

Markos Moulitsas Zúniga: The Birth of “Kos”

By Brandon Hallmark

TW: This article describes violence perpetrated against children.

Markos Moulitsas Zúniga is a military veteran and well-known American political thinker who founded the blog sites *The Daily Kos* (political) and *SB Nation* (sports). He is among the leading voices today in the American political landscape – a representative of both GenX and Hispanic Americans.

Moulitsas Zúniga was born on September 11, 1971 in Chicago to his Greek immigrant father and Salvadoran immigrant mother, both of whom had come to the United States to improve their lives. As is the custom in most of Latin America and Spain, Moulitsas Zúniga has two surnames: His father's surname (“Moulitsas” – his primary surname) followed by his mother's surname (“Zúniga”).

At the age of four, Moulitsas Zúniga moved with his family to his mother's native El Salvador. At the age of eight, that move put Moulitsas Zúniga in the midst of one of the defining events of modern Latin American history: The outbreak of the Salvadoran Civil War (1979-1992). Fearing a potential Communist insurgency, a military junta overthrew the president of El Salvador. They established a military government supported by the United States, which began violently suppressing dissent. In March 1980, government assassins murdered Catholic Archbishop Óscar Romero, who had publically called for government soldiers to refuse orders to murder their fellow countrymen. A leftist-led guerilla insurgency confronted the new military government, and the resulting brutal Salvadoran Civil War left 75,000 people dead and around 8,000 Salvadorans missing. This historic event impacted our local communities: The resulting Salvadoran diaspora to the United States (half a million immigrants) caused an influx of Salvadorans to the Washington, DC region, and Salvadoran-born immigrants currently make up 2.9% of the population of the DC metropolitan region.

As a child, Moulitsas Zúniga witnessed the horrors of war first hand. He recounted: “What I saw is little girls that were going to get water getting their legs blown off, because mines had been laid by a water hole . . . It was very ruthless on both sides.” He witnessed communist guerrillas murdering students who had been accused of collaborating with the government. In 1980, his family fled El Salvador back to the United States in a rickety station wagon.

Moulitsas Zúniga childhood wartime experiences made him virulently anti-communist, with experiences not shared by his new American cohorts. “I was the small, young-looking, brown kid who didn't speak English. I was an outcast and never fit in. But even then, I had a strong sense of gratitude for my country.” Moulitsas Zúniga idolized Ronald Reagan for his anti-Communist stances and campaigned for a Republican congressman. He shared international adoration for the bravery of Archbishop Óscar Romero. Following those convictions, Moulitsas Zúniga joined the army at age 17.

Moulitsas Zúniga described the U.S. military as the ultimate socialized eco-system. “They paid for my food, paid for my schooling, they paid for my housing, my dental, my eyesight – they paid for everything.” His military buddies took to nicknaming Markos Moulitsas Zúniga to just “Kos.” He found the military to be a very nurturing and cohesive environment, and that experience influenced and altered his political views thereafter.

Moulitsas Zúniga left the army to attend Northern Illinois University (NIU), majoring in philosophy, journalism, and political science. Moulitsas Zúniga went on to earn a law degree from Boston University School of Law in 1999.

Working at a Web development company, Moulitsas Zúniga had honed his web design and marketing skills and ultimately decided to take his interests as a “political junkie” to create a blog website of his own. *The Daily Kos* – named after his army nickname – went live in the summer of 2002. It would go on to

shake up the American political landscape.

To Moulitsas Zúniga, *The Daily Kos* was “just my place to vent.” But, he found a large community online that shared his frustrations with the political climate after the September 11th attacks in the United States. He railed against the sense that Americans were unpatriotic if they opposed calls to invade Iraq during that era. As Moulitsas Zúniga described, “I always like to say that it turns out that there was a market need for liberals, strong unapologetic liberals, to analyze and talk about the issues of the day.”

Moulitsas Zúniga did so and sometimes courted controversy. “I am an activist,” Moulitsas Zúniga said, “I’m not a journalist.” Still, Moulitsas Zúniga’s success in the sphere of writing and political communication was undeniable. Notable national figures were coming to the site, discussing its posts, and even posting there themselves. “This medium has an incredible meritocracy in a way I have never seen elsewhere,” Moulitsas Zúniga said. “People are able to succeed on their own hard work and talent as opposed to who they know and how much money their family has.” Moulitsas Zúniga established an ongoing annual political convention (now called Netroots Nation) in 2007.

In addition to his political writing, Moulitsas Zúniga co-founded a network of sports blogs, *SB Nation*, in 2003. That network covers all the major American leagues (MLB, NBA, NFL, and NHL), other professional sports such as golf, cycling, and ultimate fighting, as well as dozens of college sports programs. He has written for *The Guardian*, *Newsweek*, and *The Hill*, and he is the author of three books.