

TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

RUDOLPH SAUCEDO, JR.

This interview was conducted as part of a series on the Mexican American in Minnesota.

Rudy Saucedo, discusses the history of the Brown Berets: The Brown Berets were most active from 1968 to 1973. Its members were predominantly Mexican American, ranging from 12 to 27 years of age. They had fifty active members at the peak of their organization. All of the members were from low income families. Most of the members were known by the police and had been in reformatories.

The Brown Berets tried to prevent juvenile delinquency and improve education, housing, recreation, unemployment, and welfare problems. They were involved with the Arts & Crafts fair at the Neighborhood House, week-end camp-out trips for West Side children and Christmas parties at the Neighborhood House.

The Brown Berets encountered some difficulties through their efforts. They were thought of as a gang instead of a Civic Organization and consequently the community lacked respect for the Brown Berets. Police harassment was their major problem.

This is a transcript of a tape recording interview edited to aid in clarity and ease of comprehension for the reader. The original tape recording is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

(Rudolph Saucedo died 1979.)

INTERVIEW WITH RUDOLPH SAUCEDO, JR.

AUGUST 9, 1976

INTERVIEWER: GRANT MOOSBRUGGER

Moosbrugger: This is Grant Moosbrugger interviewing Mr. Rudy Saucedo, Jr. Today is August 9, 1976, for the Mexican American History Project. I am interviewing him regarding the organization known as the Brown Berets. Do I have your permission to interview you for this history project?

Saucedo: Yes, you do.

Moosbrugger: Could you tell us your name and where and when you were born?

Saucedo: My name is Rudy Saucedo. I was born here on the West Side of St. Paul in 1951. At the present time I am 25 years old.

Moosbrugger: You are active in an organization known as the Brown Berets?

Saucedo: Yes. Between the years, 1968 to 1973, the Brown Berets were most active on the West Side of St. Paul.

Moosbrugger: Was that a national organization?

Saucedo: That's right. We weren't a national organization during those years. We didn't know who belonged to the national organization. We didn't know who the members were. We were asked to become members. However, at the time, we felt that the national organization was dealing more at a national level. Where as we, on the West Side, had many problems and felt that our local needs were overriding the national needs.

Moosbrugger: Was this club made up of just Mexican American kids or were there other nationalities in it?

Saucedo: Yes, it was mostly comprised of Mexican American. We did have a few Indians and Whites in the organization, but that's what made up the group.

Moosbrugger: Mostly Mexican kids?

Saucedo: Right. Our youngest member was twelve, our oldest member was twenty-seven. The average member was about seventeen years old. Most of our members were school-aged and were in school. This is where we were doing most of our recruiting, from the schools. The different schools in the West Side.

Moosbrugger: How big did the organization get number wise?

Saucedo: We had approximately fifty active members at our peak. We also had members known as associates. These were members that advised us, and that worked with the school-aged kids. They were older Mexicans. They were people we would get a lot of information from. People who did provide us with information, but did not want to become known as official members.

Moosbrugger: What were some of the hopes and goals that your club tried to take care of?

Saucedo: The needs that we wanted to stay in, were in five different areas. One is to prevent juvenile delinquency, since most of our members had contact with the police department. Most of us had police records. We wanted to find an alternative for the local youth to resort to. another area was education. Since most of our members were on welfare or had been on welfare at one time. All of our members were from a low-income area. No one there could be considered middle class or even lower middle class. So then we were looking for better housing, preventative juvenile delinquency, recreation, education and employment. These are the areas that we try to get into. We look towards employment as an escape from poverty.

Moosbrugger: Were any of your members interested in the University, or any prior

Moosbrugger: education?

Saucedo: At the time, they felt that when they got out of high school, that would be the end of it. They'd be free from school. They didn't know about higher education. They didn't know it was available to them. They did not know how to go about getting into it. The knowledge that they had was, either going into the service or going into jails, or going on welfare. These were the avenues that they knew.

Moosbrugger: Then your group never was active in meeting with higher education people, or asking them for anything?

Saucedo: Yes, that was one of the areas we tried to reach out into. We tried to educate our members, first. We tried to first let them know what was available. Then, through word of mouth, try to educate the community. We tried to be a service to our community, that's what our purpose was.

Moosbrugger: Did you ever have a meeting with the president of the University of Minnesota?

Saucedo: At one point, when the Chicano students at the University felt a need to have their own study center. At this time there wasn't any Latin Liberation. We did have a confrontation with the President of the University, on why this need wasn't met. As a result, he looked at that need and the Latin Liberation was formed shortly after that.

Moosbrugger: During the years your group was active, did you meet with any opposition from the police department or any other organization?

Saucedo: Most organizations didn't recognized us. They for sure, didn't respect us. They thought we were loud-mouth punks, young, and didn't know what we were talking about. The only seriously thing that they took from us was a threatening one, thinking that we would get back at them physically. I don't think they considered the points we brought up. I think

Saucedo: the most opposition that we had was amongst our own community, our own second generation of Mexicans. The ones we wanted to be of service to, they didn't want to recognize us. This was our biggest opposition.

Moosbrugger : You had parents working against your group?

Saucedo: Parents, I guess, you can say too, were working against us. They would have their children stay away from our group, trying not to affiliate with our group. At that time, a lot of our members were known as delinquents and were in training schools and in reformatories. A lot of our members were Vietnam Veterans. So there was a lot of skepticism in the community about us and a lot of suspicions. They thought at first we were out for ourselves and more or less thought of as a gang, rather than a Civic Organization.

Moosbrugger: What are some of the incidents of police harassment that you mentioned before?

Saucedo: One of the reasons why we became less active in the community was police harassment. There were a lot of different areas that the police, either directly or indirectly, harassed us. Directly, if we would be riding in the community in our car, our license would be checked. Many of us did not have new cars, so we almost always got tickets for faulty equipment on our car.

Moosbrugger: When they stopped you did they ever make you get out of the car?

Saucedo: Yes. It was mostly physical abuse that occurred during the time the guy should have just given us the ticket. Instead we'd either get our hair pulled or get yanked out of the car, we'd get clubbed and end up going to jail for disorderly conduct. We'd find ourselves in the court room the next day. Many of us spend a lot of money on bail, twenty dollars here, and twenty dollars fine there. It was money that we didn't have,

Saucedo: money that our friends didn't have, or their parents. These are all direct ways. The police also were in contact with many of the community members, letting them know about our police records. Many of our members had trouble in the schools, and didn't have a good school record. Like I mentioned earlier, education was another area we wanted to meet. We knew, that because we had messed up in school, we wanted to show the value of our members being in school. The teachers knew about us and tried to warn the kids about us. We had harassment from all different angles, but the police were the major ones. There were two or three members that would go into a bar together to have a drink. The police would go into the bar to see what we were doing. They would go up to the bartender and ask if we were old enough. The bartender didn't need that type of business and would ask us not to patronize his place.

Moosbrugger: He didn't want the police coming in all the time?

Saucedo: Yes. He may have had bigger action in there that he didn't want to be busted up. He didn't want us around. That happened to us in many of the places on the West Side. There were only two or three bars on the West Side we could go into. If you get barred from those two or three places, you have to go way across town. That's where the traffic ticket come into play. Then, trying to look for a job. The local employers knew of you, the police knew of you, they are in contact with those employers. That will limit your chances of getting a job. Then again you have to have a skill, but that's another matter.

Moosbrugger: If the police were down on you, that might cost you a job, too?

Saucedo: Yes. That might cost you getting your foot in the door, e

Moosbrugger: Did you mention some of the good things the organization did? How were you involved with the Arts & Crafts Fair? Who puts that on?

Saucedo: The annual Arts & Crafts Festival it's held at the Neighborhood House once a year. It started in 1973. This was the third year. We were active in originating the plan, and getting that going. We played a major role in that. It turned out to be a pretty successful thing. We have many local, as well as, non-local people, that come to the festival. They listen to the music, see local talent, and crafts. It's a place where you can come for the day. It was a good thing that we established. Of course, there was other help involved.

Moosbrugger: Who was involved?

Saucedo: The Brown Berets, the Guadalupe Area Project (GAP), and the Neighborhood House worked together in getting that going. We have also had outings. Many of our doings were directed towards the youth. We had outings at Camp Owendigo. We took forty to fifty children on week-end camping trips. The Brown Berets would provide the transportation, the food and lodging, all the activities, the equipment and the chaperones. We only charged \$2.00 for that. It was a very minimum fee. This activity was open to all the West Side youth. White, Indian, Black, and they all went.

Moosbrugger: That was \$2.00, per kid, per week-end?

Saucedo: Right. I don't feel that you can find that service around anymore. We were also responsible for the Christmans party that they had at the Neighborhood House. The Brown Berets went to all the local businesses; hardware stores, Spartan's, Target's and Penney's stores for donations, for gifts, and for toys, things like this. We went to the milk company for milk and to the bakery company for cookies. On Christmas we had a big Christmas party for all the kids on the West Side. I don't know, if you are familiar with the Christmas party that they usually have at

Saucedo: Our Lady of Guadalupe. They give each child a toy. A good toy, not a paper doll. These were good Tonka toys, trucks, good \$7.00 or \$8.00 gifts. A lot of the children got two or three gifts. It just so happened, that one year we were really lucky in getting donations from a store. It had a lot of surplus toys and they just gave them to us. It was still the work of our members, that got these gifts. And the local children got them. These are services that the Brown Berets have performed for the West Side community. Although, we had bad creditability and maybe it followed us for two or three years afterwards, that was our downfall. We had power, but we didn't have the experienced person to speak for us. We knew where our power was; in the youth, in the school, and in the home. But we didn't know who to take that power to. We did not know how to express our service. Also, at the time we were developing these ideals and goals as we were going along. Some of the services that you see on the street today, you can say that we are responsible either directly or indirectly. You don't see any hard drugs on the West Side streets or any prostitution. These were areas that we combated effectively because these were things that we knew about. These were people that we knew we could talk to, and how to stop it. These were people we could control. We couldn't talk to anybody in welfare about new programs effectively. We didn't know who to talk to on the welfare board. The streets we knew about, and we could deal with it. Political areas we didn't know. We weren't experienced in those areas.

Moosbrugger: The fact there is no prostitution or hard drugs like heroin on the West Side, was due to the influence of the Brown Berets, because they knew it was bad news?

Saucedo: That's right. At that time we didn't know the people who were pushing

Saucedo: the drugs. They were informed to stay out of the West Side with those drugs. Those were measures that we could deal with ourselves.

Moosbrugger: Do you see any hope for getting the Brown Berets active again?

Saucedo: I can see the need. Many of the members have gone on to jobs as organizers, community leaders, in the NYC program, and in the Youth Service Bureau. There are capable young men here who could get it started. They are more informed than we were at that time. I would be willing to help organize it or get it started. But for me to take an active role, or any of the other members of that time taking an active role, I don't know if we would be able to. There are people here, on the West Side, that could get it going, but I don't know if they would do it at this time. I would be proud to see it, I'd like to see it. When we marched through downtown St. Paul, I felt proud, and I felt that I could feel it through the other Mexicans that were on the streets. It is part of the same way the Irish people feel on St. Patricks Day.

Moosbrugger: On what occasion did the Brown Berets march?

Saucedo: In the Mexican Independence Parade in September. We marched in that parade a couple of times. I would like to see it. I would be proud of any person who claimed to be a member.

Moosbrugger: Who were some of the first outstanding leaders?

Saucedo: I would say, the most outstanding ones were people like Pedro Zarate, Alfredo Verdeja, Carlos Verdeja, Nicholas Castillo, Jr., Lolo Castillo, Richard Verduzco, Michael Martinez, David Verdeja, Tom Aguilar, and Pete Martinez. I could name quite a few young people that were a real big help.

Moosbrugger: Did you have any girls in the organization?

Saucedo: Yes, we had Kathy Martinez and some of the Montantes girls. They were

Saucedo: younger girls and I didn't even know their names. We did have a good representation from them. We expressed to them that they were half of the movement. We gave them equal responsibilities and they did hold up their end.

Moosbrugger: Thank you for the interview.

Saucedo: Thank you.

Mexican-American Oral History Project
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