
Why Racial Profiling Is Bad Policy

Speak up against bad politics

By **Kat Avila** | Published on LatinoLA: September 15, 2011



A decade or two ago at Santa Ana College, my Chicano theater professor was telling us how he had been stopped by a cop and asked to show his papers. Our professor said, "I wasn't carrying any i.d., because I was just walking down the street." All of us laughed at the time. Not because he was one of the most wholesome guys you'd ever meet, but because we recognized it could happen to any one of us. In fact, it had.

The Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects us from "unreasonable searches and seizures." The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees us "the equal protection of the laws." Laws dressed as "immigration laws" to hide racial profiling violate these amendments. Racial profiling disproportionately affects certain American communities over others, especially U.S. Latinos and U.S. Asians who are looked upon as perpetual foreigners.

What does an "illegal" immigrant look like? Like you and me. Like your neighbor who is a refugee or has a green card. Like indigenous Americans, Indians from India, Mexicans, Chinese, Filipinos, Italians, Spaniards, Greeks, and so forth. We "look like" criminals. That's ignorant stereotyping and bad police policy.

It's bad for our American communities that need police support to keep a lid on violent crime and mischief. There are linguistic, cultural, and historical reasons as to why ethnic minorities underreport crimes in their neighborhoods. Racial profiling only deepens the trough between the police and the communities that should be under their protection.

It's bad for the self-esteem and pride of our American children. The very same stereotypes that were in circulation during my great-grandfather's time, my grandfather's time, and my father's time are still around. The 1000-strong hate groups in the U.S., logged as active in 2010 by the Southern Poverty Law Center <http://www.splcenter.org>, are partly responsible. Add to that, the political rhetoric that seeks to criminalize difference.

It's bad for our American workers. No one should have to work in a hostile workplace. "Reverse" discrimination makes the news. But for some of us, discrimination is an everyday reality we swallow. Racial profiling gives rise to often unjustified questions about our competency, trustworthiness, and/or place of birth.

Legalized racial profiling divides us as Americans, blasts us apart. Fear and suspicion goes both ways.

That said, let me switch tracks here and tag on a reminder that "Hispanic" Heritage Month starts on September 15 and runs through October. I put "Hispanic" in quotes because many people identified as "Hispanics" are indigenous and may even speak Spanish as a second language, if they speak it at all. And what about Brazilians who speak Portuguese?

These supplemental heritage months wouldn't be necessary if U.S. history more accurately accounted for all the races and cultures that have lived, worked, and died within our political

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borders.

In any case, Hispanic/Latino Heritage Month is a good time to reacknowledge our elders and mentors. One of those people, art historian Shifra Goldman, passed away just this past Sunday, September 11, 2011. My father took classes on Chicano/Latino art from her at Santa Ana College.

You can read more about Shifra's life at artist Mark Vallen's website <http://art-for-a-change.com/blog/2011/09/%C2%A1shifra-goldman-presente.html>

A freelance writer whose specialty is covering the changing cultural landscape of Southern California. She wishes you a pleasant First Day of Autumn (Sept. 23, Fall Equinox 2:05 a.m. PDT).

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