

## **The Origin of Advocacy Journalism in U.S. Spanish-Language Television News: The 1970 Killing of Ruben Salazar and the Activism of Los Angeles Station KMEX**

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### **Abstract**

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*While the merits of advocacy journalism are debated, little is known about the acceptance of the practice in the U.S in the period after World War II when television began and the Hutchins Commission called for objectivity in news. In Los Angeles in 1970, the activism of KMEX-TV news director Ruben Salazar and his killing brought a groundswell of advocacy journalism and guidelines on its practice at KMEX. An account of KMEX's subsequent advance of advocacy journalism is told for the first time. In addition to records and period reportage, interviews were conducted with three lead KMEX figures, Danny Villanueva, Guillermo Restrepo, and Pete Moraga, who were associates of Salazar and who amid disagreements promoted advocacy and activism after Salazar died. While many regard advocacy journalism as illegitimate, KMEX succeeded in demonstrating television's conduciveness to the practice.*

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Advocacy journalism is a recognized form of journalism that adopts a non-objective viewpoint usually for a social or political purpose. Recently much has been written about advocacy journalism. Noting a revival of partisan news media in the 2010s and 2020s, Fielding (2022) and Reavy (2013) are among many who have called for a re-evaluation of objectivity as a journalistic norm and acceptance of advocacy as ethical practice. Careless (2000) set forth rules for modern advocacy journalism including that journalists must declare biases and yet practice the traditional skills of fact-finding and accuracy.

Often mentioned in modern discussions of advocacy journalism is its practice among news organizations that cater to the 20 percent of Americans who are Latino. Observers cite Spanish-language television news as a principle domain of advocacy journalism. Latinos' two most widely-used sources of news, the national Spanish-language networks Univision and Telemundo, do not dispute critics who claim their news often is slanted in favor of Latino causes and initiatives. In the late 2010s, the nation's best-known Spanish-language journalists, Univision news anchors Jorge Ramos (National Public Radio, 2015) and Maria Elena Salinas (American University, 2016), believing the cause of Latinos superseded strictures that news be objective, publicly claimed a need for advocacy journalism.

Despite scholars' recognition of the practice, the origins of modern advocacy journalism, notably its genesis in Spanish-language television, are obscure. Authors do, however, suggest an occasion when advocacy journalism was demonstrated for the first time. It was a groundswell of activist reporting on Los Angeles Spanish-language station KMEX in 1970 that accompanied the killing of KMEX news director Ruben Salazar. Salazar was a longtime journalist who turned to Latino activism and on TV helped rally the late 1960s Los Angeles Chicano Movement. While much has been written in tribute to Salazar, little is known about Salazar's role at KMEX and the extent his presence there influenced the furtherance of advocacy journalism.

That which follows is an account of events that occurred at KMEX before and after Salazar's tenure as news director in 1970. It extensively draws on interviews conducted with former KMEX general manager Danny Villanueva shortly before Villanueva's passing in 2015. It further draws from interviews with Guillermo Restrepo, a reporter at KMEX who was Salazar's closest associate; and Pete Moraga, who succeeded Salazar as KMEX news director. Sources also include materials in Villanueva's personal papers, the University of Southern California's Ruben Salazar Project, and period reportage.

As will be seen, KMEX is correctly understood as the first proving ground for forms of television era advocacy journalism. Begun in 1962, in the U.S. city with largest Latino-Hispanic population, KMEX thrived. Villanueva was a former football star who became the KMEX news director although with little exposure to adverse conditions particularly in East Los Angeles where most Latinos lived. Torn between his adherence to proper journalism and an increasing sense that the station's huge Latino constituency was neglected, it was Villanueva who, after becoming station manager, hired Salazar as his successor as news director. Salazar initiated nightly reports from the "barrio" on inferior schools, dilapidated housing, non-existent medical care, and failed public works. He urged audiences to rise in protest over government inaction and, notably, alleged police abuse. It was during a protest on August 29, 1970, that Salazar was killed by police rifle fire.

Although public interest shifted from Salazar's reporting to controversy over whether police staged his killing, arguably a more formidable development was KMEX's rise as an activist news organization. Villanueva was convinced police had purposefully killed Salazar to quiet a voice who on KMEX had promoted confrontations with authorities and police. "I threw out of the rules of good journalism," Villanueva recalled (personal communication, December 27, 2013). He would issue guidance on advocacy journalism and hire individuals who, like Salazar, were willing to use news to promote Latino causes. Among those Villanueva brought to KMEX were Ramos and Salinas. They would claim that during their three decades as anchors of Univision's national news they were distant protégés of Salazar who like him pursued advocacy journalism.

### **KMEX, Villanueva, and the First Nightly Spanish-Language News**

Financed by Mexican broadcast magnate Don Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta, KMEX debuted on September 30, 1962. Following an influx of Mexican immigrants to Los Angeles following the end of World War II, the city was home to more than one million Spanish-speaking individuals. Of all U.S. cities, Los Angeles had the largest Latino population. Azcárraga created KMEX to rebroadcast his Mexican television programs including bullfights into Los Angeles. As the pioneer Spanish-language television station in the United States, KMEX was popular. By the late 1960s, it was earning \$1 million in annual revenues. Under U.S. owner and president Rene Anselmo, KMEX rose as the flagship of Anselmo's Spanish International Network. SIN was rechristened as Univision in 1987. KMEX remains a Univision flagship station.

Daniel "Danny" Villanueva joined KMEX as a sports reporter soon after it initiated half-hour newscasts at 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. in March 1963. He was a celebrity athlete as a star place kicker for the National Football League's Los Angeles Rams. In 1965 he was traded by the Rams to the Dallas Cowboys. He kept a home in a wealthy Los Angeles suburb and continued to appear on KMEX. He had several business interests including that as West Coast spokesperson for Ford Motors. He was active in Republican Party politics. After he had stumped for Ronald Reagan in Reagan's successful campaign for governor in 1966, Reagan named him to the California Parks and Recreation Commission. Villanueva retired from football in December 1967 following the Cowboys' loss to the Green Bay Packers in the NFL championship. The contest, played in sub-zero temperatures in Green Bay, Wisconsin, became known as the "Ice Bowl." It remains one of the NFL's most-famed games.

The following year, 1968, KMEX named Villanueva as news director. Villanueva was thirty years old. No sooner had Villanueva taken the post that March than had unrest erupted in districts in East Los Angeles where approximately 800,000 Mexican-Americans resided. Protesting ramshackle and underfunded public schools, thousands of students joined in walkouts. Several days of speeches and demonstrations organized by a coalition of Latino resistance groups marked the beginning of the Los Angeles Chicano Movement (McCurdy, 1968).

It was a development Villanueva had anticipated but which left him uncertain and unmoved. He had grown up in poverty. Born in 1937 in Tucumcari, New Mexico, he was the ninth of twelve children of parents who were Protestant ministers. The family lost its home in Calexico, California, shortly before he entered high school there. He excelled as an athlete and won a scholarship to attend and play football at New Mexico State University.

While sympathetic to the plight of Latinos, “I was comfortable at KMEX and my first priority was building up the newsroom,” he later would tell the *Los Angeles Times* (1977).

During his two years as news director, Villanueva enlarged the news department from twenty to thirty-five staff. He acquired the station’s first portable field cameras. Four film crews gathered news. Notable among his hirings was Guillermo Restrepo, a photographer who Villanueva groomed as a reporter and who appeared on camera in narrated filmed “package” news stories. At the time of his hiring in 1968, Restrepo was twenty-eight years old. He delivered the filmed stories on the news set alongside main newscaster Alex Nervo. Since its debut in 1963, Nervo had anchored the 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. editions of “Noticiero 34.” Roberto Cruz delivered each evening’s weather report. Villanueva anchored the newscasts’ sports segments. Villanueva also served as executive producer who determined the newscasts’ content. “I was not paying attention to the Chicano Movement,” Villanueva recalled. “My interest in racial equality was making KMEX as good or better than the English stations we competed against” (D. Villanueva, personal communication, December 27, 2013).

It was not long before Villanueva and others in the newsroom discussed whether they should cover the Movement as “straight” news or, mindful the Movement targeted inadequate schools, housing, health services, sanitation, and failed governmental response that affected much of its Latino audience, assist in its promotion. Restrepo had seen and reported on conditions in East Los Angeles where the Movement had concentrated. He insisted KMEX acknowledge concerns by having reporters devote time to investigating the conditions, a tact he knew would slant the station’s coverage in favor of the Movement’s disapproval of the establishment (G. Restrepo, personal communication, May 17, 2014).

Villanueva was open to a discussion about advocacy but felt the newsroom would lose credibility if it became a mouthpiece for the Movement’s leaders. The largest and most active of the Movement’s many groups was a militant organization called the Brown Berets. The group’s chair, David Sanchez, had approached Villanueva and confronted him with complaints that KMEX was neglecting its duties by reporting the statements and explanations of Los Angeles authorities to the effect that conditions in East Los Angeles were being addressed. Villanueva kept a file of papers he had collected while managing KMEX. Among its items was a memo he had circulated shortly after becoming news director. He reiterated policy that news workers must “balance” each new protest allegation “with statements from authorities,” those the protestors alleged were the perpetrators (KMEX-TV, 1968).

That which most complicated KMEX’s stance on the Movement was reporters’ inability to confirm allegations protestors had made. Restrepo agreed with Villanueva and others that particularly reports on extreme allegations must rest on confirmed facts—even in cases where authorities likely concealed information. “I can’t go on the air with a story about how the cops killed a guy in the jail unless I know something for proof. Jesus Christ, we all know. But just to know is not enough,” Restrepo related, noting that a need for proof usually required elaboration from evasive public officials (Thompson, 1971, p. 35).

By 1970, KMEX had broadcast hundreds of reports on the Movement. While certain most of the reports were accurate and fair, Villanueva grew equally convinced the station was falling short of meeting responsibilities by failing to educate viewers on core problems. “Every day,” he said, “it was one more thing. Our people had no perspective on what was going on.” Meanwhile, authorities “kept telling us the same old things.” He had become absorbed in a realization that few Mexican-Americans read newspapers. Featured later in a 1973 edition of the national publication *TV Guide*, he stated “We in television have a social obligation” (Stump, 1973).

Villanueva soon rose within the KMEX organization. In November 1969 at age thirty-two, he was promoted to the post of KMEX station manager. He waited to select his replacement as news director. CBS-owned KNXT was the most prominent in news of the city’s seven English-language stations. On May 13, 1970, a KNXT commentator, Bob Navarro, had hosted a public affairs program. Navarro interviewed a senior *Los Angeles Times* correspondent who headed the newspaper’s award-winning coverage of the Mexican-American community (KNXT-TV, 1970a). Villanueva recalled that the interview discomforted him. Watching the *Times* reporter accept Navarro’s platitudes, Villanueva had seen a journalist “bottled up” inside an elite Anglo newspaper who “could not say what he wanted” and who knew “he was making no difference” (D. Villanueva, personal communication, December 27, 2013).

### Salazar's Three Months as KMEX News Director

The speaker was Ruben Salazar. Born in Juarez, Mexico, in 1928, he had joined the *Times* in 1959. Starting as a local reporter, he became a *Times* foreign correspondent. In 1965, he covered the war in Vietnam. For two years starting in 1966, he headed the *Times*'s bureau in Mexico City. There, he filed reports on Mexico's worst ever civil disturbance, the Tlatelolco Massacre, in which the military confronted demonstrators who protested that the government should address poverty and unequal opportunities rather than spend millions of dollars on the 1968 Olympic Games.

Returning to Los Angeles later in 1968, Salazar focused reports on the on the Mexican-American community and the Chicano Movement. Salazar's awkwardness as a secure upper-middle class professional, one who commuted from a comfortable home in Orange County, had shown. As a panelist on the KNXT program "The Siesta is Over" on May 23, 1970, he complained that he was "tired of explaining Chicanos to Anglos." "I really wanted to communicate in their language with the people I had written about so much," he would relate (KNXT, 1970b).

By then, Villanueva had given Salazar the opportunity. A week after seeing Navarro's interview with Salazar, Villanueva contacted Salazar. He accepted Villanueva's offer to become news director of KMEX. Salazar continued to write for the *Times* not as a reporter but as a columnist. In his first column, Salazar (1970a) told of his newspaper colleagues' disbelief when he joined Villanueva's station. "KM . . . what?", they asked. Yet Salazar wrote that at age forty-two he was eager for a "new career."

Villanueva and Salazar did not become close associates. Salazar's first official day at KMEX was May 18, 1970. "He was the serious journalist. I was the former football player who'd been on TV and was climbing the career ladder" as an executive, Villanueva recalled. Villanueva was bothered that Salazar did not take a liking to running the newsroom. "He wanted to be out on the streets doing filmed reports exposing the corruption of Anglo public officials and police and how they abused Mexican-Americans, Villanueva explained" (personal communication, December 27, 2013).

They agreed to an arrangement by which Salazar appeared on KMEX's "Noticiero 34" in three-to-four minute segments that Villanueva recalled as "along the lines of a commentary segment" but which contained interviews and scenes he had filmed with camera crews. Salazar also served as executive producer who had editorial control over both the 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. broadcasts. "I wasn't sure what he'd put on the news, but I gave him full reign. I wanted him to express himself and his concerns," Villanueva went on to relate. Villanueva's had but one stipulation. He told Salazar he "could not have KMEX be a soapbox for the protestors" (D. Villanueva, personal communication, December 27, 2013).

Seen most nights on the 6 p.m. "Noticiero 34," Salazar's segments brought an element to the newscast that at first jarred what had been a pat progression of news, weather, and sports information. "He was not polished on camera and [at first] came across stilted," Restrepo recalled (personal communication, May 17, 2014). With only brief coaching on his delivery, Salazar became adept in his on-camera role. Contributing to his persona was a component of his nightly segments then not considered legitimate news but which attracted viewers and generated mail. Often he concluded his segments with on-screen displays of the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of agencies that viewers could call for assistance or to file complaints. Salazar's "call to action" advisories became a signature of his reporting at KMEX.

It was evident Salazar was succeeding on television and catching on with viewers. Within two weeks of his debut, he was receiving the largest number of the letters viewers sent to the station. Many complained of neglected public services and improper arrests and detentions by police. Salazar often contacted viewers who had written him and used them as subjects in his reports.

Salazar developed a routine of concentrating on one issue for several nights. While recordings of his segments were not preserved, a memorandum he wrote in June 1970 suggested a "crusade of the week" (Salazar, 1970b). Starting the week after his arrival that May, he investigated meager funding of Chicano neighborhood schools. In early June, he spent several days delving allegations that landlords in middle class areas denied Latinos housing. He also investigated failed sanitation and utility services in the predominately-Latino East Los Angeles district.

In July he concentrated on alleged racial profiling and alleged brutality by Los Angeles police. On July 16, Salazar reported an incident in East Los Angeles in which an officer had shot and killed a Mexican-American youth. The next day in his newspaper column, he expanded on the killing and interviews he had filmed with the victim's family. He was angered that officers had visited him and insisted he not show the interviews. According to Salazar, police told him "this kind of information could be dangerous in the minds of barrio people." In reality, Salazar claimed, police feared the interviews would "upset their image." "Communications nowadays . . . are too good to take refuge in this sort of attitude," Salazar complained. "What we must do is level with each other more, not less" (Salazar, 1970c).

### **Salazar's Killing and Inquest**

That August Salazar explored a new issue, the military's disproportionate drafting of Mexican-Americans for fighting in the Vietnam War. Anti-war activists organized a public demonstration they called a "moratorium." Reports on KMEX previewed what was to become, then, the largest mass gathering of Mexican-Americans. It was a protest march through East Los Angeles on Saturday, August 29, 1970. "We have really been covering it," Salazar told a friend. "We have to show the Anglo what we can do" (del Olmo, 1980).

That Saturday, 20,000 to 30,000 individuals marched down Whittier Boulevard and peacefully converged on Laguna Park. Several activists gave speeches. Around 3 p.m. as participants began leaving the park, individuals were seen looting and vandalizing businesses on the boulevard. Within minutes, departing participants heard sirens. The area was outside the city limits of Los Angeles. By the dozens, deputies from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department arrived. Their cordoning of the area and their engagement with and detainment of those who had attempted to resume the march touched off two hours of rioting. The Sheriff's Department later reported \$1 million in property damage and 185 arrests (Shuit & Scheibe, 1970).

With Restrepo and photographer Octavio Gomez, Salazar had been at the location all day. Around 4 p.m. while Gomez continued filming the rioting, Salazar and Restrepo retreated to a bar on the boulevard called the Silver Dollar Cafe. A few minutes later, deputies on the boulevard received a report that a man with a gun was inside the bar and threatening patrons. Deputies converged on the location. One of them fired a ten-inch pointed tear gas canister through a partially opened front door. Amid thick smoke and tear gas, Restrepo and a half-dozen patrons dropped to their knees and crawled outside through a back door. Salazar was missing. Thinking Salazar had departed through the front door, Restrepo returned to the violence on the boulevard to locate him. Two hours later, deputies discovered Salazar's body on the floor in the bar. The projectile had struck Salazar and tore off part of his head.

The public's dismay over the rioting turned to shock and anger when that night local radio and television stations interrupted programming to report Salazar's killing. A Sheriff's Department spokesperson disclosed that an investigation was under way. The Department already had questioned the deputy, Thomas Wilson, who had fired the projectile. Pending the investigation, Salazar's death tentatively was judged an accidental homicide. Wilson said he neither knew Salazar nor could have seen Salazar in the bar prior firing the projectile through the partially opened front door. According to the County Coroner Theodore Noguchi, Salazar died "almost instantaneously" from a "through and through projectile wound" (Los Angeles County Office of Independent Review, 2011.)

Villanueva recalled that Restrepo telephoned "me that night and for two hours he swore the police were lying and wanted Salazar hit." According to Restrepo, Salazar had "told him that sources he had in the L.A.P.D. warned him that officers had him under surveillance and would be killed." Restrepo pleaded that this be reported on KMEX. Villanueva refused. After asking if Salazar had identified any of the officers he said were tailing him and Restrepo replied he did not know, Villanueva did not believe the allegation. Restrepo bristled at what seemed Villanueva's indifference. According to Villanueva, "It wasn't the right time to stir things up about the police. The city was on edge. It was obvious to me we had to use KMEX to calm the community" (D. Villanueva, personal communication, December 27, 2013).

Tensions remained high. After two more days of intense rioting, calm momentarily was restored when Los Angeles County District Attorney Evelle Younger announced this his office would break policy and conduct a public inquest into the cause of Salazar's killing.

Salazar's killing and the forthcoming inquest became lead national news stories. Prominent national figures issued statements deploring the killing and urging local authorities to act quickly in their investigation in order to resolve the big and biting question: Did police kill Salazar with purposeful intent? An hour's drive from the site of the killing at his compound in San Clemente, President Richard Nixon said he had been briefed and that rather than having the U.S. Justice Department conduct an investigation he was satisfied with the probe that local police and prosecutors had initiated (Houston, 1970).

As much as the killing itself, the inquest and its much-disputed verdict galvanized sentiment in the KMEX newsroom that Salazar's advocacy reporting must continue. Court-appointed supervisor Norman Pittluck seated seven jurors and convened the inquest on September 11, 1970. The inquest was notable for Pittluck had allowed live television coverage. It was the first known occasion when live cameras had televised a court-directed proceeding. That day, Pittluck seated twenty-one observer-spectators--protestors--whose names were submitted by the activist Congress of Mexican-American Unity. When Pittluck called the first witness, a Sheriff's Department lieutenant, shouts and denunciations of "irrelevant testimony" pervaded the hearing room. The disruptions continued. Twice the observers walked out (Garcia, 1970).

Villanueva began two days of testimony beginning the second day. By then he had come to agree with Restrepo and others that police had purposely fired on Salazar. He emerged as the inquest's star witness for first-hand accounts supporting allegations that Wilson, the accused sheriff's deputy, was part of police conspiracy. Admitting he had no proof of a conspiracy, Villanueva told the jurors he had obtained from Salazar's wife a diary Salazar had kept. "There were four or five entries" dated within two weeks of the Moratorium in which Salazar wrote of death threats he believed came from police and that he "feared for life." In two of the entries, he mentioned conversations with informants close to the Sheriff's Department who told him plans for his elimination were "in the works" (personal communication, December 27, 2013).

Villanueva went on to testify that his most vivid recollection of Salazar was his odd behavior in the KMEX newsroom the day before he died. He had cleaned his usually cluttered desk. More curiously, he had pressed Villanueva on whether the Moratorium site was inside or outside the city of Los Angeles. "He was concerned it was county jurisdiction [and] this alarmed me," Villanueva told jurors (Gonzales, 1970). Among Salazar's harshest reports were those that had alleged abuse by sheriff's deputies at the Los Angeles County Jail.

The inquest continued for three weeks. KMEX's Restrepo told jurors that, like Villanueva, he was aware that Salazar had received death threats presumably from police. Wilson, the shooter, denied the allegations, testifying that he could not have identified Salazar while standing outside and shooting at an the angle through a partially opened door. Testimony concluded two days later. On the morning of the sixteenth day, October 5, the jury began deliberations.

In a 4-3 decision, the jury upheld the Sheriff Department's finding that Salazar's death was accidental. There was no pre-meditation. Wilson had acted in the line of duty. Younger, the district attorney, said his office would file no charges (Houston, 1970b). After four decades of doubts, the Los Angeles County Office of Independent Review in 2011 conducted what it termed a thorough re-investigation of the Salazar case. The 2011 review concluded that the 1970 inquest verdict was correct and that police were not responsible for Salazar's death.

### **Newsroom Unrest, Renewal, and Advance of Advocacy Journalism**

At KMEX, advocacy journalism enlarged from seeds sown by Salazar's void and news workers' contempt of the jury's unfavorable inquest ruling. Matters relating to Salazar—the killing, the inquest, and ongoing public reproach—gradually diminished as lead story items on KMEX's evening newscasts. Absent Salazar, those who watched "Noticiero 34" had seen a return of the pre-Salazar routine of "straight" and often cheerful news, weather, and sports reports.

There was unrest behind the scenes. Villanueva appointed himself as acting news director. He continued as station manager but for several weeks worked in the newsroom. Since the evening of the killing, he and Restrepo had been at odds. After the inquest, Villanueva refused comment. He did not join with leaders of Movement who had condemned the Sheriff Department's exoneration. This angered Restrepo. More than once, Restrepo confronted Villanueva with sentiment voiced not just by protest leaders but those in the newsroom that KMEX had turned timid and was unwilling to carry on the activist reporting Salazar had initiated (Thompson, 1971, p. 34).

Yet Villanueva insisted he, too, was angry. He had not dispelled his own sentiment that Salazar had gone too far in relying on protest leaders as sources and absorbing the perspective of the militant factions. Nevertheless, “the system committed a major injustice and, being close to the family, I was as outraged as anyone else,” Villanueva maintained. While “we could not allow our news to be hijacked by agitators, there was a lot we could learn from Salazar and a lot we could do to carry on the questioning he’d started” (D. Villanueva, personal communication, December 27, 2013).

That November Villanueva named a new news director. He passed over everyone in the KMEX newsroom including Restrepo, who he suspected was comprised by activists. The “new” Salazar was forty-four-year-old Pete Moraga, a specialist in public relations and journalism who had worked abroad as a coordinator for the Voice of America before rising in Los Angeles as a reporter and commentator at English-language radio station KNX. With Salazar, Moraga had been among a handful of news reporters who had concentrated on the Chicano Movement and was respected in the Mexican-American community. Villanueva admired Moraga’s knowledge of journalism and his fortitude. He had been ousted at the Voice of America for questioning U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

It was during his negotiations with Moraga that Villanueva first heard the term “advocacy journalism.” Years later, Moraga recalled telling Villanueva that “advocacy journalism was a legitimate news concept” he had practiced in his work for the VOA. According to Moraga, “advocacy journalism meant that you didn’t always need to be objective and could use facts to slant opinion in a certain direction to promote a cause [that was] socially desirable.” Joining KMEX that December, Moraga conducted a meeting of the news staff in which he set forth new policies that encouraged a renewal of the venturesome reporting missing since Salazar’s passing. “I told them Danny and I agreed we must continue to advocate for Mexican-Americans,” Moraga recalled, and that mindful of requirements for facts and accuracy “there would be no repercussions” if they slanted their reporting in favor of the station’s Mexican-American constituency (P. Moraga, personal communication, February 17, 2001).

Restrepo appreciated Moraga’s removal of Villanueva’s harness of “straight” news. He was the reporter who carried out that which Moraga remembered was the first post-Salazar demonstration of the concept. Moraga had Restrepo investigate allegations that officers at the Los Angeles County Jail were planting contraband in the cells of Mexican-American inmates, then citing them with further violations. Restrepo “knew the jail would deny it and he couldn’t talk to the inmates. So [rather than dropping the story] he went on the news reporting only the allegations as news,” Moraga recounted. “It was a one-sided report, but it brought awareness to another abuse that needed attention” (P. Moraga, personal communication, February 17, 2001).

There was a less flagrant yet direction-setting demonstration of advocacy the following month. In February 1971, a magnitude 6.6 earthquake in the San Fernando Valley had left thousands homeless. Many were Mexican-Americans. Villanueva had Moraga turn “Noticiero 34” into an instrument for raising funds and rallying public assistance. Newswriters abandoned the detachment required in “straight” news. They assisted in the relief efforts (Gonzales, 1971).

Later in 1971, KMEX reports that sided with fifty Mexican-American employees of the city’s Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency who alleged discrimination helped win reinstatement of several who had been terminated. A series of reports that revealed pro-Anglo gerrymandering in the state’s redistricting of East Los Angeles, and which detailed claims the new districts resulted from a political grab, was credited with persuading the California Supreme Court to intervene and redraw district boundaries. That August, KMEX followed a contingent of activists who had gone to the state capitol in Sacramento to protest hiring discrimination (Striking Chicano employees, 1971). Its coverage culminated with films of the protestors removing and burning an American flag and raising a Mexican flag (Ingram, 1971; Chicanos plan another protest, 1971).

The concept gained national attention in April 1972, when an unemployed Mexican national hijacked a Frontier Airlines jetliner and forced the pilot to land in Los Angeles. Restrepo and a KMEX mobile crew were at the Los Angeles airport when the plane landed. Police directed Restrepo into the cockpit to act as negotiator. On live TV, Restrepo persuaded the hijacker to surrender by permitting him to make a statement condemning the U.S. Immigration Service for abusing undocumented immigrants. Later Villanueva, who had sympathized with the hijacker, appeared on “Noticiero 34” to solicit donations to assist the hijacker and his family (Bail set, 1972).

Neither Villanueva nor Moraga formalized rules for advocacy journalism. According to Moraga, the concept occasionally was mentioned in memos but communicated almost entirely by word of mouth. Nevertheless, in an undated advisory he likely wrote in 1971 or 1972 and which he recalled posting on a KMEX bulletin board, Villanueva (undated) did list a series of expectations he had imparted on the news workers:

- \* We are a cross between an educational station and a commercial station. If we can effect change, that's our journalism.
- \* We strive to give priority to our audience, understand its special needs and concerns, and not stop defending its right to justice and equality.
- \* We are accurate and truthful. We resist special interests, even when they advocate for our audience.
- \* "Equal time" is not a requirement. If the exposure of information is good for our audience, it is not necessary to always show opponents.<sup>1</sup>

In August 1972, informing readers he had received comments on the one-sided approach to news that KMEX had adopted, *Los Angeles Times* columnist Maury Green interviewed Villanueva. "He makes no excuses for the kind of TV journalism he practices. It's the 'new' journalism, advocacy journalism, and he's proud of it. He's the self-appointed ombudsman for the entire Mexican-American community," Green wrote.

Green went on to describe a current KMEX investigation of an East Los Angeles neighborhood where, because it was on the city-country boundary and neither government wanted to serve it, there had been no garbage pick up for more than a year. "You can safely bet Villanueva will throw it back in their collective faces," Green commented. Villanueva told him "We have a tremendous social obligation. The Spanish-speaking people don't have a Time or a Newsweek or a Los Angeles Times. So we leave the news to do public service. If we don't, nobody will" (Green, 1972).

### **Advocacy Journalism After the Chicano Movement**

By 1973, both the Chicano Movement and KMEX's fervor for advocacy journalism had faded. The station's investigations increasingly focused on divisions within the Movement and its failure to congeal around a single group or leader.

While Moraga would remain as KMEX news director through 1986, Villanueva further ascended as a corporate executive. He became vice president of his company's Spanish International Network and eventually participated in SIN's reorganization as Univision in 1987. Having resolved his differences with Restrepo, Villanueva notably advanced Restrepo's career. As SIN vice president, Villanueva recommended that Restrepo anchor segments during SIN's national election night coverages in 1976, 1978, and 1980. Restrepo moved to Washington, D.C., in 1981 and became the first anchor of "Noticiero SIN," the first Spanish-language network newscast. It was the forerunner of the modern "Noticiero Univision," the nation's largest and most-used source of news in the Spanish language. In the 2020s, with nightly audiences of around 10-15 million, "Noticiero Univision" occasionally had more viewers than the audiences of ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox, and MSNBC put together.

Salazar was recalled as a foremost and iconic figure in the nation's civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The question of whether he was accidentally or intentionally killed never was resolved.

Villanueva regretted that part of Salazar's legacy, his spearheading of advocacy journalism at KMEX, was obscured. He admitted that a zeal for advocacy journalism which peaked in 1971 and 1972 dissipated with the decline of the Chicano Movement in 1974 and 1975.

Yet much demonstrated that KMEX adhered to the concept in succeeding years. During the 1970s and 1980s, the news department staged dozens of fund-raising events and telethons. Moraga invited concerned citizens to assert grievances during special segments on "Noticiero 34" in which authorities were not given opportunities to appear. The news department's most emphatic advocacy came when elections approached. KMEX staged campaigns to encourage Latinos to register. According to Moraga, "We didn't hesitate to arrange news coverage to promote the election of certain candidates when a [Latino] candidate was running." (P. Moraga, personal communication, February 17, 2001).



More recently, spurred by a 23 percent increase in the U.S. Latino population between 2010 and 2020, the first extensive studies of Spanish-language television news further suggested a legacy. In 2013, the Pew Research Center conducted a study occasioned by data showing that the audience for Univision's network news had surpassed that of ABC, CBS, NBC, and cable networks and was the most-used news in any language. The study showed that on a weekly basis Univision's nightly newscast "Noticiero Univision" informed 50 to 60 percent of the nation's 65 million Latinos. Respondents in the Pew study were regular viewers either of Univision's news or the news on Univision's smaller rival network Telemundo. They said they were attracted to Spanish-language network newscasts because of their "commitment to reporting news that advocates for Latinos" (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Advocacy journalism became a discussion topic when the following year a content study released by the conservative Media Research Center (2014) had shown that Univision and Telemundo neglected balance and greatly departed from "fairness, accuracy and journalistic integrity." The study showed that of 667 stories broadcast on Univision and Telemundo, "more than six times as many tilted left/liberal as slanted in a right/conservative direction." During reports on immigration reform, Democrats and spokespeople aligned with pro-reform made twice as many appearances as conservatives and Republicans. During reports on immigration enforcement, advocates for relaxed enforcement and open borders appeared four times as often as law enforcement officers and those who spoke for strict enforcement.

During controversy that ensued, two figures who had started their careers at KMEX, both hired there by Villanueva and Moraga in 1985, received national attention for speeches and appearances on cable news channels in which they defended advocacy journalism. The two, Jorge Ramos and Maria Elena Salinas, were the best-known figures in Latino journalism. In 1987, they left KMEX to succeed Restrepo as co-anchors of "Noticiero Univision." When Salinas departed in 2017, she and Ramos had co-anchored "Noticiero Univision" for thirty years. They substantially exceeded the network newscasting tenures of all others including Walter Cronkite.

Speaking at American University's 2016 commencement, Salinas stated "I don't think that we consciously practice advocacy journalism but all of us who work in Spanish-language media do have a social responsibility to our community" (American University, 2016). Speaking on National Public Radio in 2015, Ramos stated that he had "a responsibility to be an advocacy journalist," explaining that "we as journalists have to take a stand and stop being neutral. Am I supposed to just sit down and be silent when the president of the United States makes racist remarks? I think it is our responsibility as journalists not to remain neutral."

Interviewed in 2015, Salinas said she believed the early figures at KMEX "established a tradition for advocacy journalism" that spread to all Spanish-language television newsrooms and was "like an instinct that told you 'You can do this. You don't have to be objective [but can] cover news that advocates for justice and equality.'" She said that "what it took were those people at the beginning willing to stick their necks out" and depart from what "the do-gooders said was 'good journalism.'" She claimed to be a protégé of Moraga, "who taught me everything I knew." Through Moraga and Villanueva, she related, "I knew I was an extension of Ruben Salazar" (M.E. Salinas, personal communication, July 17, 2015).

## Conclusion

While to many illegitimate, advocacy journalism is an accepted practice that as advanced in the post-World War II period, a time that coincided with the rise of television and embrace of the Hutchins Commission's priority on objectivity, has received little attention. History's portrayal of advocacy journalism largely rests on small, localized partisan print media that crusaded for reforms in the 1800s and the "muckrakers" who published noted exposés at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Here it was shown that advocacy journalism flourished not only post-Hutchins Commission but on the most pervasive medium, television. That KMEX's introduction of advocacy journalism was intertwined with the death of a celebrated leader of the 1960s and 1970s civil rights movement underscores the importance of the history.

The account here tends to counter a theme common in past portrayals of advocacy journalism, that journalists advocate when they spot a single alleged wrongdoing and press one-sided evidence that results in reform. It's the idea of Finley Peter Dunne, that "scratch a journalist and find a reformer." Here it was shown that, rather than inspired by a single wrongdoing, advocacy journalism emerged when multiple wrongdoings ranging from governmental neglect to police overzealousness caused journalists to act on concerns that their audience was wronged. Audience advocacy was, of course, natural and essential to KMEX. It was a Spanish-language station that prospered from entertainment and news programs that catered to the one million largely underprivileged Latinos then living in Los Angeles.

Further study of advocacy journalism can benefit with recognition of the difference. Journalists who advocate in order to redress a wrongdoing are more likely to have tangible results in the form of new laws, public policy change, and legal redress. As well, as was true of the "muckrakers," successful advocate journalists can achieve status as remembered public heroes.

Differently, journalists who broadly advocate on behalf of an audience or population may succeed by bringing public attention to wrongs within society and the system. Yet truly tangible results may be few. By the time its concentrated advocacy faded in the mid 1970s, KMEX had but one definitive reform achievement. Its reports that exposed California's unfair redistricting led to the so-called "California 1970 Redistricting Reform Act." Almost all outcomes were local officials' short-lived decrees, pledges, resolutions, and statements of support. "Noticiero 34" raised tens of thousands of dollars in fund-raising drives. Villanueva believed KMEX's broad advocacy on behalf of Latinos had the effect "of keeping them [officials, authorities, police] honest." They knew "that if we heard about an injustice it would go on the news, and they would have to answer," he said (D. Villanueva, personal communication, December 27, 2013). Rather than heroes, KMEX's advocate journalists lapsed into historical obscurity.

Another matter that bears on further historical study of mass media advocacy journalism is the role played by activist groups. KMEX's relationship with them was confused. Management and staff were in agreement that the newsroom be independent of the Chicano Movement's organized factions. Yet starting with Salazar's showcasing of activists in his promotion of the Moratorium, the extent KMEX was independent became unclear. In further studies of like situations, scholars should be alert not only to the influence of well-organized activist groups but to the likelihood that many groups with differing stances on the same issue will attempt to steer newsroom advocacy. KMEX haphazardly collaborated with groups that ranged from passive neighborhood associations to the militant Brown Berets. The Movement broke down because of divisions and factionalization among its multitude of groups.

A different matter that can enhance understanding of advocacy journalism is the extent of a newsroom's newsgathering-resources. KMEX was rich in resources. Its advocacy succeeded because it invested in reporters' investigations of injustices and, notably, in its deployment of film and video crews that showed viewers that allegations of injustices were real. The same cannot be achieved by having a newscaster or journalist sit in a studio and provide verbal commentary. Thus a question is whether non-objective reporting must meet a resource threshold in order to be deemed advocacy journalism.

Finally, recent transformation of the so-called news environment suggests a need for further history of the origins of advocacy journalism in the post Hutchins Commission, television era. In the 2020s, research was consistent in showing a liberal-conservative polarization of mass news sources with cable news channels at left-right extremes. Writing of this in 2011, Baughman suggested a "revival" of the partisan journalism seen in the 1800s, this because of "a change in what today constitutes objective news presentation."

The revival had important antecedents. They can enhance understanding not just of the past but of how modern journalism with uncertain objectivity and in partisan form came to be.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Also see KMEX "Advocacy Journalism in González, A. (1978). Case study of KMEX-TV. [Master's thesis, California State University-Northridge], pp. 114-115.

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