

# An Anti-War Legacy that Resonates

## Two soldiers reflect on Martin Luther King Jr.

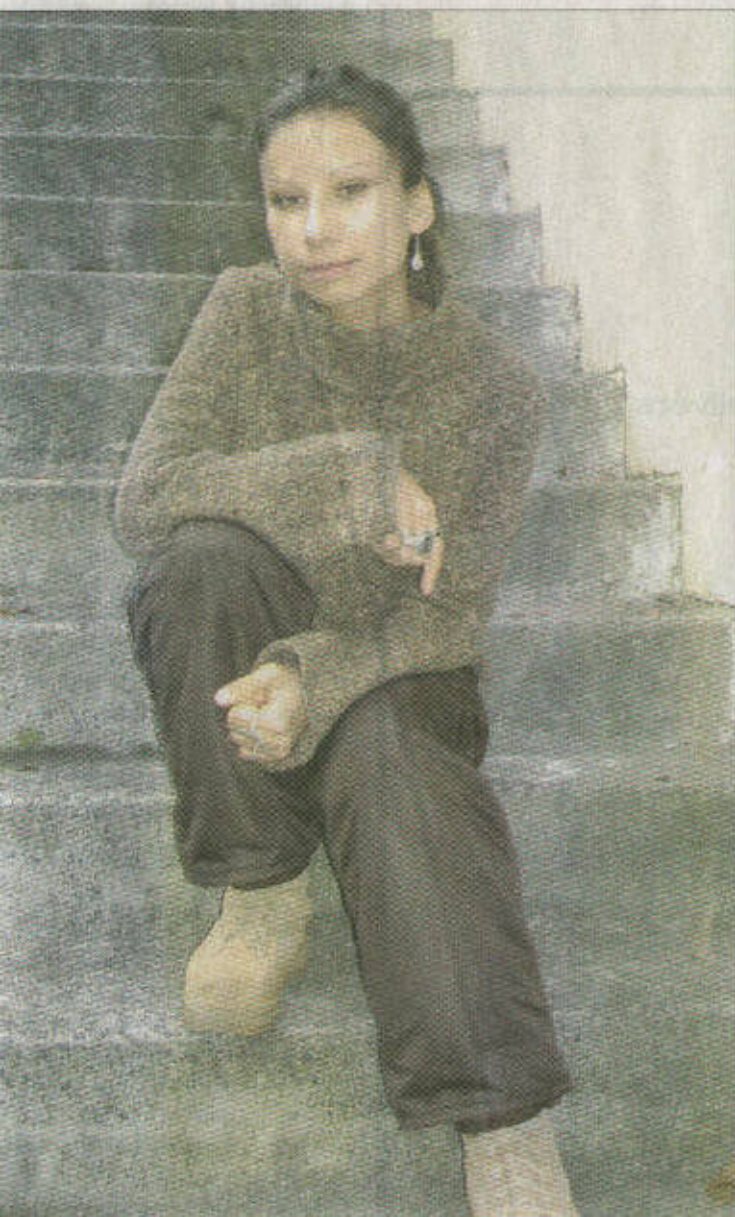


PHOTO BY CHARITY PRATER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Adriana Moyola refused to deploy to Iraq and was discharged from military service. 'I thought that the war was racist and unjust. I couldn't find one reason to go,' she said.

BY CHARITY PRATER  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

What would Martin Luther King Jr. say about the war in Iraq?

Two Oregon women with military connections have their opinions. One went AWOL rather than be deployed and the other awaits a possible third tour of duty.

Jessica Acosca, 28, the veteran of two deployments, finds solace in King's legacy of advocating non-violent, peaceful solutions to conflicts and his opposition to the Vietnam War.

She feels King would say it is time for the world to acknowledge its differences and stop dividing

for a full year.

Active soldiers are not allowed to dispute their commander-in-chief, currently President Bush, or oppose any war that they are engaged in, despite how they may feel in their hearts. Doing so can bring

referees on the playground."

She also understood that being a soldier could be very dangerous.

"World War II and Auschwitz were situations that needed force to intercept," she said. "This time it is very different. If violence is nec-

*If violence is necessary then send me, but I pray that those (the political leaders) that have told you to do it have the integrity to do what is right.*





PHOTO BY CHARITY PRATER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

*Jessica Acosca served two deployments in Iraq and may be called up for a third. She is careful not to dispute her Commander in Chief, President Bush, but feels it is appropriate for others to question whether or not the war is right.*

itself.

Acosca was first deployed to Iraq in the 2003 invasion.

"Our mission was to save Iraq from Saddam Hussein," she said.

Due to a family emergency, she returned home a few months later only to be redeployed again in 2005

— Jessica Acosca

about criminal charges.

When Acosca signed up for military service, she did so with the understanding that soldiers were also peace mediators in conflicts. President Bush called them "the

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Non-violent resistance was how King approached Civil Rights. He was arrested several times waging peaceful battles for justice, willfully violating local laws such as protesting without a permit, demonstrating, and sitting in a whites-only restaurant waiting to be served.

Although Acosca was hesitant to mention her true feelings about the war, she supports those who question the war.

"Thank God for the politicians that are asking questions about whether this war is right," she said. "As soldiers, we do what we are told to but if people don't talk about it then mistakes will be repeated again and again."

Acosca says she will go back to Iraq a third time if she is called, but said she prays to God that those who make the decisions on military deployments "go to every effort to validate the war before another one of my friends dies, I lose a limb or, God forbid, I die."

Adriana Moyola, 25, an ex-soldier from Portland has another view.

Moyola can now talk as she pleases about the war, since she was "other than honorably discharged" for refusing to deploy to Iraq and going AWOL (Absent Without Leave) from her military unit.

"I had signed up for the Army Reserves in February 2001 and wasn't called for duty until August 2006 for 'Operation Iraqi Freedom.' I signed up because I

am from Mexico, where women aren't considered able to be successful people and I wanted to disprove that," she said.

"During that time period, I had some changes in my life that included medical illness. I also had been waiting for six years to get into graduate school and was finally accepted. Most importantly, I thought that the war was racist and unjust. I couldn't find one reason to go, not in the role of a

*I thought that the war was racist and unjust. I couldn't find one reason to go, not in the role of a soldier at least...I just left the base. I was AWOL for 187 days.*

— Adriana Moyola

soldier at least."

Moyola made three attempts to avoid fighting in a war that she was "spiritually against."

She asked for an educational deferment in October 2006 and was denied. Secondly, she asked for a medical discharge. While her sergeants were reviewing her paperwork, she was sent to Camp Parks in Oakland, Calif., where she waited for two days until she found out that her medical discharge was denied.

On Jan. 27, 2007, she put her final plan into effect and went AWOL from Camp Parks.

"I just left the base," she said,

"I was AWOL for 187 days."

Before the unauthorized leave, Moyola said she had prepared herself for duty, assured by a female officer who said that the military treated women well in Iraq. But she said her opinion changed when she overheard the same officer tell a male officer that she had lied to her.

Moyola said she hid from the military for four months by staying with another ex-soldier who

had refused deployment.

"I believed it was my human right to choose not to kill innocent people," she said.

"The Army was looking for me in Portland," she said. "They even went so far as to tell PSU, the college I was attending, that if I showed up then to call the police."

Moyola eventually turned herself into the military, thinking that she was going to spend three months in jail and possibly get deported since she was an immigrant from Mexico who moved to the United States with her father at age eight.

"I was really lucky, I wasn't court

marshaled for desertion. I spent five days in jail and was allowed to return to Portland," she said.

"The army told me to never talk to others who had been to Iraq while I was active," she added.

"I was really happy that I didn't risk my life. I knew what I was doing was very patriotic and democratic."

In 1968, Martin Luther King commented about the Vietnam War saying, "We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace in Vietnam and for justice throughout the developing world, a world that borders on our doors. If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark, and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight."

Moyola said something much similar about the Iraq war today.

"The people with less access to support are the ones who end up joining the military. Ultimately, any decision you make will affect you. You have to let go of your fear of the government and look into why you are being asked to go to war and who profits from it. Vietnam, in Martin Luther King's time parallels the war in Iraq today."

Acosca also is grateful for Dr. King's work, saying that he has "made such a difference through peace advocacy and we honor him for that today."