



La Fe Policy Research and Education Center



Promoviendo Bienestar para Familias y Comunidad con Conocimiento, Confianza y Poder
Promoting Family and Community Well-Being through Knowledge, Trust, and Empowerment

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Mexican American Civil Rights Messaging and Action: 1968 vs. 2021

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Latino issues regarding the history of Mexican American Civil Rights in Texas are gathering public attention. It could not be timelier given the current racial divisions that have been perpetrated by local and national groups, including elected officials led by former President Trump.

While we no longer see signs reading “Blacks to the back of the bus” or “no Mexicans or Dogs allowed in restaurants”, voter suppression, xenophobia, white supremacy, and inequitable and undemocratic policymaking all characterize the current environment. Recently enacted state laws that target voter suppression and white-washing historical TRUTH regarding the treatment and contributions of Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans are particularly salient.

However, transforming public attention into action and change in today's ‘civil rights’ environment requires thoughtful and concerted incorporation of what was learned into policy and electoral power development strategies.

A 2017 conference commemorating the 1968 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Hearing held in San Antonio was conducted at Our Lady of the Lake University. Over 800 people attended the 3-day conference, from which sprung additional civil rights initiatives.

- ❖ Development of the Mexican American Civil Rights Institute (<https://www.somosmacri.org/>) in 2019. The MACRI makes it clear that, *“Mexican American civil rights history is ongoing, dynamic and exceedingly relevant. Telling and retelling our history of Mexican American civil rights has the power to transform our collective consciousness, lived experience, identity, resilience, and self-determination, now and into the future.”*
- ❖ Collaboration and completion of the book, *“Mexican American Civil Rights in Texas”*. Nineteen authors chronicle 50 years of struggle, progress, and continued policy challenges since the 1968 hearings. (Editors: Robert Brischetto and J. Richard Avena) <https://mexamtx.org/>

Other relevant efforts and initiatives are contributing to this public exposure of Mexican American history. The book *“The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas”* by Monica M. Martinez documents the violence by vigilantes and law enforcement in the early 1900’s against

Mexican Americans. Local civic and cultural organizations are memorializing historical truths, identity, and empowerment, such as “*Dia De La Raza Celebration 2021: Texas Raza Unida Commemoration*”. (<https://www.academiaamerica.org/>)

The state and national political attention that “*Forget the Alamo*” book has received is beneficial to our public discourse and understanding of Texas Latinos' past and current civil rights today. It's ironic that three gringos are the authors. Indeed, the authors have publicly expressed their surprise that much of what they wrote “is not new” and had already been written by Latino/a researchers trying to expose the TRUTH.

There is also an array of Latino locally based and non-commercialized print, radio, and social media across Texas cities highlighting Latino culture, history, and progress. These media sources are vital to keeping alive our stories and the contribution we make every day to family, communities, and society, e.g.:

<http://www.lavoznewspapers.com/>,

<https://laprensatexas.com/>

<https://esperanzacenter.org/>,

<https://www.latinolubbock.net/>

<https://www.nuestrapalabra.org/>,

Our voices must increase to reach the new diversity of Latinos across the state and the larger public. Furthermore, our voice must increasingly focus on reflecting our perspectives and positions on policies affecting our families.

Despite the clear demographic, economic (great consumers), and cultural importance of Texas Latinos, it seems that our voice (narrative message) is still relegated to secondary status and has not been able to overcome narrow views, stereotypes, and deeply rooted racial sentiments. In addition, traditional commercialized media platforms such as news, television series, films, and social media fail to reflect our values and stories or perspectives on issues.

What is the value of Hispanic Heritage Month if it does nothing to contribute to policies that positively impact the *bienestar* of *nuestra gente*?

The current state and national right-wing racialized politics intensify policy concerns, particularly their impact on Latino families and their children's futures. Taken together, it means a minimal commitment to innovative policy ideas and solutions.

Mexican American Civil Rights in Texas is as REAL TODAY as 1968! Latinos and allies are working towards strengthening their efforts in:

- Advocating for local and state-wide policies that increase electoral power, reduce inequities, and increase socioeconomic mobility opportunities.
- Using our population growth and shift to a Latino majority state to our policy influence advantage.
- Strengthening collaborations and committing to more transformative and sustained changes. Making efforts away from defensive positions, only reacting to bad initiatives and legislation rather than moving towards proactive and innovated policy advocacy.

It is essential we also include building and strengthening more Latino-based media resources as part of our civil rights strategies going forward. In turn, media resources should reach out and partner with the many arts and cultural organizations to develop creative storytelling and messaging relevant to today's issues.

Texas experiences and strategies from Mexican American civil rights history are essential 'tools' that can inform and organize constituencies. Further, they can be used to develop more effective media messaging related to current events that current commercialized English and Spanish media does NOT.

Latinos must systematically engage new media vehicles, outlets, and cultural organizations to bridge stories and issues so policymakers can incorporate our values and perspectives regarding policies impacting our families and community. Let's commemorate and honor Mexican American civil rights activists' struggles by taking their work to another level of action and results.