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COPS/Metro Alliance - StMU Oral Histories with Steve Mendonza

Qiuying Chen

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COPS/Metro Alliance-StMU Oral Histories

Narrator: Steve Mendonza

Date: 03/26/2024

Location: San Antonio, Texas

Interview Session: 1 of 1

Interviewer: Qiuying Chen (Kitty)

Transcribed By: Qiuying Chen

Transcript Edited By: Kensley Dieckow 05/2024

Narrator's Biographical Information:

Steve Mendoza is an active COPS/Metro leader, he has been in the organization since day one. Steve joined COPS when he was still a high school student. As he went on with his life, he became a member of a parish in a suburban area where the White population dominated. Steve has witnessed and been through racial tension in San Antonio all along.

Summary of Interview:

In his interview, Steve Mendoza reflected on the history of redlining and resource inequality in San Antonio and the impact it's had on the neighborhoods COPS/Metro serves. He also discusses demographic changes within the COPS/Metro organization. He prides himself on the success of COPS/Metro's Project Quest education program that has benefited the people living on the Westside. Looking to the future, Steve hopes COPS/Metro develops more programs for the changing needs and demographics of San Antonio.

Interview Key Terms:

COPS/Metro, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Race, Diversity, Redlining, Resouce Inequality, Education, Hispanic, San Antonio, Project Quest,

Length of Interview: 9:03

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Are the consent forms complete? Yes

Steve Mendoza by Qiuying Chen

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Steve Mendoza Interview

Kitty

0:01

So I'm Kitty. I'm one of the M.A. Public History students that are here to interview tonight. And-

Steve Mendoza

0:03 (overlapped)

Hi, Okay. Thank you Kitty!

Kitty

0:10

Yeah, and I am afraid I would have to ask what was your name and how do spell it.

Steve Mendoza

0:15

Of course. My name is Steve. S-T-E-V-E. Mendonza, M-E-N-D-O-Z-A.

Kitty

0:25

Z?

Steve Mendoza

0:26

Z- like a zebra, A-, Mendoza. And I'm COPS/Metro leader. I'm COPS/Metro from Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Helotes, Texas. So that addresses your first question?

Kitty

0:39

Yeah. And, so how has the demographics within COPS changed since you joined? Like in racial groups..

Steve Mendoza

0:50

Well I, Kitty, I've been around since day one of the organization. Because in day one, it started in the Westside, it started in my parish, COPS/Metro did. It was one of the first six parishes that organized for power. And so I've been here from day one, and COPS/Metro where I've been involved with these years. Because back then I was a sophomore in high school. And so I got involved, you know, doing things like holding up signs, you know. But not anything, as some of these older leaders have been involved, right?

Steve Mendoza

1:23

So then I graduated high school, went out to college, went out of state, came back, married, started my family. And I did pretty well, I was successful. I came moving down to the suburbs. So I come from the suburbs. Remember, we started right in the middle of Downtown Westside. And now I'm a member of a suburban parish, a very successful suburban parish. It's probably 30 miles from downtown. So we have gone from mostly Hispanic, poor, maybe some Black in the neighborhood, to now into a parish is mostly affluent, White. And um, so totally different. They come in from a real poor parish and no money in the Westside, to now coming from representing a parish, that has the means to make change. So imagine the demographic has changed completely. But the reason, the reason I go to question number two, is that the reason we had to do this?

Kitty

2:35

Which one that... Oh yeah, the question two will be: Are there any Whites or Asians or non-Latinos?

Steve Mendoza

2:39

Yeah, that goes that goes to the question number two, I'm saying. What happened is that we noticed that our power was centralized. So mostly in the Westside. And then we opened up a little bit in the Westside, so the power was mostly within [Loop] 410. But we also noticed that most of the money and most of the influence was outside the circle of [Loop] 410. So I live outside [Loop] 1604. Right? Right. So there was a need, that if were going to continue to have power. Then we have to expand to these areas, which are mostly White, mostly affluent, have money, they're White people, they're not really... They don't know the story about the problems down here. And they frankly, don't care. They have really expensive cars, you know, they go to the Rim or La Cantera. They don't really know what happens down here at 36th Street, you know, by St. Mary's University. Right? So now, to answer your question, our demographic has changed a lot. There are many White and Black people apart of COPS/Metro, not just Hispanic.

Kitty

3:52 (overlapped)

I see. Yeah so, how would you describe the racial climate in San Antonio?

Steve Mendoza

3:56

The what climate?

Kitty

5:57

Racial, like..yeah.

Steve Mendoza by Qiuying Chen

Steve Mendoza

3:59

Well, it goes, it goes back to day one.

Kitty

4:02

Yeah, like from day one, Yeah.

Steve Mendoza

4:04

Yeah, from day one, you know. It was always the Northside vs. the Southside. The Northside were the rich White people. The Southside was sort of.. imagine drawing the line across the city. The power and the White would live north. And then the poor Hispanic people lived on the Southside. And there was like an imaginary line [Redlining] that you wouldn't cross. And that line was probably Bandera Road. So here is the Bandera Road, were more affluent than the area south of Bandera.

Kitty

4:34

And the Westside is just like another unique case? Or...

Steve Mendoza

4:41

Yeah, yeah. So the um, there's always been that tension. And there is still that tension. Even today, because when you were a kid, you were told you don't go to those parts of town, right? Because that's rich and you're a Mexican kid, you have no reason to be at North Star Mall.

Kitty

5:00

Did the rich kid also be told almost the same thing like, "Don't go to the Westside"?

Steve Mendoza

5:04

Yeah, you don't go to the Westside, because they're a bunch of Mexicans and they're poor. And they can hurt you. It's always been like that. And now it's still like that, 50 years later. It's still like that, but it's just not as obvious, right? But there are kids in my neighborhood that have never been to St. Mary's University or, inside the.. [Loop] 410, right? Because it's dangerous, and you can get killed.

Kitty

5:30

Oh, so they choose to go to UTSA [University of Texas at San Antonio]?

Steve Mendoza

5:33

Well yeah, well they, they go to Northwest Vista, which is on [Loop] 1604, or UTSA. But their life centers around, you know, [Loop] 1604. I go to the Rim, I go to La Cantera, do that kind of stuff, but I don't really dare come to the Westside. They're still there.

Kitty

5:54

Okay, I see. I think that's, most of the questions. But um, what do you envision as the future of COPS/Metro's work in promoting racial justice and equality in San Antonio?

Steve Mendoza

6:07

Yeah, I think the vision has always been there, because many of our folks that we've empowered are Hispanic and are Black and White, right? Um I don't think that's really our purpose. You know, to necessarily say well, we need more White people. Our vision is to help those that need the help. I was telling [that] young lady right now that there was a kid, and I just.. For example, he.. I had a medical procedure last week, and I was in the hospital for a day, for overnight. And two of the three nurses, right? Were graduates of a program, "Project Quest" that was set up by COPS/Metro. Two of the three nurses, right? And so the one nurse I talked to, he grew up in the Westside, he was poor, but he was Anglo. So he was like, "I was kind of like the kid that stood out because it has a bunch of Hispanic, Mexican kids. And I was the only White kid", right? But he was still.. by the fact that he was going to that poor school in the inner city, right? He still didn't have access to certain benefits that other schools in other areas have.

Steve Mendoza

7:26

But through a program that COPS/Metro started, he went to an information seminar, and they told him, "Hey, we've got a program that will help you go from not knowing what you want to do, to get an in-demand job." And so he got this job as a registered nurse on the cardiac ward, right? And it's transformed his life. But he just happened to be a little Anglo kid that lived in the Westside. But because he was in need, because his mom was a single mom, and they were poor. He found the resources that were established, and helped by Project [Quest], by COPS/Metro to benefit to now having a decent paying job, a great job, right?

Steve Mendoza

8:10

So, so it just, I mean it happened that he's Anglo. And it happened that he got educated, right? But what's happening now is since the "power base" is all the way around [San Antonio]. We make sure that our reach goes to all districts so that we can get the support from those elected officials, right? So we have like 10 districts in San Antonio, and some districts are more White, some districts are more Black. But in order for us to get their support, we have to have programs to benefit them too, right?

Steve Mendoza by Qiuying Chen

Kitty

8:45

Yeah. So I think that's most of my questions. I'm so happy that you let me interview you!

Steve Mendoza

8:51(overlapped)

Thanks Kitty. Good luck with you. Are you a graduate student too?

Kitty

8:53

Yeah, same, we are in the same program, same class.

Steve Mendoza

8:57(overlapped)

Oh good. Is this your first year or second year?

Kitty

8:59

It's my first year.

Steve Mendoza

9:00

You got another year, right?

Kitty

9:02

Yeah.

Steve Mendoza

9:02

Oh, good for you.

Steve Mendoza by Qiuying Chen

Transcription Notes: This interview was lightly edited as needed for readability which may include inserting paragraph breaks, removing redundant words, or adding clarifying words. Added words or words difficult to decipher typically appear inside brackets.