietnam War
16. “Interview with Delia Alvarez, POW Sister,” La Raza: News and Political Thought of
17. Alvarez and Pitch, Chained Eagle, 155.
19. On Richard Stratton, see John G. Hubbell, P.O.W.: A Definitive History of the
  1976), 164; and Hay Parks, John Thornton, Paul Galanti, Richard Stratton, and James
  the ways in which the experience of POWs in Korea informed the Vietnam POW
discourse, see Gruner, Prisoners of Culture, 10; and “A Celebration of Man Redeemed,”
21. On the history of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and
  Missing in Southeast Asia (hereinafter referred to as the National League of Families),
  see T. Christopher Jespersen, “The Politics and Culture of Nonrecognition: The Carter
  Administration and Vietnam,” Journal of American–East Asian Relations 4 (Winter
  1995): 397–413. For the perspective of its founders, see Stockdale and Stockdale, In
  Love and War.
22. On the history of the “go public” campaign, see H. Bruce Franklin, M.I.A. or
  Mythmaking in America (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1982), 49–60; and T.
  Christopher Jespersen, “The Bitter End and the Lost Chance in Vietnam: Congress, the
  (Spring 2000): 265–93. On the connection between the “go public” campaign and revelations
  about American war atrocities, see Gruner, Prisoners of Culture, 19; and “Dear President
24. Ibid., 154.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 153.

44. On the connections between the National League of Families and the Republican Party, see “Politics and POWs,” New Republic, June 3, 1973, 17–19. Although many members of the league were members of the Republican Party, they insisted that their work in behalf of POWs was nonpartisan. On the ways in which POW relatives were advised to handle the media, see “The P.O.W. Families,” New York Times Magazine, October 3, 1971, 56.


47. On the similar ways in which hostages were identified with their families during the Iranian hostage crisis, again see McAlister, Epic Encounters, 198–234.

48. On who was likely to be a POW, see “Healthier Adjustment for Vietnam POWs,” Science News, September 17, 1977, 182. Rochester and Kiley describe the POWs as “glamorous aviators” in Honor Bound, ix–x.


54. Ibid., 19.


56. On the connection between maternalism and pacifism, see Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz, eds., Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); and Jean Bethke Elshtain, Women and War (New York: Basic Books, 1987).


59. Guarino, P.O.W. ‘s Story, 352.

60. POW divorce rates were about 30 percent, a rate that, while in line with divorce rates within the general population, was significantly higher than rates of divorce within military communities. See Edna J. Hunter, “Combat Casualties Who Remain at Home,” Military Review 60 (January 1980): 29–36.


67. Ibid.


70. “Psychological Hangups of Returning Prisoners of War,” 12.


72. House Committee on Armed Services, Hearing on Problems of Prisoners of War and Their Families, 6000–6001.

74. See, for example, Guarino, P.O.W.'s Story. These images also abound in Hubbell, P.O.W.
81. Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), 42.