

LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

POLICE VIOLENCE AGAINST LATINOS: THE SHOCKING DATA WE NOW KNOW

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LAURA FLANDERS: Relative to their population, Latinos are the second most likely demographic to be killed by law enforcement in these United States, but you wouldn't know that from the data. With the Latino community seen largely through the lens of immigration, there's currently no federal or state [institution](#) that reliably tracks the numbers. And under the Trump administration, we're unlikely to see much meaningful change. And so a community of volunteers in Southern California has taken on the job of changing, correcting the numbers. What difference would it make to our understanding of policing to better count and identify everyone? This particular story was brought to us by our 2024 Social Justice Fellow, Journalist Roberto Camacho, who's been working with our Senior Producer, Jeremiah Cothren, to prepare this episode for our monthly feature, which we call "Meet the BIPOC Press". Hi Jeremiah, thanks for bringing this story to us.

JEREMIAH COTHREN: Hey Laura, thank you for having me. And I'm so excited to introduce our fellow [Roberto Camacho](#), who is a Chicano multimedia journalist from San Diego, California. His reporting focuses on criminal justice reform and immigration. His writing has been featured in the San Diego Union-Tribune, Palabra, Next City and Prism Reports. We're gonna hear more about La Raza Database Project from him. He interviewed two senior members from the project, Project Manager, Ivette Xochiyotl Boyzo, along with Lead Statistician, Jesus Garcia, to bring their analysis of why Latinos are so frequently misrepresented. We'll also share interviews he conducted with a mother and sister who lost their family member, César Rodriguez at the hands of the Long Beach Police Department. Roberto, thank you so much for joining us here today. I wanna ask you, how did the work of La Raza Database Project come to your attention?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: Thank you, Jeremiah, thank you Laura, it's a pleasure to be here today. Yeah, so the work of the [La Raza Database Project](#) first came to my attention after the database released the preliminary findings. After which I felt inclined to do more reporting, and I was actually contacted by Ivette Xochiyotl Boyzo herself. And from there I started to interview the research team. I wrote a piece for Palabra called "[The Heavy Toll](#)", an award-winning piece, diving into their work. And since then I have been keeping up with the status of their research and all updates since then.

LAURA FLANDERS: So we're gonna meet some of the folks from the La Raza Database and thank you for doing these interviews. Just in broad strokes, what is the database, what's the work that they're doing and what's a little bit of what we're gonna see?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: So La Raza Database Project is a project dedicated to mapping and re-identifying individuals who have been misidentified in fatal police encounters, specifically those of Latino descent. Latinos are the second most likely demographic to be killed in fatal law enforcement encounters, but they're the most likely community to be misidentified. Again, whether that is as white or as unidentified, and it skews the community's numbers. It makes it seem like this is an issue that is not really affecting Latinos, when in fact they're the second most likely demographic to suffer at the hands of this. The database combs through two decades worth of data from the year 2000 to 2022, and they estimate that at least 6,500 Latino people have been killed by police since then.

LAURA FLANDERS: And is this countrywide, statewide? What area are they covering?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: It is from every state, from East Coast to the West Coast, although a majority of the deaths of those involving Latinos do come from the Southwest because relative to the population, that is where the biggest populations of Latino people are, which are predominantly in the southwestern United States.

JEREMIAH COTHREN: We'll jump into our first clip of the interview you did with Ivette Xochiyotl Boyzo. Can you tell us about her?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: Ivette is the Project Manager of La Raza Database Project and she has been the head of the database for the past several years. She has been instrumental in not only putting together a team to aggregate all of this data, she's also been instrumental in facilitating the stories of these families to make sure that they are heard and also that their needs are met and that the database is doing everything that it can to uplift their voices and to make sure that their family members are not lost in the mix of this reporting.

IVETTE XOCHİYOTL BOYZO: If we don't have a real picture of the truth, we cannot have justice. How can you fight for justice if you don't know the stories of the people who are impacted? But more than anything, I think there's a tendency for people to justify these killings because you need to comply, you just need to listen, you just need to be respectful. And yet people that are respectful and comply still get killed. The other thing is that these are extrajudicial killings, meaning that we have courts, tribunals that are meant to bring justice or for people to see their day in court, and yet the fact that our people go underreported misclassified, again, it's an issue about humanity. It's an issue about how we are being seen and treated systematically within this country. So in order for us to really understand the magnitude and the

seriousness of this issue, and the historical ties that it has to the creation of the United States as a country, we need to know the truth. We need to know who are the people who are being targeted and why, and that usually revolves around a phenotype. But yes, we need truth, transparency and justice.

ROBERTO CAMACHO: I was interested to learn more from Ivette about demands or recommendations the Database Project might have since publishing their findings.

IVETTE XOCHİYOTL BOYZO: For one, that these killings are investigated like any other homicide in the community, we are asking that these investigations of the killings that already happened to be reopened and investigated properly. We have also recommended congressional hearings. Congress needs to hear directly from these families. We are talking about lives, with families, with community. And the other thing is that we believe that this is a matter that needs to be dealt with in an international tribunal, international law. Under a Trump administration, I'm not sure that there will be truth, justice or transparency and especially not for people that are seen as savages and subhuman, but it is time for a community to organize and demand community oversight. Also, we cannot continue to allow these departments to investigate themselves. We need third parties to come and do these investigations and report really what happened, report accurately. And we need a standardized central system. We need the government to really take action and do their job and document how many people are truly being killed and why, and where more than anything, we need to pay attention to the communities where this is happening because it happens a lot.

LAURA FLANDERS: Why did it seem so important, Roberto, to pursue this story? It's fascinating, but I'm curious how you personally got engaged by it.

ROBERTO CAMACHO: I've been reporting on police misconduct and violence for the better part of the past decade, but seldom are Latinos brought up in the conversation of policing in general. Very rarely are they discussed outside of the context of immigration really. So when I learned about the groundbreaking historic work of the database, I was intrigued and I knew that I had to dig deeper and see exactly what kind of work they were diving into.

JEREMIAH COTHREN: Initially, how did you get involved in reporting on policing?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: So policing is something that, it's been a personal subject for myself. I myself, along with family members, have been subject to racial profiling and have not had the best interactions with police in our neighborhood. And again, this is a topic that is something that affects not only myself but my peers, family members and people in my own community. And to see that it's something that really quite honestly flies under the radar.

LAURA FLANDERS: How did it affect you to realize, whoa, you didn't even really know the nature of the company you were in?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: It's actually one of these instances where there's a general feeling and consensus that we know there's an issue going on, but we didn't have the data to concretely back it up. And the findings of the database actually backed up what we already felt and had a sense to be true, but now we know without a shadow of a doubt this is an issue that's going on and it's a systematic problem that has been happening not just for months or years, but for decades.

JEREMIAH COTHREN: To speak a little bit more about the data and the facts, we'll hear a few more words from someone you spoke with at La Raza Database Project, Jesus Garcia, the Lead Statistician. Can you set this up for us?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: Jesus details why this is a historic, first of its kind project, detailing not only why Latinos are so often misidentified, but also going into detail about the meticulous process of going through multiple databases, of coming through US census data, in an effort to meticulously identify people who were misidentified, whether that be in police reports, corner reports, or even by local media reporting on the deaths.

JESUS M. GARCIA: One of the reasons for not documenting or not having this data documented is that there's no mandatory rules for collection of data in a standardized way. There's no mandatory rules for collecting data at the state, at the county level. So standard for how this information is collected varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and everybody does it differently. And so that's part of the reason, and there's [no federal mandate or state mandate](#) to do this, so if it's not there, they're not gonna do it. Since there is no standard for data collection and thinking about it, there probably wouldn't be any information from the federal or state government because of HIPAA and privacy laws. So what occurred is there were a number of individuals Mapping Police Violence, Killing by Police, Washington Post, and others, Fatal Encounters. And they were individuals, they were journalists that took this issue as their own and started the drudgery of identifying deaths through either newspaper articles or police reports or others.

ROBERTO CAMACHO: I learned that one of the limitations of this data was the fact that deaths in ICE custody were not included. I asked Jesus, why not?

JESUS M. GARCIA: The goal of La Raza Database Project was to identify Latino as a proportion of the total population. Our goal was also to give a geographic context to these deaths, where did they occur? Taking it from there requires more time and effort. And because of the short timeframe that we had, we couldn't go deeper into the data. And now the data set is available and there is the possibility of continuing to understand the circumstances of these

deaths. Where do they occur? You know, are these sheriffs, are these police, are these park police? Are they federal government? At this point, we haven't had an opportunity to dive deeper into this information. So many of these deaths may exist there or they may not. Again, it takes more effort and research to come up with these. And so for at this point, we achieved our goal of identifying at least the count of Latino deaths as well as African American, Asian, and white.

JEREMIAH COTHREN: Why is no one talking about this in national media?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: Since the inception of this country, racism and policing has almost always been viewed through a black and white binary. And in turn, the same goes for the Latino community. We are almost always viewed through the prism of immigration. Our community is perpetually painted as outsiders or foreigners. And we are seldom brought up in the conversations revolving policing and violence because of that. Which again, as the data shows is anything but true because we are the second most likely demographic to suffer at the hands of police violence and the most likely demographic to be misidentified. From top to bottom, officials wave off the problem like this is something that's not affecting Latinos, which now we know is quite the opposite.

LAURA FLANDERS: We're gonna go now to a clip of an interview you had with a family who was directly impacted by police brutality. Can you talk about that?

JEREMIAH COTHREN: Well, for my interview, I traveled to East Los Angeles to speak with Rosa Moreno and Priscilla Rodriguez, who were the mother and sister of a young man, César Rodriguez, who was killed in 2017 by the Long Beach PD. Rodriguez was a unarmed passenger who was riding the LA Metro Blue Line when he was racially profiled and cited for allegedly not paying \$1.75 train fare.

PRISCILLA RODRIGUEZ: My mom had four kids, three girls, and he was the only boy. And ever since he was little, he was a special- that was my mom's baby. He all the time would bring us together because he always wanted to hang out with all the family together. If we would go and do family cookouts, it was because he would like say, I wanna go and like do things with everybody. So he was kind of like the glue to our family to kind of get together and stuff because he would always say that he wanted to see all his nephews and sister, my mom together. So he was really like that one person that would get everybody together. He was always that person that wanted to help out. If he would see someone in the street struggling, like with their bag, especially older people, like he would say, hey, stop so I can go and help them. So he was that kind, loving person, I guess from the family. He got profiled and that's what a lot of police officers tend to do, and especially to the Hispanic and Black community. That's what we, we've experienced that with law enforcement because of our race and our color. And I know that if he would've been white, he would still be here.

ROBERTO CAMACHO: I wanted to know if the database findings were helpful for raising awareness about this issue for the community.

ROSA MORENO: Well, I hope there can be more information, that the police really are killing our children. Our nephews, cousins, right? Because there are many people in their homes. Women or families who don't really believe that the police are killing people. Because I get with people like that and they say, what do you mean the police killed your son for \$1.75? Are you crazy? And I tell them it's real.

JEREMIAH COTHREN: Can you update us on this case? So you're saying he was stopped, allegedly, he had not paid the \$1.75, but he was stopped and ended up being killed.

ROBERTO CAMACHO: Although the arresting officer, Martin Ron was never held criminally responsible for César's death, a jury did award the family at \$12.2 million settlement, wrongful death settlement in César's death. The jury said that the main deciding factor in the settlement was the fact that Ron did not move Rodriguez to the center of the platform and out of harm's way, so he was not be hit by an incoming train or any other moving vehicle. That settlement is currently being challenged by the Long Beach PD and the city, and they are planning to take it to the California Supreme Court.

LAURA FLANDERS: I understand that the family have got pretty busy and organized in the wake of all of this. What's going on on that front?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: Absolutely, Laura. So the family, like many other families of police violence have rallied around to bring attention of people of color who are racially profiled by police and particularly young men of color who are racially profiled. They're bringing attention to the fact that broken windows policies and these quote unquote quality of life crimes such as fare evasion, loitering, stuff of that nature is disproportionately levied against communities of color and particularly young men of color. They have done incredible work highlighting this in Long Beach, Los Angeles, and they've also been a instrumental family, and also bringing attention to how cases such as César's, an unarmed Latino man, can go under the radar even after a multimillion dollar lawsuit is leveled against the department and the city and still can garner little attention from the news reporting media.

LAURA FLANDERS: You said earlier on, Roberto, that all of this work is being done on a volunteer, non-profit basis. And I guess one of my questions is, is the idea behind this to create a model that will then get adopted by the Census Bureau or the police department or some of the institutions that gather this data? Or do they anticipate having to continue to comb through all the multiple resources you've described to try to correct the numbers every time, hence forth?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: The hope of the database is that there is now a model that can be followed by any community in any state in the country, and also the hope that this data is now available for public consumption. So people can pull from these numbers and they can use it to come to their police agencies, whether that's at the local or state level, and that more reforms and just policy can be enacted using this database as the underpinning to back up their claims, to back up their grievances. And with the hope that on the strength of these findings, that a more just and equitable policy regarding policing could be put forth wherever the organizer or activists may be coming from.

LAURA FLANDERS: Well, you mentioned activists there, and if you forgive me, I just have one more question I mentioned at the top, I asked at the top like what difference could having this information make? And I've heard you talk about the difference it could make to reporting, the difference it could make to families, the difference it might make to police. And I wondered if you are seeing, or if you think you might see a coming together of social justice work with this information that shows a much more non-binary picture, if you will, of who is being affected and how?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: That's an excellent question, Laura, and it is absolutely true. I think that in regards to organizing, the work of the database, one of its many strengths is also highlighting the intersectionality. And that this is an issue that doesn't just affect Latino communities, it doesn't just affect Black communities, it affects everybody. One of the findings from the database that was unexpected was how much of a disproportionate impact that policing has on the Asian Pacific Island community and how much of under count is in that community. That number jumped four times. It initially, it was at 497, that number after the aggregation of the data and reclassifying people jumped to a staggering 2010 people. This is a community that is even more so hardly ever even mentioned when it comes to police violence and policing. So I think that the strength in regards to activism, it really does go to show that this is not a binary issue. It truly is an intersectional issue that is affecting everybody, is affecting various communities of color, it is affecting working class people, it is affecting poor people. It is a issue that knows no color or class. We have the power. What we lack right now is the will from our elected officials. And I think that with this data, no longer can they put it off or ignore it because we have the facts, we have the data to back it up with and we will no longer be quiet about it anymore.

JEREMIAH COTHREN: So thinking about that, Roberto, and in your reporting that you've done, originally some of the reporting has been in Palabra, I wanna ask you, with the facts and data that we have, how can journalists like yourself, how can we do things differently?

ROBERTO CAMACHO: We have to dig deep, we have to aggregate it, and we have to really get our hands dirty to really get down to it and to make sure that we are reporting the clearest picture. What I would ask journalists to remember though is that although this is a story about numbers and statistics, is that behind every number, behind every case is a person. There's a family that has lost, that has lost a loved one, is left broken forever, whether they've lost a mother or a father, a son or a daughter. I've talked to more families affected by police violence than I honestly would like to admit, and I think that one of the biggest things that has been brought to my attention in my reporting at least, is humanizing their loved one. It really truly makes a difference. And when these families feel seen, it makes them realize that they are cared for. People genuinely do care about the injustice that happened to their loved one, and they are not just simply a number, they're not just a statistic. They're not just a blip on a map. So I think as journalists, we need to keep on reporting that heavy data, we need to keep on reporting on the big picture of the numbers, but also we need to remember that we cannot lose our humanity.

LAURA FLANDERS: Well, thank you Roberto and Jeremiah for bringing this story to our attention. We'll continue to follow the progress of the La Raza Database and your work. It's been wonderful having you as a social justice reporting fellow, Roberto, and we wish you absolutely all the best in your future.

ROBERTO CAMACHO: Likewise, thank you so much, Laura, it's an absolute honor to be here today.

JEREMIAH COTHREN: Thank you so much, Roberto.

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