

Immigrant's Death Sparks Tensions in N.Y.

3 Police Officers Investigated After April Homicide

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MOUNT KISCO, N.Y. -- It was the kind of life and death that might have slipped by without much notice. Rene Perez was homeless, a drinking man from [Guatemala](#), an occasional laborer in this affluent community, and he was found unconscious on a desolate road in a nearby town only to die soon afterward.

But the county medical examiner ruled his death in the early hours of April 29 a homicide, probably from blows to the abdomen, and soon police from [Bedford](#), where Perez was found, said that three [Mount Kisco](#) officers were being investigated in connection with his death. The officers -- who had responded to a 911 call from Perez and left him just 44 minutes before he was found unconscious -- were put on desk duty, their patrol cars temporarily impounded.

Perez's killing has exposed tensions between well-off white employers and poor immigrant workers in this northern [Westchester County](#) town of 12,000 about 40 miles north of [New York](#), where 75 percent of residents are non-Hispanic whites and about 25 percent are Hispanic.

"People here are afraid to talk to the police," said Fernando Mateo, president of Hispanics Across America, an advocacy group, at a vigil here he organized Wednesday night. About 100 people, mostly Latinos, stood in the rain outside the red brick Village Hall carrying signs with slogans such as "We Have the Right to Live," and "No One is Outside the Law."

The demonstrators were addressed by Janet DiFiore, the Westchester County district attorney, who promised that no questions would be asked about immigration status if someone had information about the case. Her office is spearheading an investigation that also includes the [FBI](#) and U.S. Attorney's office.

In 2003 and 2004, two other Guatemalan men who had been out drinking were also found dead. Santos Bojorguez, 33, was found strangled in 2003, as was Roberto Martinez, 42, in 2004. Neither case was solved.

Many Guatemalans -- the majority of Latinos here -- say police have not made a serious effort to solve the crimes.

"If it was three white men who had died, the perpetrator would have been caught," said Manuel Linares, 38, as he stood with four other Guatemalans hoping for a day's labor at a pickup spot outside a delicatessen on the edge of town.

"The police never treat you as a citizen, as part of the neighborhood. They treat you as a hindrance," said Linares, adding that he is often asked to move on from where he is standing. "They look at you and treat you like a dog."

Perez came to America in 1992, carrying the hopes and burdens of his family. He was the son of aging parents, one of four brothers, a husband, and a new father to a baby girl, Gladys.

His parents had mortgaged their modest property to pay about \$2,000 for him to be smuggled into the [United States](#), said his mother.

But in Westchester County, he found little work, and he stopped sending money to his parents, who lost their land. Over time, he became a heavy drinker.

You'd always see him walking the streets with a beer in his hands," said Roberto Jiminez, 42, who knew Perez from childhood in Apantes.

Perez was well known in Mount Kisco. He used to stop by the American Latino Deli on Main Street a few times a week, and Adan Villeda, 33, the owner, would offer him rice and beans. "He was hungry," Villeda said. "I felt badly for him."

The Mount Kisco police arrested him at least 59 times for public urination, petty theft, trespassing, and other public disturbances, and he had more than 300 interactions with the department, according to Lucian Chalfen, a spokesman for the Westchester County district attorney's office.

In recent winters, he took shelter about three times a week in churches, said Melvin J. Berger, who organized the program. Perez otherwise slept behind the A&P grocery store, in a wooded area, like other immigrants sheltering in the forested shadow of the town's strip malls, said Berger.

At 10:47 p.m. on April 28, Perez called 911 from a pay phone in the Lexington Laundry, a coin laundromat, complaining of a stomach ache, according to police and a laundromat worker who declined to give her name.

He was in the habit of calling 911 for basic help when he was very drunk -- which was often, according to Chalfen, the Westchester County district attorney's spokesman.

That night, three officers answered his call: Lt. Edward Dunnigan, Officer Edward Dwyer, and Officer George Bubaris.

It is not clear whether he left the laundromat alone or in a patrol car. But after deciding he had no real emergency, two of the officers drove away on another call. Only Bubaris, the first officer to respond to Perez's call, had 44 minutes between the time he closed the Perez encounter to the time he next appeared in police logs, Deputy Mayor Peter DiChiara told reporters.

F. Hollis Griffin Jr., a lawyer for Bubaris, said that after the encounter "my client was on patrol in the Village of Mount Kisco as part of his regular job."

Bubaris has worked for the Mount Kisco department less than a year. He previously worked for the [New York Police Department](#).