The following program was produced by Minnesota Public Radio.

The Mexican culture is extremely rich. And it's hard to stamp out.

They have certain priorities as far as people are concerned, and we're just not up on the top priority-- list of the priorities.

The problem is that with all this pacification with the Blacks, giving the Blacks the programs, putting them on the media, what's going on is that we're the new nigger. We're the new Black.

[PIANO PLAYING "MEXICAN NATIONAL ANTHEM"]

[SINGING IN SPANISH]

The Mexican national anthem, an oddity for most Minnesotans, but for the state's 20,000 Mexican-American residents, it's either a poignant reminder of a homeland left behind or, for the young, a source of intense cultural pride, conjuring images of a life and culture so different from our own, it often represents a stark counterpoint to the realities of living in America today. For many Mexican-Americans, that reality is one of continuing poverty, poor education, and alienation.

[SINGING IN SPANISH]

Minnesota Public Radio presents "In Search of a Better Life, A Special Report on the History, Life, and Problems of the Mexican-American in Minnesota."

[SINGING IN SPANISH]

They won't even dare right now to say anything against Blacks, anything derogatory on the media against Blacks, because they know right away, with the advent of the NCAAP, the SLCP, I mean, the Southern Christian League, and all the Black problems they're having all over the United States, hey, they have to think twice to say anything about the Blacks.

But hey, we might as well-- what other ethnic group are we going to make fun of, man? You know? So it's the Mexicans. They won't do it against the Indians now because the Indians are-- with this Wounded Knee takeover, the Indians are coming to life now, you know? And what's happening is that we're in the lower-- we're becoming lower. And man, it was up to--

Ah, you're the last--

That's it.

--to find any response.

That's it. We're the bottom of the barrel, man. We're the new damn nigger.

[ENGINE REVVING]

Concord Street, the main thoroughfare through the HRA's Concord Terrace redevelopment area, the center of St. Paul's West Side neighborhood and the home of Minnesota's single largest Mexican-American community. A redevelopment project in the mid 1960s has left the streets widened and brightly lighted at night. Most of the once blighted housing in the area has been either removed or renovated.

For all of the redevelopment effort, though, the neighborhood remains dowdy and lackluster, a collection of low-lying brick and frame buildings, low income housing projects, and newly built, but small, boxlike single-family houses within the boundaries of a larger area, a neighborhood of old houses, all neatly kept and many quite sound, but many others not so sound and clearly in need of repair.

It's not much to look at, but it's to this neighborhood an estimated 7,000 Minnesotans of Mexican descent have come to live. It's in this neighborhood one of Minnesota's most unique ethnic groups resides and continues a struggle which began early in the 1900s, with many barely making a living from the land. Mexican-Americans living in the Southwest and Mexican nationals migrating northward were drawn to Minnesota by jobs and somewhat better working conditions in the state's growing agricultural industry.

The biggest attraction to bringing people here was Crystal Sugar Company in about, let's say, 1905, 1906, 1907.

Sam Hernandez, Mexican-American consultant for the St. Paul School District.

Crystal Sugar began to make-- there was a need for new lands and acquisition of new lands, particularly by Crystal Sugar. And the main attraction point at that time was Chaska, Minnesota. Over a period of years, Chaska became the largest, most modern sugarbeet refinery plant in the world. Recently, it's been closed off, and it's been moved up to Red River Valley. But it did attract a number of people who came from neighboring states who were already migrating throughout the center Midwest.

They began to hear about the labor market available in Chaska and associated refineries and farms that were beginning to put out the sugarbeet. And so they began to come. So when they found themselves unemployed in the middle of a bad season, like late October, late November, and with no money to return back to Texas, they would come into the major city, which would be Minneapolis or St. Paul.

When they would arrive at Minneapolis or St. Paul, they would then hear about a small concentration of Chicano people over there in South Minneapolis or someplace called [INAUDIBLE] or someplace called [INAUDIBLE] or someplace called El Barrio or someplace. And they would attract-- they'd magnet toward that. And they would find the philosophy of Chicano, where they're called "mi casa es tu casa," "my house is your house." And they would say, move in and stay with us a few days until you find some way to get back to Texas. Well, of course, many went back to Texas, but also many stayed.

Those who stayed were joined by those who came later, and year after year, they came each summer, in search of work in the sugarbeet fields. Work all the more appealing for the fact that in 1910, Mexico was in the throes of a tumultuous revolution, and working conditions in Texas and neighboring states were considered extremely poor at best. Later, Mexican nationals were encouraged to work in American fields by farmers faced with a dwindling domestic labor supply during the two world wars.

Like a scene from *The Grapes of Wrath,* an observer of the migration during the '30s described the trip from Texas to the fields of the upper Midwest as a nightmare. Many of the workers and their families traveled by truck. As many as 50 or more migrants huddled on benches and traveled through the night in open stake trucks never intended for passengers. Tin cans were used as urinals. The drivers, driving on contract, were often as arrogant as captains on a slave galley, and accidents and breakdowns were frequent.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

What were your feelings during this time? You had a new life, a new world. Can you tell us what it was like?

Well, I'll tell you, it was very hard.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

You see, when you don't know the language, the feeling of a place, it's very difficult for one.

Doña Elisa Molina was one of the lucky ones. Now the oldest member of one of the first families to settle in St. Paul, she had left Mexico during the revolution. And after working the fields of Texas for more than 10 years, she made her way to Minnesota by train. With her husband and children, she worked the beet fields, living in what she describes as little more than a chicken coop.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

My husband, well, he knew. He knew the language. But I didn't know anything.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

I say I wasn't so lonely here and didn't feel so poorly because, frankly, it was much better than it was in Texas. In Texas, they didn't give you anything. There was no work.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

Or they didn't give you sugar.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

Didn't give you sugar to drink with your coffee.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

They gave you corn flour, five pounds a week for a whole week. How can a person live like that without butter, without grease to cook?

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

Who provided this for you? The church gave that to us. We didn't suffer nearly as much up here because we didn't have to wait so long between jobs.

Did you know that or did you think that Minnesota would be better than Texas?

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

A minister told us about coming up here. It seems that he knew about the work situation. They were looking for work crews to come up and work in the beet fields, and that's how we came up.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

That's why we're here. I'm still here. I'm not going anywhere else. I'm going to stay here.

Like so many others ever since, Doña [? Elisa ?] eventually settled in St. Paul's West Side. While the jobs in the city were invariably menial, they at least offered a reprieve from the transient, backbreaking labor of the fields.

The main attraction to the settlement in the West Side was the Swift Packing Plant and Armour's Packing Plant and the associated slaughterhouses, loading and unloading dock syndrome that's part of the meat packing industry. And they worked in these things for years. But economically, they were making more money than they were as migrants because migrants then, as now, are the lowest paid human segment population in the world.

So you can understand that, regardless of whether or not that was their lifestyle. And I can't believe that the slaughterhouse and the cutting of guts is anyone's lifestyle, but compared to a hands and knees stoop labor and the money they were making, they would naturally, regardless of the environment or cold or winter or what have you, or lack of la familia, which certainly was not there, they stayed, and they became the fourth or fifth generation that we now to be the grandfathers and the grandparents of the Chicano of the West Side Barrio.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

We made $0.50 an hour in those times. Was it the same for men and women? Yeah, it was. Except that those who worked with the knife got $0.65 an hour. But for those of us who were doing regular work, just $0.50 an hour.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

Now that you've found this work, was the situation a little better? Yes, we were able to build up a little more. By the time I left there, I was making close to $4 an hour. But I did immense work. I worked with a knife. And they paid me the same as the men.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

And that's all. There I stayed 20 years.

Doña [? Elisa ?] now lives with some of her children and grandchildren near the center of Concord Terrace in one of the public housing projects. When she first arrived, though, she and everyone else in the community lived about a quarter of a mile away in what is referred to as simply "The Flats," a collection of dilapidated houses and poorly maintained streets on the Mississippi floodplain. This was the site of both the city dump and the original Mexican-American community in St. Paul.

Late in the 1950s, the St. Paul Port Authority decided to clear the area to make room for industry, and that decision meant more hardship. John Flores, a lifelong West Side resident and the former director of a community housing agency.

We had what we thought was a pretty good community, and obviously, other people didn't feel that way. Because we had no mechanism for participation, as we do now, in those years for participation in deciding what would go, what would stay, why it should go anyway for anything, there was no mechanism at all. So basically, we just had a wholesale clearance program.

Everything went. There was nothing spared. The whole area was totally cleared. City dump was filled in. We got businesses and factories on it now. People were offered certain amounts of money for their property. We didn't feel they were equitable. They indicated they could solve a lot of problems, all with the big sweep of the wand, was, we'll solve this human problem, this housing problem, and we'll solve an industrial problem.

We'll provide new places for industry and business. We'll provide new taxes. We'll get rid of all that damn housing down there, and we'll get rid of all them minority people, the Indians and Mexicans and Blacks and whatever. And we'll solve the human problem besides.

But they were damn stupid because they didn't solve anything, except they provided more tax revenue, probably. They provided an industrial park. But they didn't really realize that the people with the small amounts of money that they did have would, out of necessity, and given the conditions, would merely use those kinds of funds and buy many of them on contract for other dilapidated housing.

The other dilapidated housing was just up the hill in what is now the West Side area in general and Concord Terrace in particular. Community residents had been assured of jobs in the new factories, jobs, which, for the most part, they never got. So most of the community ended up moving into largely the same conditions the city had hoped to eliminate.

In about 1964, the housing authority saw the need for public housing, concentrations of very poor people here. Low income whites and poor minorities were concentrated here and in other parts of the city. And in an effort to provide lowest income housing they could provide public housing, they built a place called Dunedin Terrace.

And Dunedin Terrace is 88 units of three, four, and five-bedroom units. It's a public housing area. And of course, it was occupied by those kinds of people that the housing authority deemed that needed those kinds of housing. The actual needs were for single-family. The actual need that screamed out a lot of people was for home ownership, some independence, more than just a box. And that's basically what the housing authority provided, was just a box for the very lowest people on the income scale. And the remainder were left to flounder.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

The welfare didn't want to help us. And the landlord wanted to kick us out because we were three months behind in the rent.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

And he brought me a letter from the court. Said I had to leave the house.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

[WHIMSICAL MUSIC]

[SINGING IN SPANISH]

For all of the disruptive influences on the community, its migration, relocation, and submersion in the essentially alien Anglo culture of Minnesota, it remains culturally strong, culturally unique. Young and old alike are typically tied together by a fabric of traditions, ranging from the use of the Spanish language to the large, interconnected extended families and the preservation and enjoyment of traditional foods and music.

[SINGING IN SPANISH]

[? Ramiro ?] [? Salcedo, ?] former Mexican counsel for Minnesota.

The people in the community have cultural ties, whether it be food or whether it be things, celebrations or dances, or whether it be music. It doesn't really matter. You're going to find that no matter where the people live, they will still come to an area where they can buy the tortillas or where they can buy the chili sauce. And they will come to hear Spanish wherever it's spoken. And when you have the regional dances of Mexico, you'll have a certain percentage of people coming down to watch those dances.

I think it's something that people have that has been instilled in their minds since early childhood. And if it hasn't been instilled in their minds, eventually, they get around to finding out who they are and where their background has-- where they come from. And then they begin to develop an interest along those lines and also try to develop it a little further.

And I'm sure that my children, who were born also in St. Paul, they're going to crave someday, even if they don't marry a person of Mexican descent, they're someday going to want tortillas and so on and so forth, because no matter what Mexican home you go to, no matter how removed, I'm sure that they have some type of Mexican food in their refrigerator. And I'm sure that there are a lot of homes that have Mexican flags in their homes.

And this can go on to music as well. You go into a number of Mexican homes. You name the number of homes that you want to visit, and I can take you there. And you can open up the refrigerator, I'm sure you're going to find some Mexican foods. I'm sure you're going to find some Mexican records. You see?

And people keep this alive. There's a record shop right around the corner over here. You see, there is that burrito that makes Mexican bread. There's a person, a Lebanese fellow that makes Mexican sausage. Well, it's all around us, you see. The Mexican culture is extremely rich. And it's hard to stamp out.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[CHEERING]

Dancing's a real art for Mexican-Americans, as I can perceive it. And it's not so much as we as Anglos use it as sort of a courting process. If you watch Mexican-Americans dance, it's very skilled, timed, an art for them.

When someone asks you to dance, it's not necessarily as a way to court you. It's a way to move together, to dance. It's for sheer enjoyment.

We're mostly feet orientated when we dance, Anglos, whereas Mexicans, as I've watched them, use their hips and their entire body more. And what's beautiful about it is that the little children come right along, and the little children are out there dancing and learning at a very early age. And they're very good at it. It's a family event, just like going to the movies is a family event.

[MUSIC CONTINUING]

[APPLAUSE]

For all of the strength tradition provides, some of those same traditions are the very cause of ongoing individual and community problems. A relatively heavy reliance on the use of the Spanish language is a prime example. Sequestered in the comfort of a community, which, because of common experience, has largely preserved traditional values, many of the older generation have acquired little or no skill in the use of English. At the same time, many migrants are still coming to the area from the Southwest, where, because of population patterns, Spanish is used heavily, and English is largely unnecessary.

While most in the community are at least somewhat bilingual, those who rely on Spanish in any degree are often at a distinct disadvantage. Marci Vasquez, director of a federally funded migrant tutorial program.

There are some families that I say have been here for many years and have never gotten command of the English language. And it's very, very difficult for them. And I know this from personal experience because I have had elderly neighbors that have never had command of the English language. And they may understand it, but not enough to really feel confident that they understand what is going on.

And personal experience, I mean, that I have had neighbors that have wanted to, say, pay me $1 because all I did was read a letter to them, or maybe I addressed an envelope. Or one thing that I think was important is they go to the doctor, they get their medicine, and it has to be explained to them, how many capsules do you take and how many hours apart.

And to get transportation is another problem, because they can't speak, a lot of times. And this has happened that I have heard where they will maybe order a cab. And because they just give them the address on a piece of paper, who knows how many turns the cab will take?

The American people, whether you want to believe it or not, maybe not all educated people, but certainly the general populace, which is the educated are in the minority, but the general populace still feels that the Mexican is inferior. And I say this because I've experienced it, as well as a number of other people. I went into a bar one time, and I was talking Spanish to my cousin. And we were talking away in Spanish about Mexico and about everything else.

And the guy next to me, he says, hey, what's the matter with you wetbacks? He says, how come you don't learn English? You're living in this country. It's our country. And if you really want to live in this country, why don't you learn English? I said, listen, buddy, my English is better than yours. And I can speak Spanish just as well, too. Equally as well.

He said, well, gee, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I didn't know. I heard you speaking Spanish or some language, some foreign language. And I just thought you were a dumb fellow who didn't know anything. So that when they hear you speak another language, either they feel that you're talking about them, or you're talking against this country, or you're not smart.

You're not smart enough to know English.

That's right. Whether they say it or not, this is their impression, you see. And this is the impression we've had for years and years.

The lack of English language skills, combined with the poor educational opportunities associated with the migrant labor experience and stereotyping of the Mexican-American by the dominant Anglo culture, may well explain virtually all of the community's most serious common problems. One of those problems is extremely high unemployment. One study recently estimated Mexican-American unemployment in Minnesota at 13.7%, more than double the national average. Sally McKay, a social worker assisting Mexican-American clients.

Well, just yesterday, I can think of an example, of someone called me. A client called me on the phone, and her husband was told to go down to a job interview for a janitor. Now he has a back problem, and he's working this out with DVR for disability.

He went down there alone, speaks very poorly English, and did not understand the essence of the interview, did not know if he got the job or not, came back, had his wife call me-- he did not want to call me-- to call the West Publishing Company and to call the person from DVR to see if he had gotten the job or if he had goofed it up because of his disability. He did not understand what had happened during the interview.

The Mexican-American, because he doesn't the avenues and the way to approach certain problems, he hasn't had the experience, and moving along these lines, is somewhat handicapped and shy, to a certain degree, in applying for a number of positions. He feels, well, no, this job, it requires too much skill, too much ability, and I just don't have it, instead of saying, look, I can do it if I'm given a chance.

Another example is a woman that went down to a luggage company and did not speak one word of English and was down there alone, trying to fill out an application. So yeah, she called me up, and then we had to make other arrangements so that she could go back and have an interpreter come along.

Some of your children that are the migrant children, say, 15 to 20 that are coming into town with their families, those children have trouble speaking the language in job interview situations, because they become nervous. They're not confident, whether they're understanding or not.

The very, very first year I tried to stay out here, it really didn't work out for me, which I think is one of the common things for many migrants that try to settle out in the city.

What kinds of problems did you find?

My main one was, oh, I'd have to say finding employment, being unskilled, employers looking back into my education records, finding that I drop out in and out of school. Then I guess, they figure that I'd be the same at the job, you know.

I've seen where you have to be almost twice as good as anyone else in your department before you're promoted or before you're given a chance. This, you can check. The person can be-- a Mexican-American can be just as intelligent, or if not more, than anyone else in the department. You have to prove yourself and you have to do a lot more, and knock yourself out, you might say, in order to show them that you can really handle the job, and you are responsible, dependable, and reliable, and these are the things that you're not given a chance to do.

If you can't find, if you don't understand it, don't yell at him in English. Find out who can understand him and sit down with him, as they had nobody who speaks Spanish there. Our relationship with the food stamp office is a lot better now. They got people--

Frank Guzman is the director of Migrants in Action, a community agency providing assistance to migrants wanting to settle in the Twin City area. According to Guzman, most other social service agencies are poorly equipped to deal with the particular needs of Mexican-Americans.

Most agencies we talk to are surprised there are even Mexican-American-- many Mexican-Americans in Minnesota. I give them a figure. Oh, that many? And hardly any of them know that there are about 20,000 or more Mexican-Americans that come to Minnesota every year just to work in the fields. And they're kind of hanging around the highways without any gas and food, and they come into the cities and these kinds of things. And the reason they don't know it is because they don't go out and find out.

If an agency that continuously tells you, like the welfare or the highway department or anything, tells you, oh, they're really concerned, well, if they were concerned, they'd do several things. One is they'd set up some way so they'd go out into the Mexican-American community, into the migrant community, and go out and learn about it, go find out about it. And then as soon as they could have, they draw up some kind of a program where they can start hiring Mexican-Americans, bilingual, bicultural people in their programs.

What would be an example of a problem that comes up for an individual in the community and an agency that he might go to where there would be difficulty in getting the kind of response you're looking for?

I mean, several, but one of them that has happened is that there are people from the West Side community who are Chicanos, were going down to Ramsey Hospital because they were hearing of problems much too often that were going on down there, problems we're talking about language, mostly, or a doctor or a nurse behaving a certain way that just didn't make the migrant or the Mexican-American feel right. So people were down there, and they finally did find out there were a lot of problems, especially with language.

The thing is that I know people who, for example, have gone down to Ramsey with a sick child, and that child has died in the waiting room because they were not taken care of. I know of many people who go there, and nobody spoke Spanish to them. They didn't know what was happening, terribly frightened, terribly frightened.

And so from this, I would say this is the main reason that the clinic was started on the West Side, for instance, because of these problems.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

With communication problems adversely affecting matters as critical as health care delivery, a low-cost bilingual health clinic was created to serve St. Paul's West Side neighborhood, a neighborhood with a significantly higher infant mortality rate and a disease rate nearly double that of the rest of St. Paul. The clinic is considered inadequate to serve all of the community's needs, and funding is an ongoing problem. But according to Dr. Luis DeCubas, the patients he sees are served better for the use of the Spanish language.

We have plenty of aging people, and they don't speak English, or they speak English, but they prefer to talk in Spanish. They think it's more easy for them to explain what happened and what they feel.

You say sometimes they feel more comfortable coming here and speaking to you, rather than trying to deal with some other place. Why?

Because it's something normal. I remember in Cuba, we have plenty of Americans, and they like to go to the Anglo-American hospital. Many of them speak Spanish, but it was better for them. For them, more comfortable, more easy to explain feelings, you know? Not only pains or different things about other things, about how they feel in here or if they have some familial problems. It's better if you can talk in your language, you know? Then in a foreign language, you expect them to can't talk very good.

And many people find that there are too few places other than here where they can do that?

I know only three or four people here are doctors and they speak Spanish. Many of them don't speak very good Spanish, but I don't think, at least in this neighborhood, it's not easy to find any doctor who can speak Spanish.

I think the Mexican has found it perhaps more difficult to adjust to the Anglo-Saxon culture because it's so foreign. The others, when you're talking about Europeans coming to this area, at least, they have some type of common bonds, and there's some type of overlap there in culture. You have English coming, Scandinavians coming. They've been here for generations. The Mexican-American is relatively new to this area and still coming. And yet, it's a tremendous transition that he has to make. As a result, he has a tremendous disadvantage.

If the problem of communication between two essentially different cultures is serious in regard to health care delivery, it should come as no surprise that the same conditions have created problems in relations between some members of the community and the police. Jose Trejo, a member of the St. Paul Human Rights Commission, and community residents wanting to remain unidentified described the problem. First, Trejo.

If you talk within certain circles in the community, particularly the younger people, the grapevine indicating the problems of police harassment or the problems of misunderstanding, particularly in the confrontation issues or particularly in times when an arrest takes place, you continually hear about the fact that the arrest procedure was not proper or about the fact that they use excessive force.

The other thing that is important here is, basically, the fact that the majority of the Mexican-American community are very authority oriented, and perhaps, in many instances, if a case does occur or of what you may consider police harassment or what might be considered police harassment, it may go unreported, while in other instances, the complaints that may be filed may not be substantiated. The younger people are the ones that have brought the question of police harassment up more often than any other group in the population.

What are your impressions of the police and the way police relate to the community here?

Man, a lot of harassment. Like, I just say like a week ago, two police officers went into one of the local bars I was in and arrested me and handcuffed me in front of all the people, brought me in a bathroom, thought I was somebody else, called down to the police, looked for a tattoo on my hand, and let me go.

Are there friends of yours in the community and others who see the situation in the same way?

Yeah, a lot of them, a lot of people.

Well, do you think that this kind of situation is typical of the way police relate to everybody, or do you think the police in St. Paul are picking out Chicanos for extra abuse?

Oh, yeah, all minorities, gringoes, Blacks, and Chicanos.

What makes you say that? What is it that makes you believe that it's discrimination?

Because I see it happen all the time, on a street, in a bar, wherever.

Can you give us some more examples?

Oh, man, I think I gave you enough. I don't know. I see it all the time. Just, they come in and they grab you and pull you out. And you don't see the dude for a couple of years.

And you think if you weren't Chicano or if you weren't living in the West Side, that probably wouldn't happen?

I don't think so.

Well, let's just put it, whenever they see a cop driving down the street, people just-- something comes up and into them. It's just like seeing the Gestapo running or riding through Paris, the same type of fear.

The problem, as I see it, is basically communications problem. And also the second portion of that will be a basic lack of understanding by the police officer of the customs, traditions, and behavior patterns of the Mexican-American community.

Could you describe a hypothetical situation that might result in a complaint?

Ah, the domestic problems are one of the areas that could be described. In the Mexican-American community and in Mexican traditional culture, the man has quite a bit of authority within the family. And assuming that the man beats up his wife or something along those lines might happen, where he may become intoxicated and be allowed, traditionally, this problem will be handled within the family, the family structure. That is, the parents or the grandparents will probably bring pressure to bear on the individual to behave himself and to try not to do that.

But however, if the police become involved, the police are looking at the rights of the individual, including the rights of the wife. And an altercation may occur, and as a result, if the individual that is being arrested does not understand English or finds it difficult to comprehend what is taking place, he may resist arrest, or he may consider the fact that police have no business whatsoever inside his home.

I have known people that have been to court and can't hardly understand English at all. Yet they're being tried for something they didn't even know that they did wrong, like coming up from Texas and maybe Mexico, right? They come up here, and they can walk down the street drunk if they want to. But up here, in our community, they walk on the street drunk, and they get thrown in jail.

Then they get thrown in the workhouse for 90 days, and they don't know why. They don't take time to have an interpreter there to tell the person why he's going to court. The guy maybe knows a few words of English, like, "yes, sir," or, "no, sir." And he ends up going to jail for 90 days, just because he was enjoying himself that night, and he got drunk.

Basically, the cases I have seen have been in cases where an individual has been stopped for some traffic violation or has been stopped or has been arrested for intoxication. And they do not have enough comprehension of English to know what his rights were.

And as a result, there was fear and intimidation on his part and the inability of the police to understand or to even make available to him the fact an interpreter or someone to read his rights and to assure him that if he was innocent, that he had nothing to worry about or to fear, will have lessened the antagonistic attitude and feeling that the individual had.

Arrest rates in the principally Mexican-American West Side neighborhood are significantly higher than most other parts of the city. Most of the arrests involve young people. And many area residents believe part of the problem lies in the fact that the West Side has little to offer in the way of recreational opportunities. Likewise, it said that the schools in the community have failed to respond to the particular needs and values of the Mexican-American student. The result, they say, is that many students can't be late to school, and instead, get themselves into trouble.

We have a high rate of school dropouts that there's nobody down there to tell them, go back to school, man. Get some kind of training, and go to college. Or don't just lay around. There's no one down there talk to them like that.

From there, they go out in the streets. They're on the streets nights, start off with vandalism or stuff, burglary, and then armed robbery, and the next thing they know, they're in prison. And it's because what's there on the West Side for them? The West Side has nothing to offer them, except harassment and oppression, frustration, stuff like that. And you can't live like that.

Well, see, we were drinking, and it was around six months ago or so. I don't know. And there's nothing to do, so we just thought we'd have a little fun.

The little fun these high school students are describing involved a burglary of the local Catholic elementary school. Looking for something to do, they stole a television, a tape player, a sewing machine, and some tools. They were caught and ultimately returned the goods, but in addition to their troubles with the law, they were considered troublemakers at school. Why? They couldn't really explain, but they seem to perceive school as simply offering too little and demanding too much.

Some of the teachers are really pricks, man, because this one teacher we got, when we go in his class, like-- I don't know-- he treats us like we're all dumb, man. Like, we're all dunces. Like, he only talks to the white people that he likes, you know? And I don't know. He just talks to just certain people, man, and he puts everybody else out. And then when he does talk to them, he cuts them down when he says something.

You mean you're telling me that this one teacher in particular is down on Chicanos, and he only deals straight with Anglos? Is that what you're saying?

I mean, not really. He doesn't do it that straight out, but I mean, that's the way he does it, though.

Is this just one teacher, or is there a similar problems with other teachers? Or do you know? Or what's behind it all?

I don't know. Well, some teachers like-- I don't know-- they treat us like-- I don't know. They just don't like talking to us. A lot of teachers are like that, but some of them are really cool.

Larry Lucio, a young man born and raised on the West Side and counselor for the students you just heard.

So often, our kids are labeled abnormal idiots.

Why?

Well, because they don't meet-- supposedly, they don't meet the majority standards as far as the way a person is supposed to react and live in the society today. I mean, our kids have a whole different orientation as to what life's all about.

And a lot of the people in the education system here on the West Side have theirs. And it's one that's 30, 40, 50 years old, as opposed to the younger kids and their whole orientation to life and what they've lived. And it just, it makes no sense when you have an educator say, well, I've taught his brothers and sisters, and I've been in the community for 20 years. I know what this kid needs. You know? He doesn't know what the kid needs.

[BELL RINGS]

What do the kids need? Community leaders and parents agree what's needed is better quality education, schools with programs and curriculum tailored to meet the unique characteristics of the Mexican-American student.

Teachers are so satisfied when they have minority kids in school. They'll say, oh, these poor, little Mexican kids, these poor, little Blacks. They're so stupid. We'll just be satisfied with just a little bit from them. They don't really care.

Sister Giovanni, known affectionately as "Sister G," is a nun at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, a focal point of the community. For more than a decade, she's acted as a strong advocate of community concerns. And when discussing the local schools, she doesn't mince words.

You consider, as have each of the people I've talked to, education as a key need of the community, but why? What is the problem? Why are people poorly educated in the West Side community? What--

Because the schools are so horrible. For example, we're dead end schools down here. I mean, take Humboldt and Roosevelt. It was only just the other day that the newspapers got a hold of their test results in reading. We've been telling them all these years that these kids don't know how to read. It's because our type of people are not used to making a rumpus if their kids don't learn how to read, OK? If that should happen in Highland Park, the parents would be right down the school board's neck, right? But that's not how these people are.

These people are gentle or kind or considerate to people. And in their estimation, they think they are so stupid and that teachers are maestro, huh? They are so smart that you just do not criticize them. It just, really, I do. I see purple when I think of the lack of education that's going on in this community. And we have tried again and again and again to do something, and all we do is make news in the paper, or they snap our pictures for television. And what is the result? Not much.

Like Sister Giovanni, other community leaders agree better education is sorely needed. In fact, it's felt that better education is the key to eventually overcoming virtually all of the problems the community currently faces. What does quality education mean to the Mexican-American community? The consensus is clear. It means an aggressive effort to provide a comprehensive, bilingual, bicultural, educational program. Gilbert Deleo, a community youth worker, speaks of the need for a greater emphasis on Mexican history and culture.

There isn't anything taught in the schools about Mexican history. The only thing we learn about Mexicans is that, hey, there's 13 white boys that held us off at the Alamo, held off 3,000 Mexicans, you know? And they still have the concept that we wear the big sombrero. We got the Pancho Villa mustache, the Zapata mustache, whatever you want to call it. And there's nothing really concrete on the Mexican history. And we've got a lot that we offered here, you know?

I felt like I had to really be a simulation in order to make it here in the United States. Hey, I wanted to dress nice like the boys up at Cherokee Park, and I wanted to be a football hero, everything like that, you know? Because that's what that was happening, you know? All these guys had cars, and those guys are walking to school.

But I guess the only way we felt that maybe we could compete or maybe we could have them respect us, maybe they can't respect us because we didn't know how to spell or we didn't drive nice cars, but one thing we know they could respect us for is that we could fight, you know? And that's the only way we used to get across. And maybe we perpetuated our own image of being that, of hostile, aggressive, but and I think a lot of that had to do with-- there's nothing about Mexicans in history.

And that has to be instituted in the schools. Because, man, if you could just see some of the report cards of the kids in school right now, poor. They're poor readers. They don't do this, they can't do that. But the only problem is that they're blaming the kid. They're always blaming the child, the Mexican child, for not achieving in school. To me, I think maybe the teachers ought to check it out. Check out their own curriculum. Maybe it's the teacher's fault. Not always the child's fault, you know?

If you don't make a person proud of himself and proud of his culture and proud of his family and proud of who he is and where he came from, he's not going to amount to anything because he's going to be ashamed of himself, you see. He's always going to take a backseat, and he's always going to say, gee, I can't do that because, well, I'm Mexican.

[? Ramiro ?] [? Salcedo. ?]

The main point is, if we are going to make useful citizens of the Mexican-American, you have to show him that he's not an inferior being. And when I went to school-- and I went to Humboldt-- I felt somewhat ashamed that I was Mexican or Mexican-American. Why? Because everything was English. Everything was American. They didn't even teach Spanish over there. There was nothing I learned at Humboldt that made me proud of myself.

And anyone that asked me, are you a Mexican-American, well, not really. I'm an American, like you, because I was born in this country. But now I just say, I'm Mexican-American, or my parents are from Mexico, and I'm proud of it. Why? Because I have more right to be in this Western hemisphere than anyone else because my ancestors were here. Even if you want to call them Spaniards or you want to call them Indians, they were still here long before anyone else's ancestors were here. And they had a high civilization.

Community leaders insist that bicultural and bilingual curriculum must be provided simultaneously. According to figures only recently and quietly released by the St. Paul School District, 82.1% of the Mexican-American students tested fell below their grade level in reading. Nearly half were one or more years below grade level, and almost a third were two or more years behind.

Advocates of bilingual, bicultural education insist that by starting early, Spanish-speaking children in the lower grades can begin the process of learning in the language they know while they learn English. In this way, it said, they won't fall behind. [? Stella ?] [? Alvo, ?] a teacher at Me Cultura, a private preschool bilingual, bicultural daycare center, explains.

Spanish children are given-- like, say, they speak Spanish for the first three or four years of their life, and then they're forced to speak English, and they are not given any language in which to learn concepts in because they are not given enough English to deal with the ideas. They're not given enough, and they're not given enough Spanish. The Spanish is not reinforced so that they increase their vocabulary.

So they're in a position where they can either go ahead or go behind. Like teaching the concept of 1 plus 1 is very easy for people who think in English. But if you don't have a language, if you don't have a language to teach the words, 1 plus 1, 1 object plus 1 object, then the child is lost.

And so, what we try to do at Me Cultura is no matter what the original language is, the child is reinforced in that language and given competency in a second language, so that if a child comes in speaking only English, they are talked to in English so that they do not lose that basic English language because a child or any person needs a language to begin to develop ideas and concepts in. And that seems like such a logical thing to know. And yet, it's something that isn't dealt with.

For example, a little kid comes to the kindergarten, and he's heard nothing but Spanish for maybe, say, five years of his life. Then he comes into a kindergarten or first grade. Say he's in first grade. Well, maybe she's got a cute little teacher, and he thinks she's really smart because our kids admire beauty. And she doesn't know a word of Spanish.

And so he begins to have doubts in his mind. Well, what's wrong? And then he's lost in school the first day he steps into school. He has heard Spanish all his life in his home, and here, he hears nothing but English. And the kids in the class are learning how to read English. He's got not only to listen to English, to learn English, to read English, he's already behind.

Recently, after months of intense community pressure, the St. Paul schools agreed to begin a limited bilingual, bicultural program at one school in grades K through 3. Additionally, pleading inadequate local funds for further expansion of the program, the school district has applied for federal assistance. These actions are viewed as representing real progress.

At the same time, however, many community leaders feel the progress is too little, too late. It's felt that the school system could have done more without federal assistance, and that while federal funds can help, they are always subject to disruptive cutbacks. The real answer, it said, is a greater commitment by the school district and more efficient use of local funds.

I've gone through a lot of fights with administrators who have said the money's not there. And it's very mysterious that when you bring in 150 angry people, all of a sudden, the money does appear somehow. And one of the things that I don't like to get into is this whole trick bag of, well, should we give it to the Black community, or should we give it to the Mexican community?

And if they really had their ingenuity together, there'd be ways for the monies to come through to both or three or five communities or 10 communities, because it seems to me that if the Board of Education is supposed to be reflective, and I would underline the words, "supposed to be," reflective of community wants, needs, and desires, that if it isn't relevant, then the budget priorities really should be reviewed.

Stephen Sewell, a community advocate and counselor for Migrants in Action.

The cost of education is supposed to be offset with the kind of contributions a person is able to make to society. And a person who is truly bilingual and bicultural is able to make a greater contribution and able to function with a lot more latitude.

If I were to address the majority culture on this issue, I would simply, to put it most succinctly, say that the Anglos and the majority culture has nothing to lose from learning another language, from getting a better perspective on other cultures, and that it's a matter of, we could say, a luxury for us. But for the Chicano or the Portuguese fisherman or the Indian child who grows up speaking an Indian language, it's a matter of survival.

They can't read or write. They can't fill out job applications. They don't know history. He keeps on getting behind. He keeps on getting behind. She tells him that the best breakfast to eat is whole wheat bread and orange juice. He's never had it for breakfast. So he begins to get doubts in his mind about himself. He gets to about the third or fourth grade. If he's late, he'll go along with the rest of the white kids, and he'll resent the fact that he's Mexican. If he's dark, he'll resent the rest. And he'll have chips on his shoulder.

I have had young men, heard them talk where from the time they were seven years old to the time they were 18, they hated anything any white person ever told them. Can you imagine the trouble they were in? Just because they saw what those white people had done to their parents on the migrant line. They saw what trouble they had. And so it takes a while before they begin to sort things out and say, well, OK, all the whites aren't bad, and all the Mexicans aren't good. And then they begin to look at things.

But in the meantime, all this suffering has gone on and all those wasted years. And I think the most heinous thing that a teacher can do is to stop a kid from getting a love for learning, that these kids who are-- and oh, man, our kids are so smart and cute when they're young. They're eager beavers. They're wide-eyed, wanting to go to school and learn and get smart.

And then they go to school, and they meet with the teacher who is bored with life. Maybe she has problems in her own life and does not care about the kids, doesn't give them a love for learning. And there they are. They couldn't care less. They can't wait until they can get out of school. And it's a wasted life, unless somebody grabs them.

Who will grab them? For all of the community concern, effort, and hope of resolving the problems they face, the struggle, which began in the early 1900s, has left many with a sense of ennui, a sense of despair.

Everybody who lives in the West Side here knows that whenever anything happens, it will always be the last to get ink on anything, whether our people had, for instance, had the first co-op in the Midwest area. They organized it on their own. Yet, as far as the newspapers and the media were concerned, it could have-- it's just like somebody being born again. Big deal. It happens every day.

It's that type of attitude that not only the media, but the government has, again, where geographically, we're cut off from the rest of the city. That doesn't help our identification with the city of St. Paul, is, we feel we're a big part of it. But I guess, the politicians feel like we're only a big part when it comes to election time. They come down and they tell us what a great job we're doing, and how much better we are than, say, some university area. We don't burn our houses and hope that they pass on ahead.

And of course, our people are very trusting, or they have respect for people with an education and who-- especially the older people I'm talking about. I'm not talking about the older generation. And they believe, and-- so like I say, the politicians come in and whitewash a lot of the older people. And they get the votes, and then they leave. And next thing you hear is they're voting against something that we want. Politicians come in and they ask for votes. They leave. And nothing ever gets back to the community.

It's so typical. Again, it's typical. To me, it's just a microcosm of what the whole society is all about, that they have certain priorities as far as people are concerned. And we're just not on the top priority of-- the list of the priorities. And I guess that's something that we have to deal with, and we see and we face as a reality. And we see it as a given. And we work from there. If we have to kick teeth, we'll kick teeth. If we have to pat people on the back to get some things, we will, I guess.

It's just kind of like the survival thing that a lot of the brothers talk about. You have to play the man's game at times to get what you want. And that's really so true. There are times where you have to play games to get things done. But you don't feel bad because you know it's for a purpose and that things are going to come out on top, anyways. You know that you'll come out on top if you're sincere about what you're doing. That maybe you have to back down once in a while, but it's worth it because, sometimes, the results are going to be the best for everybody, and that's what you want.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[CHEERING]

[CLAPPING]

Addressing the problems faced by the many people who came to this country in search of a better life, Robert F. Kennedy once said, all of us, from the wealthiest and most powerful of men to the weakest and hungriest of children, share one precious possession-- the name American. It's not easy to know what that means, but, he said, in part, to be an American means to have been an outcast and a stranger, to have come to the exiles' country and to know that he who denies the outcast and stranger among us, at that moment, also denies America. This is Greg Barron.

[CHEERING]

This program has been a production of the News and Public Affairs Unit of Minnesota Public Radio. The program was written and produced by Greg Barron. Additional field recordings by Ken Mason. Audio mixing by Michael Moriarty. Simultaneous translation by Stephen Sewell. This is Dennis Rooney speaking.

[CLAPPING]

[MUSIC PLAYING]