
Mexican Americans And Distrust In Law Enforcement

For Chicanos, there was more to the struggle of finding equality. It was a matter of learning to recuperate from the past, deal with the present, and find their identity in a new land that was once theirs. The primary source that will be addressed is titled, Ruben Salazar, the National Chicano Moratorium, 1970. Ruben Salazar wrote the document in May 1970. During the Vietnam War, Mexican American soldiers were dying at twice the rate of their fellow Anglo soldiers. The Chicano Moratorium was a movement of Chicano activists that organized anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. When the Vietnam War was in place, Mexicans were dying twice as fast as their fellow Anglo soldiers. While trying to protest the Vietnam War, Mexican Americans were dealt another hand, unequal justice, and police brutality, bringing light to why Mexican Americans couldn't put their trust in law enforcement.

Salazar addresses why Mexican Americans resist law enforcement because there is no trust. The issue is that law enforcement has given Mexican Americans reasons to distrust them. Mexican Americans are treated poorly, endured poverty with bad living conditions, and people are getting separated from their families, let alone, dealing with police brutality and unequal justice. All of this is occurring while they are already barely making ends meet and trying to survive on what little they had. The problems of unfairness in the system are an issue. We hear often about black and white issues, however, when it comes to other minorities, such as Latinos, it's often in the shadows and goes unrecognized. For example, if an Anglo juvenile was convicted, that Anglo juvenile would have more leniency, such as going home in the custody of their parents with no charges held against them. If it was a Mexican American minor, it would be the opposite, kept in law enforcement custody while facing criminal charges.

"The struggle for equality is not simply political; it also involves retaining and recovering a history, a culture, and a distinctive identity." Salazar wrote to the US Commission on Civil Rights in hopes of bringing light on why Mexican Americans do not trust law enforcement. His intended audience is law enforcement and the government. He wrote this in hopes of shedding light on his and his people's view as he lived to experience this first hand. Ruben Salazar was a staff reporter for the Los Angeles Times, and former chief of the Times' Mexico City Bureau. The document addresses how Mexican Americans were discriminated against and brutalized. He also points out that the issue isn't just police brutality and harassment complaints, the issue at hand is that sometimes they literally cannot communicate with the police. There are not many Mexican Americans or Latinos in law enforcement or authoritative figure positions. "In 1968, only 7.4% of the total uniformed personnel in law enforcement agencies in the Southwest were Mexican Americans... Only ten law enforcement agencies are headed by Mexican Americans and eight of there are in communities of less than ten thousand in population."

Salazar felt that although justice was the most important word in race relations, justice wasn't shown for all. Justice was being shown when in favor of Anglos as opposed to every race as a whole. Due to their color, they were harmed, harassed, and sometimes could not even communicate with law enforcement. It is hard to trust people, let alone law enforcement, to understand what ones' point of view may be, to have someone empathize and understand what you are going through, and what you are aiming to achieve if they are not going through the same hardships. Mexican Americans didn't have people of their own kind in positions of

authority, and because of that, they couldn't see how the law would bring them to justice. There was also a commission study of the grand jury of twenty-two California counties done, that showed that Mexican Americans faced the same level of discrimination in juror selections as Negroes in grand juries in the South faced, for Mexican Americans, at times, it was even worse than what Negroes had experienced.

Antiwar protests by Chicanos peaked on August 29, 1970. Over twenty thousand Mexican Americans marched in East Los Angeles against the Vietnam war and the high Chicano troop casualty rate. Salazar stood by other Latinos during the National Chicano Moratorium. Police used tear gas canisters, firing them into the crowds. More than four hundred Chicanos were arrested. This antiwar protest led to the death of three Mexican Americans. The process of fighting for equality and a better life was a struggle. "But the day ended in a flurry of beatings and flying objects when law enforcement officials clashed with marchers, and three people were killed. Among those slain was Los Angeles Times reporter Rubén Salazar, whose columns had championed Latino rights." Ruben Salazar was one of the three that died from the tear gas being fired. "No one was ever arrested — then or since — in connection with Salazar's violent death."

This was what led Mexican American activists to focus on police brutality and unequal justice. "This sparked a movement in defense of Latinx lives," read a description by Fusion. It wasn't exactly a Black Lives Matter moment. No two moments in history are the same. But it was the beginning of a Latinx-led push for civil rights and part of U.S. history that many in the community are making sure is not forgotten four decades years later."

This primary source document tells us that with change, comes struggles. When you see the result of something, there is an occurrence that led to that result. Mexican Americans had to go through many unfair hardships to get to where they are today, including police brutality. Since then, the number of Mexican Americans in law enforcement has doubled and will continue growing. "Hispanics are the fastest-growing major racial or ethnic group in local police departments in the United States. In 2013, Hispanics made up 12% of full-time sworn officers, up 7 percentage points since the late 1980s, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics." Not only do we see more Mexican Americans in local police departments, we see them in all fields of work. There are many more Mexican Americans as teachers, as political figures, actors/actresses, singers, and so forth. Police brutality and harassment is still an ongoing issue, however, now Mexican Americans have a voice and a way to communicate. They also have their own people in many different fields to listen and assist them with their concerns. There will always be some level of distrust with law enforcement, however, things have gotten better for Mexican Americans today as opposed to the Chicano Movement Era. Trust is earned, not given.