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**Anti-War Hero
The Fifth Column
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In the 1960s, most of America reviled Malcolm X as a villain. America now celebrates the May 19 birthday of this "[shining prince](#)."

History repeats itself. On April 22, 2004, an American football star named [Pat Tillman was killed](#) in action in Afghanistan. After September 11, Tillman had [eschewed a \\$3.6 million sports contract](#) to volunteer for the Army Rangers. Selfless and ruggedly handsome, he could have played himself in the Hollywood movie about his life - had he not been shot by his own troops. On [April 28](#), Rene Gonzalez, a political science graduate student at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, objected to calling Tillman a war hero, pointing out in an [essay](#) that this "anti-hero" had not died defending his own country from invasion but had instead volunteered to kill other men in theirs.

[Within two days](#), [death threats](#) forced Gonzalez to go into hiding. [Websites](#) went up with his personal details - e-mail accounts, telephone numbers, his home address. Even [Paul Begala](#), the supposedly liberal former advisor to U.S. President Bill Clinton, [urged CNN viewers](#) to send letters critical of Gonzalez to *The Daily Collegian*, the student newspaper that had published the essay. Instead of defending one of his students from terrorist threats, university president, Jack Wilson, called Gonzalez's essay "[a disgusting, arrogant and intellectually immature attack on a human being who died in service to his country](#)." Without a trace of irony, Wilson added, "[We are fortunate that so many people like Pat Tillman have made the sacrifices necessary to protect the free speech rights of Mr. Gonzalez](#)."

Performing last rites on the First Amendment, that part of the Bill of Rights that protects

free speech, the Massachusetts legislature [officially condemned Gonzalez](#) in a resolution. [Gonzalez soon apologized](#).

All that Gonzalez should have apologized for was confusing Pat Tillman with "Pat Tillman," the creature constructed by the U.S. Army out of dead men's flesh like Frankenstein's monster. "Pat Tillman" was a "caricature," as Tillman's mother Mary put it, as unfamiliar to her as the square-jawed photograph broadcast to the nation by the military after Tillman's death, a portrait that Mary had never seen before and that Pat said he did not like.

"Pat Tillman" was a God-fearing überpatriot. But Pat Tillman, the long-haired atheist, wanted to meet [Noam Chomsky](#), the distinguished MIT professor and anti-war writer, a "favorite author" of Pat's, according to his mother. Pat Tillman considered as his "hero" Rachel Corrie, a peace activist crushed to death when she placed herself - living [Mario Savio's](#) words - between a bulldozer and a home. And, according to Tillman's friend, Army Spec. Russell Baer, "[Pat said, 'You know, this war is so f***ing illegal.'... He totally was against Bush.](#)"

The irony is that, despite the outrage expressed ostensibly on the Tillman family's behalf, Tillman's mother told me she had never read Gonzalez's essay. Tillman's brother, Kevin, also an Army Ranger, unknowingly echoed Gonzalez when he wrote, in 2006, "[Somehow American leadership, whose only credit is lying to its people and illegally invading a nation, has been allowed to steal the courage, virtue, and honor of its soldiers on the ground.](#)"

The part of the American leadership in Massachusetts should now apologize. Not just to Rene Gonzalez, but to all Americans: those who fell on the battlefield - [their coffins hidden from view](#) like someone's mad aunt in the attic - and those who fell victim to right-wing hate-mongering.

America's "[digital brownshirts](#)" (a term coined by former U.S. Vice President Al Gore) have "[Dixie Chicked](#)" many. But with [62 percent of Americans thinking the Iraq War was a mistake in 2006](#), and [George W. Bush's popularity at the close of his presidency only 22 percent](#), it now appears that Rene Gonzalez was ahead of his time. While many still morally distinguish Iraq and Afghanistan, Gonzalez's majority of one in 2004 became the Democratic majority in 2009.

Five years and zero weapons of mass destruction later, one could view Gonzalez as an anti-war hero. Maybe even Pat Tillman would have agreed.


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