

Title: Fear, Learning, and Resistance: Latine Communities and Proposition 187

As I screened *Fear and Learning* at Hoover Elementary, I was emotionally overpowered by the political grievances revealed, yes, but by the naked humanity of the parents, the children, and the teachers ensnared in California's Proposition 187 crossfire. This wasn't a history lesson; this was an insight into how fear tears across communities, how policy wounds a child, and how people, especially immigrants—resist in acts of love, care, and pedagogy. As I cross-referenced my lecture notes on Prop 187 with the film, I came to understand that anti-immigrant fervor in California during the 1990s did not sprout under vacuum conditions. Political rhetoric, economic instability, and cultural transformation collided to create public sentiment, and the Latine community, rendered so commonly in black and white broad strokes, showed its constituents were never monolithic in nature. They held a wide range of opinions and beliefs—each shaped by lives experienced, migration stories, and generations.

Changing California: The Road to Prop 187

To really appreciate why Proposition 187 gained so much steam, we can examine California's political and social environment at the start of the 1990s. California was unsettled. Its economy was unstable following the recession of the early '90s, and middle-class workers were losing job security. Meanwhile, the population of the state was undergoing a radical change through immigration, particularly from Mexico and Central America. These changes unsettled Californians who feared the loss of economic and cultural dominance. Politicians and the media dramatized such concerns, blaming immigrants for such issues as overly packed schools, jammed healthcare systems, and crime. In such a context of anxiety and grievance, Prop 187 presented itself as a solution to what many saw as an "illegitimate problem" of unauthorized immigration.

Governor Pete Wilson employed immigration as the campaign's issue du jour. His political advertisements weren't exactly coy about being xenophobic—there was quite a bit of video of humans pouring over the Mexican border in them, vilifying them instead of as people seeking refuge or opportunity. Wilson's messages caught the voters most likely to feel left behind by an evolving economy. Prop 187 would be an assurance to bar illegal immigrants from draining public funds, mostly public schools. It literally made education—a basic human right—something against immigrant kids to be used as a weapon.

What was particularly devastating was how Prop 187 made undocumented immigrants and their families feel unwelcome, even when they had lived, worked, and built communities in California for decades. What struck me from both the lectures and the film was how this wasn't just about policy; it was about identity. Prop 187 sent a message that if you were brown, spoke Spanish, or came from a migrant background, you didn't belong.

A School in the Storm: Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary

Laura Angelica Simón's documentary brings that message to life in a way no textbook ever could. Through her personal lens as both filmmaker and teacher at Hoover Elementary, Simón shows how Proposition 187 wasn't just debated in political ads and courtrooms—it was lived in classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias. Watching the children at Hoover made everything feel more real. These were little kids—innocent, eager to learn, full of energy—suddenly made to feel like criminals or outsiders.

What really stayed with me were the children's voices. One student quietly asks if she's going to be deported. Another talks about how her parents told her not to talk to anyone about her family's immigration status. These aren't the kinds of things children should have to worry about. But thanks to Prop 187, they did.

The film also showcases the emotional labor of teachers, many of whom are Latine themselves. They're not just educators—they're protectors, mentors, and sometimes even lifelines for their students. Simón herself narrates how her role as a teacher shifted during this time. She went from helping kids learn their ABCs to helping them cope with political trauma. She organizes meetings, speaks out, and most importantly, listens to her students. In doing so, she shows how public schools became a frontline in the fight for dignity and humanity.

Not a Monolith: Diversity of Latine Perspectives

One of the most powerful aspects of *Fear and Learning* at Hoover Elementary is how it shatters the stereotype that the Latine community is politically uniform. As a Latine viewer myself, this part hit home. In my own family, I've seen relatives disagree passionately about immigration policy. Others feel that the rules should be enforced more strictly because they "did things the right way." Others are more compassionate, recalling their own hardships as illegal immigrants. The film touches on this complexity gently.

For instance, there is one of these moments where a Latine woman cites a reason for voting for Prop 187. She is talking about fairness and how her family lived by the rules and is irked that undocumented immigrants are "cutting the line." It is a tough moment, but a necessary one. It is a reminder that identity is not sufficient to yield ideology. Economic status, length of residence in the U.S., immigrant generation gap, and familiarity with other tales all influence political views.

Other community members in the film resist, protesting, organizing protests, speaking out at school board meetings, and building webs of support. They come together on a feeling of shared responsibility—not to themselves only, but to their neighbors and children suffering.

That diversity of opinion within the Latine community resists the reductionist media portrayals that dominated the airwaves during the Prop 187 era.

History in Motion: How the Film Serves as a Source

Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary is both a primary and a secondary source. It's primary because it includes firsthand footage and testimonials from the time. Simón's role as a teacher gives her an insider's view, and her interviews offer direct accounts of how people experienced Prop 187. But it's also secondary in that she structures the film to tell a story, editing and framing the footage to convey a particular message. It's part documentary, part memoir, and fully powerful.

If I were writing a history of education in California, I would use this film as a way to capture the emotional and personal impact of state policy. Legal documents, voting data, and news articles can tell you what happened. This film shows you *how* it felt. It humanizes the statistics and fills in the emotional blanks that traditional sources often leave out. It would be especially useful in a chapter about resistance—about how schools didn't just implement policy but actively resisted it in subtle and overt ways.

Conclusion: What We Choose to Remember

Watching *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary* made me reflect not only on the past but on the present. Many of the issues at the heart of Prop 187—immigration, education, belonging—are still being debated today. And like then, the people most affected are often the least heard. The film is a reminder of what happens when fear is allowed to shape policy, and it's also a testament to the power of community, especially in the classroom.

This is not history. It's a lived experience. It's the kind of story that has to be told and retold, especially in a country where immigration is such a divisive issue. The Latine community is

huge, diverse, and powerful. Films like this remind us that behind every policy, there are people—children—who are owed better.